

PRIEST AND DOZENS OF OTHERS WITNESSED UNUSUAL IMAGES IN BLESSED SACRAMENT

A few days ago we reported the spiritual benefits of adoration in front of the Host and quoted a woman who claimed to see a radiant mist in connection with it. The phenomena often go beyond that, to reports of details and visual effects witnessed -- as in the case of Jacksonville -- by dozens of people. The events began on November 6, 1999, and were also witnessed by priests, including Father Bernard Ahern, a retired Navy chaplain who recounted that in the midst of the retreat -- the middle of Saturday afternoon -- a woman came into the room "hysterically" crying that she had seen Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, which was exposed during the retreat.

"I then went into the chapel myself to find out what was happening, and I, also, saw the Face of Jesus in the Eucharist," the priest told two chroniclers of the events, who produced a booklet on the occurrences. "The color of the image was a sepia color, a light brown and white. There were many other people who also saw Him. I was skeptical and thought that there might be some shadows in the back of the monstrance, or light in front of it causing the image. But I found no basis for this after checking the surrounding area, and realized I saw what I saw."

The admission of witnessing such an event by a priest is a rare event at a time when clergy are often more skeptical than even secular authorities and at a time when seminaries have all but extinguished training in mystical theology. Actually the events were first initiated when a woman named Cathy Duncan -- like Father Ahern wondering at first if it was just shadows from the sun or candlelight -- saw the Face of Christ earlier in the day and had it confirmed around dinnertime when she ran into the woman referred to by Father Ahern, who was in the chapel and blurted out, "Do you see Him?" -- referring to the remarkable image.

Duncan noted that by now the sun had gone down and the candles had been burning all day, changing their angles. It wasn't the candles. Later in the day the Host turned a very bright red that appeared to be glowing -- according to witnesses. There were about 35 retreat participants in the first event along with thirty or so retreat givers and women who had attended previous retreats. About a third presented formal testimony. So dramatic was this event that it made a secular newspaper, The Florida Times-Union, which noted that "most of those interviewed recounted seeing Jesus' Head and

Shoulders, though the level of detail varied." Some said they saw features -- ears, eyes, mouth; others glimpsed a vaguer silhouette.

"I looked at the Host and noticed the color was not the usual color of off-white but was light pink in the center, which became darker and darker until it reached the rim where it was deep red," said yet another observer, Trish Kessler, describing a resemblance to the Shroud of Turin. "I felt like I was walking in the Holy of Holies." "I was in shock, and yet so happy," added Cherrie Martinez. "I saw with my own eyes the silhouette of the Sacred Heart. It was like a pencil drawing of His hair, head, and shoulders. This shows how powerful prayers are!"

It also indicated the reality of the True Presence -- long a point of contention between Catholics and Protestants. Similar events have been logged from Canada to Venezuela and Australia. In Jacksonville, even former Baptists -- often loathe to report such manifestations -- were witnesses. One, Chrys Sills, also observed what she described in the monstrance as an apparition of the Turin Shroud. Others reported the Host glowing brightly despite the dark room and some said the Host appeared gold.

"I stood in front of the monstrance and saw Jesus' Face as an outline in silhouette," reported Helen Targonski, a woman who had recently lost a husband to cancer. "I saw the top of His Head with a crown of thorns and His Face faintly but His eyes were more predominant, looking straight out. His eyes looked real and were radiating with tremendous love. Everywhere I looked, I saw other members kneeling and crying or lying prostrate."

The message: God is with us even in our most trying moments. It was spiritual bedlam and it repeated itself at the same church four years later, during a men's retreat from October 18 to 19, 2003. In a series of events that some like to compare to an historical occurrence in Bordeaux, France, the men reported similar images -- pencil-like etchings -- on a cloth placed behind the Blessed Sacrament as a white backdrop.

"These pencil drawings began to develop into very distinct and clear images," noted one newsletter from Journey to Our Father Ministries. "Some people saw them in black and white, while others saw them in various shades of gold. Witnesses first saw an image of a lamb, which was over the shoulders of Jesus. Many people saw Jesus' Image as a side view looking right and down, while others saw Him in a frontal view. One person came nearer and said, 'Do you also see the baby Jesus?' You could see the baby Jesus, then a dove, and then Mary, and also God the Father. All these different images were visible within the overall image. The detail was so great that you could actually see the individual hairs on God the Father's Head."

While in both cases many of the images were sketched, at least one person saw an entire image in color. Once again, the Host was "glowing." During the Rosary, a picture of Mary reportedly moved.

The theme of the retreat was "Open the eyes of my heart." On the way home, as one couple boarded their car, on the radio was the song, "Open the eyes of my heart Lord, I want to see You"! Each person felt as if he or she had a personal experience -- often seeing something uniquely his or her own.

"This was a day that would forever change my life," said one of the former Baptists. "Not because I saw what I already knew was there, but to know that He is with us every minute that we take time to spend with Him."