

MARCH 24 2026 CARDINAL THOMAS COLLINS

Millions of people around the world watched the funeral of Queen Elizabeth a few years ago, and as a procession passed a big pillar of stone in the middle of the street, the king and all the military in the procession saluted. Now why were they saluting a big pillar of stone? That makes no sense. But of course they weren't really, it was the Cenotaph. It represented the sacrifice of those who had died for their country, who'd offered their lives in sacrifice. And so, by saluting the big pillar of stone, that physical object, they really were—everyone knew—they were not saluting just that. They were saluting the sacrifice of those who had died for their country.

And so it is around the world on Remembrance Day, where people leave wreaths in honour of those who have died. And they do so though, not just generically, they do so at cenotaph, at a pillar of stone. That represents it in time and space.

This is what we in faith call the sacramental principle. God works in this physical world. Divinely he works, but he works in physical ways. And that's utterly important in our life. He comes to our level, because we cannot on our own go to his.

We see a foreshadowing of that in the Old Testament. In the first reading today, the people were dying from the bites of these venomous serpents, and so the Lord asked Moses to hold up a symbol, a sign, of a serpent, a bronze serpent, which would represent not death, but life. And as they looked to that, they were healed. God was using something physical to bring about the healing of those people. The divine power of healing.

And of course, the greatest example of the sacramental reality is the coming of almighty God into this world, our Lord himself. Almighty

God does not stay in icy distance and majesty. But he enters this world, God with us, our Lord Jesus Christ, the second person of the trinity. To walk amongst us, to speak to us, to heal us... in physical ways.

Alternately by being lifted up on the cross, and sacrificed in love, overcoming the power of sin, and death, and hatred, by his love. “Father forgive them, they know not what they do.” And he continues to do that. The Lord works in physical ways.

Sometimes in ordinary, little physical ways, like for example, this is what we call a sacramental, it's the rosary. It's simply a reminder of God. But, of course, he works in other ways much more profound, as what we are doing here. This is almighty God is taking bread and wine, very physical, as much as a block of stone, or other such things... He is taking something very physical, very uninspiring in itself, and by transforming that, he comes amongst us.

That's why I always, when I lift up the host and the chalice, with the cthe blood of Christ, I always say in my own heart, quietly: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” And then when I genuflect, which these days is more horizontally than vertically, I always say: “My Lord and my God.”

This isn't just a reminder of Jesus, as a picture, or a holy crucifix and things, or a rosary is, it is the Lord, coming to us in physical ways. So all of the sacraments are profoundly important. They are the way that God comes to us in our struggles, to lead us to heaven, to lead us to him. And that's why we pray that the sacraments may be widely known amongst us, so we may enter into them, and experience the divine power through the physical signs. Of the holy Eucharist above all, but the forgiveness of sins.

The seven sacraments, baptism, confirmation, all of those use water, oil, things like that are used to be physical instruments through which almighty God enters and transforms us, and comes amongst us.

And that's also a reason, maybe appropriate to think of today, at this Mass, why we pray that the Lord will inspire, and draw the people to—from amongst our community, to be instruments of his grace. To make possible the celebration of the sacraments. And that's really the purpose of the Serra Club. To pray to the Lord. 'Cause the only thing Jesus ever said was—about vocations, is: “Pray to the Lord of the harvest, to send labourers into the harvest.”

And the Serra Club does that. It helps, it reaches out in every way, to encourage those whom the Lord has called to serve in the consecrated life, in the priesthood, and permanent diaconate, and other ways, to step forward, and help be instruments through which God, divine, sublime, far beyond us, enters into our world again by his will, through the sacraments, through the word of God, and the seven sacraments of the Church.

And so I always pray that people will support and enter and join in the great work of the Serra Club to pray to the Lord to make this sacramental reality more and more strong amongst us, as he draws us close to him.