Since we began Ordinary Time of Year I in the Liturgical Calendar, the first reading has come from the letter to the Hebrews. This epistle seeks to strengthen practical faith, appeals for perseverance, speaks clearly of the dignity of Christ, the wonder of the Incarnation, and the exaltation of Jesus. It draws a fine comparison and contrast between the role of the high priest in the Old Testament tradition and that of the everlasting priesthood of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ fulfills the promises of the Old Testament. His life is an eternal priesthood, an eternal sacrifice.

The letter to the Hebrews points out that the high priest was selected from among men and women. Though guilty of sin, his office was a divine appointment. He functioned as the representative before God, patient with erring because he was beset with weakness. Our high priest, Jesus Christ, was selected by God for men and women. Though he knew no sin, he embraced our sin, patient with our erring for he loves us infinitely before we sin, after we sin, and even while we are sinning for we simply cannot limit, restrict, or contain the infinite, forgiving, healing love of Christ.

Through perfect obedience, Hebrews notes, Jesus is the source of eternal salvation, our representative before the Father, the once and for all, unique sacrifice offered on Mount Calvary, what Francis de Sales refers to as the Mount of Lovers. So, some may ask why then we gather to offer this sacrifice. We do so in faithful obedience to the one who loves us and asks us to “do this in memory of me” so that we are reminded daily of the ongoing love, the eternal
priesthood of Jesus Christ, the eternal sacrifice. Is it any wonder De Sales refers to the Eucharist as the “sun of all spiritual exercises, the center of the Christian religion, the heart of devotion, and the soul of piety?” Here we celebrate daily the Paschal Mystery, the presence of God whom we are called to be for one another. It is here that we approach the table broken so as to be forgiven and renewed in order that we can “go in peace to love and serve our God and one another.”

It is in this great gift, our celebration of the Lord’s supper, where we hear the word of God so that it may nourish us and take root within us in order to bear fruit thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold. This takes time. It takes perseverance. It takes fidelity and devotion leading to perfection. We understand why Jesus exhorted us to “do this in memory of him.” This is why we gather daily at the table of the Lord. We may find ourselves at a different place than we were when we heard the same Scriptures a year ago or ten years ago. The same word of God speaks to us in new and different ways because we are at a new and different place as we progress in the devout life. It may be challenging us to grow, to forgive, to seek pardon, to understand, and the like.

Hearing the word of God and letting it take root may be said to be what Francis calls devotion. It requires all the elements De Sales laid out for devotion. It not only “presupposes love of God…it is simply true love of God.” It takes hold of us so that we can only do the will of God “carefully, frequently, and promptly” (Introduction to the Devout Life, p. 40). It keeps us open to a daily outpouring of the “graces and blessings” which De Sales writes that God “in his supreme goodness” pours forth on each of us “as a seed that falls not only on good ground but on the wayside, among thorns, and upon rocks, so that all of them would be inexcusable before the Redeemer if they did not use this most abundant redemption to win salvation for themselves” (Treatise on the Love of God, II:7). It calls us to a life lived in union with God, living
well where we are and making sacred what it is we are called to do in the ordinary. It’s a union of hearts fundamentally whose essence is rooted in love...loving whatever God wills of us. DeSales writes, “Like good ground that has received seed and then in due season returns it a hundredfold, a heart that has found complacence in God cannot keep from wishing to render God another complacence in return” (Treatise on the Love of God, VIII:1). In searching for this union with God, let us be content at being where God calls us and desiring to be no other place or as DeSales puts it, “being who we are and being that well.” For it is here we find root. We come into the presence of God to be that presence.

May we come into the presence of God to be nourished by his word and sacrament so that we may stay in the presence of God and be that for one another. May we have a childlike trust and be totally abandoned to how that word speaks to us in this space and this time. May we trust in its power, put aside fear, and let our roots issue forth in kindness to another, in forgiveness to one hurting, or perhaps in a tender and complete forgiveness of ourselves, in the acceptance of one ostracized, and in loving the one whom others deem unlovable but in whom we recognize the presence of Christ. Let us pray that like Jesus’ eternal priesthood, his once and for all perfect and eternal sacrifice, we may listen attentively, carefully, promptly with our ears and our heart, partake of and be nourished by the real presence of the Eucharist so that in our devotion the wish of the Good Mother, Mary de Sales Chappuis, may come true and we, the sons and daughters of Francis de Sales, may be for each other “another Christ walking the face of the Earth once again.”