

EUCCHARISTIC GRACES

Poems for Pondering
God's Presence

Jeanette Martino Land



Catholic. Pastoral. Trusted.

In *Eucharistic Graces*, Jeanette Martino Land offers a collection of her poems that speak of seasons of the year, of the Church, and of self. Her poems reflect her contemplative, loving heart and will enrich the personal prayer of those who read them.

—Sr. Sarah Schwartzberg, OSB
Editor, *Spirit & Life* magazine

Cardinal Joseph Bernardin once wrote that it is in the Eucharist that we discover *who* we are and *whose* we are. That seminal truth of Christian belief and life is articulated beautifully in the eucharistic poetry of Jeanette Land. She ponders the mystery of Christ's faithful gift of self in the sacrament that nourishes and invigorates us for a life lived in union with God. In the subtle lines of her poems, she illumines the truth that disciples of the Lord are a eucharistic people whose very identity is shaped by our belonging to God. Readers of this book will find their appreciation for the gift of the Eucharist deepened and their participation in this sacrament enlivened.

—Rev. Robin Ryan, CP, PhD
Professor of systematic theology, Catholic Theological Union

Pablo Neruda, the beloved Chilean writer, once said that “poetry is an act of peace.” That sense of calm encircles me whenever I read Jeanette Martino Land's work. It is certainly true of this volume. What Jeanette accomplishes with her words is an exploration, a celebration, and a sharing of lived experiences. From pondering the mysteries of the Eucharist to meditating on the limitless love of God, Jeanette invites us on a journey inward, where God resides.

I invite you to find a comfortable chair and slowly read her words. And in that sacred space, you will find the peace your heart desires for communion with the divine.

—Christopher Heffron
Editorial director, Franciscan Media

These are the perfect prayer starters for those times when our prayer life is feeling somewhat dry, but also for the times when we simply want to rest quietly in the divine presence. For those times, we don't have to search for words, as they are here in the page before us and come from a heart that has long searched for the sacred and knows what it is like to draw sustenance from that never-ending well of mercy and grace. These poems also make fine companions for *lectio divina*. I have reflected many times on just one word or phrase of these rich and profound meditations that are appropriate to all liturgical seasons and all seasons of life.

—Judith Valente

Author, *How to Live, How to Be; The Art of Pausing*; and
The Italian Soul: How to Savor the Full Joys of Life

The sacraments are God's masterpieces, the Eucharist, God's poetry. What better way to unpack such precious mysteries of divine love than with the help of poetry inspired by faith? The poems found in Jeanette Martino Land's *Eucharistic Graces* are just that. They are prayers that uplift and inspire anytime, but they are especially rich to ponder in the presence of our Eucharistic Lord.

—Marcellino D'Ambrosio, PhD
Author and professor

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Dedication

For my parents, Stephanie and John Martino, my first encouragers; Melvin Shorter, CP, Janet Knudson, and the late Mary Ann Hansen and Barbara Schopfer, for reading and commenting on the manuscript; my husband, Jack, for his unwavering support; author Judith Valente, mentor and encourager par excellence for the past twenty years; and last, but not least, my wonderful editors, Paige Shortal, who has shepherded me well, and Fr. Byron Miller, who brought this book to completion. My heartfelt gratitude!

TO GOD BE THE GLORY!

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Introduction

***No Christian poetry worthy of the name
has been written by anyone who
was not in some degree a contemplative.***

THOMAS MERTON

“POETRY AND THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE” (1947)

Are you on a spiritual journey, or do you want to start one? Do you want to see the world around you—and in you—with new eyes? I invite you to come along with me in these lines of poetry. Use them as prayer starters to deepen your contemplation. Use them as springboards to enrich your spirit and personal meditation. Ponder them, be still, stretch your mind, soothe your soul, reignite your faith, open your heart to your Creator, to creatures, and to creation—to the One who is Hope, Truth, Joy, and Love. Awaken your soul, inspire your mind, delight your senses! It is my hope that, with an open mind and a listening heart, a gathering of graces awaits you. Eucharistic graces are free for the seeker.

Our Lord is the One who nourishes and sustains me and inspires me to write—especially eucharistic poetry. As a practicing Catholic who attends daily Mass with my husband, I believe that Christ is truly present in the Eucharist. In receiving the Bread of Life, I am united to Christ and to all of humanity in this wondrous Sacrament of Love.

SEEKING THE DIVINE

Diving deep for words
Below the surface of life:
The poet creates.

Seeking the divine,
Poetry awakens faith,
Delighting the soul!

As a Catholic, I understand the *Eucharist*, from a Greek word meaning “thanksgiving,” to be the grace par excellence, but there are many other graces—abiding graces—that emanate from nature, creation, and human beings. Thus, all of my poetry—in the broad sense of the term—is eucharistic. It embraces thanksgiving. Its purpose is to touch the hearts and souls of the reader and move him or her closer to the divine.

Rhymes have been swirling in my head ever since my mother introduced me to nursery rhymes when I was very young. Therefore, it was no surprise when I attempted my first rhyme at about four years old, which I then recited to my mother: “I saw a clown, and his pants were falling down!” Not professional, surely, but a start.

I was an avid reader, and Saturdays found me in the Solvay Public Library. Throughout my school years, I kept jotting down verses while also writing for my high school newspaper and college quarterly literary magazine.

As a college freshman, I won first prize in a Catholic Daughters of America poetry contest and had some poems published in the local newspaper. But my dream was to be a famous novelist! And I got nowhere. I learned there was a Christian writers’ group in Rutherfordton, North Carolina, but I avoided it. What did I know about theology or the Bible? However, a member of the group encouraged

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me to attend, and from them I learned the basics of writing articles and stories and how to submit manuscripts.

When I was doing my student teaching in elementary French, I took a poetry-writing course at the YMCA. I was hooked! I ordered poetry books, joined poetry clubs, and attended conferences and workshops on creative writing, poetry, and haiku. Often, I can be seen tapping my fingers, 5–7–5, when I see something or hear a word that triggers a haiku in my mind.

CREATIVITY

Inhale sights and sounds...

Heart-stopping, resonating:

Exhale poetry!

Over the years, I have been blessed to have hundreds of poems, articles, and other works appear in more than seventy-five different publications. Reading the Bible and other spiritual books and making an annual silent, privately directed retreat (a gift to myself for over thirty years now!) help me be more in tune with my Creator God. When I slow down, I become aware of the wonders of creation and the divine in every day, and I attempt to express in poetry my feelings, beliefs, and experiences of God's love, presence, and power. I hope and pray that these poems also help communicate what you may feel but find hard to express—all in a spirit of God's abiding eucharistic graces.

One

Pieces of Love

*Delight is the chief, if not the only, end of poesy
[poetry]: instruction can be admitted but in the
second place; for [poetry] only instructs as it
delights.*

—JOHN DRYDEN

“AN ESSAY OF DRAMATIC POESY” (1668)

PIECES OF LOVE

We are all pieces of Love.
Sometimes our pieces become
bruised...broken...crushed
as we are buffeted by the storms of life.
Sometimes our pieces become
depressed...angry...unloving.

Yet we are still pieces of Love.
In our woundedness, we become beggars,
approaching the Lord's Table
to be nourished by His Body and His Blood,
asking to be made whole again
in the healing power of the Eucharist,
the Sacrament of Love
that unites us with Him and with each other.
Yes, we are all pieces of God's Love.

DIAMONDS IN HIS SIGHT

God cuts, polishes
Refines and perfects us to
Sparkle with His Love.

UNTIL THE END OF TIME

We approach Your Table, Lord,
aware of our sinfulness
grateful for Your Mercy
acknowledging our total dependence on You.

We accept Your invitation
to take and eat
bread broken
wine poured

For us...the people of God
broken
bleeding
bonded

By this Sacrificial Meal,
where God and man together
are sat down
until the end of time.

JOURNEY OF LOVE

My heart is stretched out with sorrow, Lord

Burdened...

Beyond my understanding

Pierced...

Beyond pain to the point of numbness

Broken...

Beyond any human mending.

I come with outstretched hands, Lord

Eager...

To receive You in Eucharist

Expecting...

To experience Your healing power

Waiting...

To have You fill my stretched-out heart
with joy!

WITH EYES OF FAITH

Teach me, Lord, to see
with eyes of faith.
Remove any blinders that prevent me
from distinguishing what is good and holy and true.
With eyes of faith,
help me recognize You.

When I welcome a stranger at church
or visit a friend in the hospital
or take a meal to a shut-in
or hug someone who's bereaved...
with eyes of faith,
I know I am ministering to You.

Instill in me the perception
of the shepherds and the Wise Men,
who looked upon a Jewish baby boy
lying on a bed of straw and,
with eyes of faith,
knew they beheld the Messiah.

When I gaze at the wafer of bread
and the cup of wine
offered at Mass,
I thank You for a believing heart;
as with eyes of faith,
I adore Your Precious Body and Blood Divine.

I THIRST

The Man on the Cross says,

“I THIRST.”

Physically and spiritually, Jesus thirsts.

Dehydrated, He desires liquid to quench
the terrible dryness in His mouth.

Longing for the love of His people,
thirsting for souls,

He desires to drink deeply of the Cup
given to Him by the Father:

The mission of our salvation.

Obediently, Jesus accepts and embraces
the Cup of Suffering that leads to Calvary.

“Not My will, not what I want;
but what You want, Father;
Your Will be done.”

My God, I THIRST.

In my Gethsemanes
of emotional abandonment
and spiritual aridity,
my soul thirsts for You.

In the desert of my waiting,
as I face my crosses,
I sometimes struggle to accept
the Cup of my Salvation,
with its often bitter wine.

“Yet, not My will, but Yours.”