

In The School of Mary

(Papal documents condensed by Deacon William Wagner)

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Pope John Paul II

Mane Nobiscum Domine, Apostolic Letter proclaiming October 2014 - October 2005 "The Year of the Eucharist".

INTRODUCTION

"Stay with us, Lord," (*Mane nobiscum, Domine*) they pleaded. Although Jesus would disappear from the sight of the two disciples at Emmaus, he found a way to stay with them, and us, in the "breaking of the bread." The Holy Father proposes this *image of the disciples on the way to Emmaus* as a "fitting guide" for the Church as she is engaged in living out the mystery of the Holy Eucharist in this special year (October 2004 – October 2005).

"The breaking of the bread," the Eucharist, so named by the Church from earliest times, has always been the center of her life. The idea of dedicating an entire year to celebrate this central mystery of our faith came from various sources. But it was also with a view to nourishing the faith and enthusiasm of the youth as they gather for *World Youth Day* this August in Cologne that the Pope thought an extended focus on this Most Holy Sacrament to be particularly fitting. Finally, to his way of thinking, pastoral programs of individual Churches should find fuller development grounded in a Eucharistic context.

Part I In the Wake of the Council and the Great Jubilee

With a great deal of hope Pope John Paul II called for a preparation for the Great Jubilee Year of 2000. Despite the tragic events that occurred in the initial moments of the new millennium, he nonetheless felt, and still feels, that a proper celebration was in order. Very importantly, it must be recognized that Jesus Christ stands not only at the center of the history of the Church, but also the history of humanity. It is in the Incarnate Word that both the mystery of God and the mystery of man are revealed. In Jesus, all of humanity finds redemption and fulfillment.

The Holy Father recalls for us how he had attempted to prepare us for the opening of the third millennium. It was a plan that was fully Trinitarian and Christocentric. By means of his proposal he sought to help us approach this critical moment in history within a Eucharistic environment. In one of his letters to the Church, the Pope urged all to rediscover the Eucharist as the heart of Sunday (*Dies Domini*).

That John Paul set a high standard for the Church is nothing surprising. He advocated a deeply pastoral approach to conversion based on something extremely fundamental, contemplation of the face of Christ. The object was to be, as he put it, "holiness through the art of prayer." In his methodology he stressed particularly the Sunday Eucharist. Sunday itself was to be experienced as a special day of faith, the day of the Risen Lord, the gift of the Holy Spirit, a weekly Easter. The *Liturgy of the Hours* could form for us a training ground in prayer, teaching us to sanctify the various hours of the day as we passed through the different stages of the liturgical year.

Last week we ended with the Holy Father urging us to sanctify the Day of the Lord and in particular by praying the Liturgy of the Hours. This week we begin with the Pope returning us to the theme of contemplating the face of Christ *from a Marian perspective* by means of the recitation of the Rosary.

He notes two remarkable characteristics of this prayer so highly recommended by the Church, its biblical and evangelical roots. These focus powerfully on the name and face of Jesus in the contemplation of the mysteries. The repetition of the Hail Mary's represent a kind of pedagogy of love *evoking within our hearts the same love that Mary bore for her Son*. For this reason John Paul felt compelled to add the Mysteries of Light to the Rosary, which could not end at any other point than the Institution of the Eucharist.

The Pope tells us that he issued *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (his encyclical on the Eucharist) in the midst of the Year of the Rosary to suggest the great need for a Eucharistic spirituality with Mary, the “woman of the Eucharist,” as its model. He now offers us some reflections that he feels might be helpful in the celebration of this *Year of the Eucharist*.

II The Eucharist, A Mystery of Light

The account of the happenings on the road to Emmaus helps us focus on a primary aspect of the Eucharist. *The Eucharist is a mystery of light!* Yet in the Eucharist the glory of Christ remains veiled and it is pre-eminently a *mystery of faith*. However, the Eucharist is light above all because at every Mass the liturgy of the Word precedes the liturgy of the Eucharist in the unity of the two tables (of Word and Bread). There is an obvious bond between the two. Christ himself intercepted the two disciples’ journey to Emmaus, explaining to them how all the Scriptures pointed to the mystery of his person. Their hearts burned within them as Jesus drew them out of the darkness of sorrow and despair, awakening within them that exclamation of desire: “Stay with us, Lord.”

The Second Vatican Council sought to make the Scriptures more broadly available to the faithful by allowing for the vernacular. Further, the homily, treated as a part of the Liturgy, seeks to draw out their meaning for the Christian life. It is to be proclaimed with care, preparation, devout attention, and *meditative silence*, thereby enabling the word of God to touch the peoples’ minds and hearts.

Prepared by the Lord’s words, the two disciples recognized him in the simple act of *the breaking of the bread*. John Paul in words irreducible says the same of us, “When minds are enlightened and hearts aware enkindled, signs begin to *speak*. The Eucharist unfolds in a dynamic context of signs containing a rich and *luminous* message.”

In our humanness we are constantly tempted to reduce the Eucharist to our own dimensions, while in reality it is we who must open ourselves up to the dimensions of this Mystery. It is evident that the Eucharist is a meal establishing fellowship with God and others. However, it has a profoundly and primarily sacrificial meaning. Every Mass is a memorial as we are reminded during the exclamation after the consecration. It makes present the past while impelling us into the future. This eschatological aspect fills our Christian journey with hope.

The *mystery of the “real” presence* truly makes a demand on our faith. The Holy Father reminds us that it is with the entire tradition of the Church, that we believe that Jesus is truly present under the Eucharistic species. It is not to say that other presences of Christ are not real but that this presence is real *par excellence* because Christ is substantially present, whole and entire, in the reality of his body and blood. The Pope says that Faith demands that we approach the Eucharist fully aware that we are approaching Christ himself. The Eucharist is a mystery of presence, the perfect fulfillment of Jesus’ promise to remain with us until the end of the world.

Because it is so great a mystery, Holy Mass must be celebrated well. Pope John Paul suggests that as a project a parish might consider studying the General Instruction of the Roman Missal. Other projects are given consideration as well.

The Holy Father thinks that there is a particular need to cultivate a lively awareness of Christ’s real presence both within and outside the Mass. To his way of thinking times of silence during Mass as well as during Eucharistic Adoration are “golden.” How ministers treat the Eucharist is of utmost importance. At the same time the Tabernacle must be a kind of *“magnetic pole attracting an ever greater number of souls enamored of him”* waiting to hear his voice.

According to the mind of the Pope, Eucharistic adoration outside of Mass should become a particular commitment for individual parishes and religious communities. Let us take time, he says, to make reparation for acts of carelessness and neglect. Through adoration we deepen our personal and communal contemplation. The Holy Father returns again to recommending the Rosary, when prayed well, as a “fitting introduction to Eucharistic contemplation, a contemplation carried out with Mary as our companion and guide.

Pope John Paul II makes one final suggestion for this year of the Eucharist. It is that we also celebrate with particular devotion the Solemnity of Corpus Christi with its traditional procession.

III Source and Manifestation of Communion

Receiving the Eucharist means entering into a profound communion with Jesus. This “Abide in me, and I in you,” (Jn 15:4) enables us to have a certain foretaste of heaven on earth. At the same time this Eucharistic “communion” cannot be adequately understood or fully experienced apart from ecclesial communion. For the Church is the Body of Christ. As the Apostle Paul states, “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” (1 Cor 10:17) And so in the mystery of the Eucharist Jesus builds up the Church as a communion of persons united in him with the Father.

In effect, the Eucharist is both the source of ecclesial unity and at the same time its greatest manifestation. It is a true epiphany of communion, both hierarchical (vertical) and at the same time fraternal (horizontal). In the year of the Eucharist, the Holy Father tells us that we are to draw as close as possible to the ideal of communion that is portrayed for us in the Acts of the Apostles. With the participation of the laity, the presbyterate and the diaconate, the "Stational Mass" of the Bishop celebrated in the cathedral is the principal "manifestation" of the Church. Additionally the Pope urges priest to be especially attentive to the *Sunday Mass* as the means of bringing the entire parish community together.

IV The Eucharist, Principle and Plan of "Mission"

Once we have truly met the Risen One by partaking of his body and blood, we cannot keep to ourselves the joy we have experienced. This encounter with Christ issues in the Church and in every Christian an urgent summons to testimony and evangelization. St. Paul closely relates meal and proclamation. (*cf 1 Cor 11.26*) The dismissal at the end of each Mass is an evangelistic charge given to us to go forth and spread the Gospel. John Paul wishes us to see in the Eucharist not only a source of strength for but, in some sense, the very plan itself. The Eucharist is "*a mode of being which passes from Jesus into each Christian.*" It is meant to be spread throughout society instilling in it Christian values. The Holy Father sees a special charge arising out of this "commissioning" for this *Year of the Eucharist*.

In our secularized society, so characterized by its forgetfulness of God, we are called to remind men and women of the necessity of their thankfulness. We have been chosen to incarnate this Eucharistic plan (a plan of thankfulness) into our daily life. It means that we give witness that human reality cannot be justified without reference to the Creator. Without the Creator the creature ceases to exist. This "*transcendent point of reference*" (i.e. God) commits us to a "Eucharistic attitude," one of thanksgiving.

The Holy Father strongly feels that during the *Year of the Eucharist* we should commit ourselves to being more forceful witnesses of God's presence in the world. In other words, we should not be afraid to speak out about God. If history demonstrates that mistakes have been made, they are not to be attributed to our "Christian roots" but to the failure of Christians to be faithful to those roots. The Pope makes us aware of an essential element of Christianity. It is that the "one who learns to say 'thank you' in the manner of the crucified Christ might end up as a martyr, but never as a persecutor."

The Eucharist is not merely an expression of ecclesial unity but a *project of solidarity* for all of humanity. The Church recognizes her awareness of being the "sign and instrument" of intimate union with God as well as unity with the entire human race. Further, John Paul II teaches us that, as the Church enters this new and dangerous Millennium, we must learn to experience the Eucharist as a *great school of peace*. As a result we are to become promoters of dialogue and communion with others.

The Pope calls our attention to the fact that by bending down to wash the feet of his disciples, Jesus explained an essential meaning of the Eucharist, that of building in a very practical way a more just and fraternal society. The poor and oppressed are found everywhere, even amidst immense wealth. The criterion for being recognized as true followers of Christ is our concern for those in need. At the same time that concern for the poor is also the measuring rod for the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations.

The Holy Father offers the *Year of the Eucharist* as a grace through which the whole of the Church might contemplate this *ineffable sacrament*. He asks for nothing extraordinary. However, whatever we do, it should be marked by a *profound interiority*. He asks only for a true revival of the Sunday Eucharist and an increased Eucharistic worship outside of Mass. Little enough. But he asks this of us all, Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Consecrated, lay men and women, young and old.

All this John Paul seeks through the intercession of Mary who gave Jesus his spotless flesh. *Ave verum corpus natum ex Maria Virgine.*