

## **In The School of Mary**

(Papal documents condensed by Deacon William Wagner)

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## **Pope Benedict XVI**

*Sacramentum Caritas*, The Sacrament of Charity, February 22, 2006. Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation.

The Exhortation, which is dated February 22, Feast of the Chair of St. Peter, is the final document of the synodal assembly held in Rome from October 2<sup>nd</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2005. It has been published in Latin, Italian, English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese and Polish.

This Apostolic Exhortation forms part of the "series of great documents on the sublime Sacrament of the Eucharist such as, for example, those of Servant of God, John Paul II, '*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*' and '*Mane Nobiscum*,' both of which we have condensed in this column in the recent past. '*Sacramentum Caritatis*' is part of this continuity and, at the same time, re-proposes in an updated form certain essential truths of Eucharistic doctrine, calling for the dignified celebration of the sacred rite and recalling the urgent need to include Eucharistic life as part of everyday life."

The secretary general of the Synod of Bishops, Archbishop Nikola Eterovic, points out that the document, "in presenting the great truths of Eucharistic faith in a way accessible to modern man, considers various current aspects of [Eucharistic] celebration and calls for a renewed commitment to building a more just and peaceful world, in which the Bread broken for everyone's life becomes ... the exemplary cause in the fight against hunger and against all forms of poverty."

Cardinal Angelo Scola, as well, recalls how the title of the Apostolic Exhortation, "*Sacramentum Caritatis*," reaffirms "the Holy Father's insistence over the past two years of his pontificate on the truth of love," clearly indicating that this is "one of the crucial themes upon which the future of the Church and of humanity depends."

As for myself, I find it significant that we begin this condensation on the anniversary date of the first apparition of Fatima. The three seers themselves were prepared for these events by an angelic series of Eucharistic apparitions. Fatima's message is grounded in the Eucharist. So we begin Benedict XVI's most recent presentation.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The sacrament of charity, the Holy Eucharist is the gift that Jesus Christ makes of himself, thus revealing to us God's infinite love, for every man and woman. Jesus continues, in the sacrament of the Eucharist to love us "to the end," even to offering us his body and his blood. Our Holy Father ponders the amazement that the Apostles must have felt in witnessing what the Lord did and said during that Supper! He also notes the wonder that the Eucharistic mystery should awaken in our hearts as well.

#### ***The Food of Truth***

St. Augustine asked the question: "What does our soul desire more passionately than truth?" Each of us has an innate and irrepressible desire for ultimate and definitive truth. Benedict XVI tells us that in the *Sacrament of Charity* the Lord truly becomes food for us to satisfy our hunger for truth and freedom.

Jesus Christ is the Truth in person, drawing the world to himself. He is the lodestar of human freedom. With him, freedom finds itself. It is in the Sacrament of the Eucharist that Jesus shows us, in particular, the truth about the love that is the very essence of God. Precisely because Christ has become for us the food of truth, the Church turns to every man and woman, inviting them freely to accept God's gift.

### ***The Development of the Eucharistic Rite***

In every age of the Church's history the Eucharistic celebration, as the source and summit of her life and mission, shines forth in the liturgical rite in all its richness and variety. The Synod of Bishops thought that the difficulties and even the occasional abuses that they noted could not overshadow the valid benefits of the liturgical renewal. Yet its riches are still to be fully explored.

### ***The Synod of Bishops and the Year of the Eucharist***

It is at this point that the Holy Father summarizes many of the significant events preparatory to the Synod. He enumerates the Eucharistic occurrences of note, especially the Year of the Eucharist. Benedict highlights two important works of his immediate predecessor, John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine* and *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* that sought to increase Eucharistic devotion and give the Church a sure magisterial statement on the Eucharist.

### ***The Purpose of this Exhortation***

This Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation seeks to consider the richness and variety of the reflections and proposals that emerged from this synod of Bishops. It also wishes to offer some basic directions aimed at a renewed commitment to Eucharistic enthusiasm and fervor in the Church. Benedict XVI here wishes to second the desires of the Synod Fathers to encourage the Christian people to deepen their understanding of the relationship between the *Eucharistic mystery*, the *liturgical action*, and the *new spiritual worship* that derives from the Eucharist as the *Sacrament of Charity*.

The Pope says that he also wishes to place this exhortation along side his first Encyclical Letter, *Deus Caritas Est* so that we might better understand how *agape* (Christian love) also became a term for the Eucharist.

## **PART ONE**

### **THE EUCHARIST, A MYSTERY TO BE BELIEVED**

#### ***The Church's Eucharistic Faith***

"*The mystery of faith!*" are the words proclaimed by the priest immediately following the consecration, a reality that surpasses all understanding. The Eucharist is a "mystery of faith" par excellence. Faith and the sacraments are two complementary aspects of ecclesial life. "*Faith is expressed in the rite while the rite reinforces and strengthens faith.*" For this reason, the *Sacrament of the Altar* is always at the heart of the Church's life.

#### **The Blessed Trinity and the Eucharist**

##### ***The bread come down from heaven***

Pope Benedict XVI awakens us to the fact that the first element of Eucharistic faith is the mystery of God himself, Trinitarian love. To Nicodemus, Jesus said that God so loved the world... that God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. (Jn 3:16-17) These words show the deepest source of God's gift. In the Eucharist Jesus does not give us a "thing," but himself, the totality of his very life. He is the eternal Son, given us by the Father. In the synagogue at Capernaum Jesus is heard to say, "My Father gives you the true bread from heaven..." (Jn 6:32-33) He identifies himself, his own flesh and blood, with that bread. (Jn 6:51) Jesus thus shows that he is the bread of life that the eternal Father gives to mankind.

##### ***A free gift of the Blessed Trinity***

The Eucharist reveals the loving plan that guides all of salvation history. The Holy Father tells us that it is in this sacrament that the *Deus Trinitas*, who is essentially love, becomes fully a part of our human condition. It is in the Paschal Meal that God's whole life encounters us and is sacramentally shared with us, God who is a perfect communion of love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is an absolutely

free gift, the superabundant fulfillment of God's promises that the church receives, celebrates and adores in faithful obedience. The "mystery of faith" is thus a mystery of Trinitarian love.

### **The Eucharist: Jesus the true Sacrificial Lamb**

#### ***The new and eternal covenant in the blood of the Lamb***

In the mystery of Christ's obedience unto death the new and eternal covenant was brought about. The Pope tells us that in his crucified flesh, God's freedom and human freedom met in an eternally valid pact. Human sin was redeemed once for all by God's Son. Love in its most radical form is born in the Paschal Mystery whence takes place our deliverance from evil and death. The ultimate purpose of Jesus' mission was clear from the beginning of his public life. At the Jordan River, John the Baptist saw Jesus and he exclaimed: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." (Jn 1:29) These very words are repeated at every Mass. Jesus is the true paschal lamb who freely gave himself in sacrifice for us and thus brought about the new and eternal covenant.

#### ***The institution of the Eucharist***

The institution of the Eucharist took place within a ritual meal commemorating the foundational event of Israel, its deliverance from slavery in Egypt. This is the context in which Jesus introduces the newness of his gift. In instituting the Eucharist, Jesus anticipates and makes present the sacrifice of the Cross and the victory of the resurrection, revealing himself as the true sacrificial lamb. Jesus thus shows the salvific meaning of his death and resurrection, a mysterious renewal of history and the whole cosmos. Amidst all the violence and absurdity, the Eucharist demonstrates how in Jesus' death it became a supreme act of love and mankind's definitive deliverance from evil.

#### ***Figura transit in veritatem***

Jesus brings his own radical *novum* (newness) to the ancient Hebrew sacrificial meal, the *Berakah*. Benedict XVI tells us that in Christ the foreshadowing has given way to the truth itself (*figura transit in veritatem*). By his command to "do this in remembrance of me," Christ asks us to respond to his gift and to make it sacramentally present. The remembrance of his perfect gift consists not in the mere repetition of the Last Supper, but in the Eucharist itself, that is, in the radical newness of Christian worship. The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' act of self-oblation, into the very dynamic of his self-giving. It thus introduces within creation the principle of radical change, leading ultimately to the transfiguration of the entire world.

### **The Holy Spirit and the Eucharist**

#### ***Jesus and the Holy Spirit***

The Holy Father reminds us that the Church, the Bride of Christ, is called to celebrate the Eucharistic banquet daily in his memory. This great mystery is celebrated in the liturgical forms that the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, develops in time and space. We need a renewed awareness of the decisive role played by the Holy Spirit in the evolution of the liturgical form.

In the so-called "farewell discourse" reported by John, Jesus clearly relates the gift of his life in the paschal mystery to the gift of the Spirit to his own beloved. (cf Jn 16:7) Once risen, he can pour out the Spirit upon them, making them sharers in his own mission. The Spirit would then teach the disciples all things and bring to their remembrance all that Christ had taught. As the Spirit of Truth, it falls to him to guide the disciples into all truth.

In *Acts*, on Pentecost the Spirit descends upon the Apostles gathered in prayer with Mary and stirs them to undertake the mission of proclaiming the Good News. Through the work of the Spirit, Christ himself continues to be actively present in his Church, starting with her vital center, the Eucharist.

#### ***The Holy Spirit and the Eucharistic celebration***

Against this backdrop we can understand the decisive role played by the Holy Spirit in the Eucharistic celebration, especially with regard to transubstantiation. This was already clearly evident in the *Catechesis* of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem. He states that we "call upon God in his mercy to send his Holy Spirit upon the offerings before us, to transform the bread into the body of Christ and the wine into the blood of Christ." Saint John Chrysostom as well notes that the priest invokes the Holy Spirit when he celebrates the sacrifice. The Pope sees the need for a deeper appreciation of the anaphora (Eucharistic prayer) for it contains the epiclesis, the petition to the Father to send the gift of the Spirit upon the bread

and wine so that they will become the body and blood of Jesus Christ and that “the community as a whole will become ever more the body of Christ.” It is this same Spirit who gathers the faithful “into one body” and makes of them a spiritual offering pleasing to the Father.”

## **The Eucharist and the Church**

### ***The Eucharist, causal principle of the Church***

In the sacrifice of the Cross, Christ gave birth to the Church as his Bride and his body. The Fathers of the Church often meditated on the relationship between Eve’s coming forth from the side of Adam as he slept and the coming forth of the new Eve, the Church, from the open side of Christ sleeping in death on the cross. John recounts that there came forth blood and water, the symbol of the sacraments. Benedict XVI says that in contemplation we are led to reflect on the causal connection between Christ’s sacrifice, the Eucharist and the Church. The Eucharist is Christ who gives himself to us and continually builds us up as his body. The Church’s ability to “make” the Eucharist is completely rooted in Christ’s self-gift to her. Here we can see more clearly the meaning of St. John’s words: “he first loved us.” For all eternity he remains the one who loves us first.

### ***The Eucharist and ecclesial communion***

The Eucharist is therefore constitutive of the Church’s being and activity. The ancient Church used the same words, *Corpus Christi*, to designate Christ’s body born of Mary, his Eucharistic Body and his ecclesial body. This helps us to appreciate the inseparability of Christ and his Church. The Eucharist is thus found at the root of the Church as a mystery of communion.

In his encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Servant of God, Pope John Paul II, already noted the relationship between the Eucharist and *cummunio* (communion). The fact that the one Eucharist is celebrated in each Diocese around its own Bishop gives us to understand how those particular Churches subsist in and *of the Church*. “The oneness and indivisibility of the Eucharistic body of the Lord implies the oneness of his mystical body, the one and indivisible Church. From the Eucharistic center arises the necessary openness of every celebrating community, of every particular Church. The Pope tells us that in the celebration of the Eucharist, the individual members of the faithful find themselves in *their* Church, in the Church of Christ. From this perspective, rightly understood, ecclesial communion is seen to be catholic by its very nature. It also provides a powerful base for ecumenical dialogue amongst certain churches not in full communion with Rome.

## **The Eucharist and the Sacraments**

### ***The Sacramental mentality of the Church***

The Second Vatican Council recalled for us that all the sacraments, all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate were bound up in the Eucharist and directed toward it. For in the most blessed Eucharist is contained the entire spiritual wealth of the Church, Christ himself our Pasch and living bread. The Council stated that the Church, in Christ, is a sacrament, a sign and instrument, of communion with God and of unity with the entire human race. Benedict XVI reminds us that in this way the Church is the universal sacrament of salvation, reaching our lives in all their particularity.

## **I. The Eucharist and Christian Initiation**

### ***The Eucharist, the fullness of Christian Initiation***

It must not be forgotten that our reception of Baptism and Confirmation is ordered to the Eucharist. The Sacrament of Baptism, by which we were conformed to Christ, incorporated in the Church and made children of God, is the portal to all the sacraments. The Holy Father says that, nevertheless, it is our participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice that perfects within us the gifts given to us at Baptism. The Holy Eucharist brings to completion and represents the center and goal of all our sacramental life.

### ***The order of the Sacraments of Initiation***

Attention needs to be paid to the order of the sacraments of initiation. Different traditions exist in the Church. (i.e. especially the East vs. the West) These variations are pastoral in character for the most part. It needs to be seen which practice better enables the faithful to put the sacrament of the Eucharist at the center, as the goal of the whole process of initiation. Conjoined with Rome, Bishop’ Conferences should examine the effectiveness of current approaches to Christian initiation.

### ***Initiation, the ecclesial community and the family***

The whole of the Christian initiation is a process of conversion. The Pope says that he would like to call particular attention to the relationship between Christian initiation and the family. In pastoral work it is always important to make Christian families part of the process of initiation. Receiving Baptism, Confirmation and First Holy Communion are key moments for not only the individual but also the entire family. Benedict XVI notes in particular the importance of First Holy Communion. For many of the faithful, it was at this point that they first realized the importance of a personal encounter with Jesus. Parish pastoral programs should make the most of this highly significant moment.

## **II. The Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation**

### ***Their intrinsic relationship***

The Synod Fathers stated that a love for the Eucharist leads to a growing appreciation of the sacrament of Reconciliation. Given their close connection to one another, an authentic catechesis on the meaning of the Eucharist must include the call to pursue a path of penance. The loss of a consciousness of sin (an evident modern-day phenomenon) entails a certain superficiality in the understanding of God's love. Bringing out the elements within the rite of Mass that express consciousness of personal sin and, at the same time, of God's mercy, can prove most helpful to the faithful. The relationship between the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation reminds us that sin is never a purely individual affair. It always damages the ecclesial communion that we have entered through Baptism. Reconciliation, as the Fathers of the Church said, works much like baptism. (*laboriosus quidam baptismus*) Therefore as the outcome of conversion, a return to the Eucharist envisions a restoration to full ecclesial communion as well.

### ***Some Pastoral Concerns***

Bishops have the duty of promoting a reinvigorated catechesis on the conversion born of the Eucharist and of encouraging frequent confession. All priests should dedicate themselves with generosity to administering well the sacrament of Reconciliation. I ask pastors to be vigilant with regard to the celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation limiting the practice of *general absolution* exclusively to the cases permitted. Individual absolution is the only form intended for ordinary use.

Given the need to rediscover sacramental forgiveness, there ought to be a *Penitentiary (an individual with special delegation)* in every Diocese. The sound practice of gaining indulgences can renew appreciation for the relationship between the Eucharist and Reconciliation. By this means the faithful obtain remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins, for themselves or for the deceased, whose guilt has already been forgiven. The practice of indulgences reminds us how closely we are united to each other in Christ and how the supernatural life of each can help others.

## **III. The Eucharist and the Anointing of the Sick**

The disciples were sent to heal the sick for whom Jesus instituted a specific sacrament as well: the Anointing of the Sick. Benedict points out that the Eucharist shows how Christ's sufferings and death have been transformed into love while the Anointing of the Sick unites the sick with Christ's self-offering for the salvation of all. Through the mystery of the communion of saints, we can participate in the redemption of the world. In addition, the Church offers the dying the Eucharist as viaticum: Holy Communion, the seed of eternal life, as food for our journey to the Father. (cf Jn 6:54) The Pope concludes by emphasizing that the attentive care shown the suffering sick brings great spiritual benefit to all the community.

## **IV. The Eucharist and the Sacrament of Holy Orders**

### ***In Persona Christi Capitis***

On the night before he died, Jesus instituted the Eucharist and at the same time the *priesthood of the New Covenant*. He is priest, victim and altar: the mediator between God the Father and his people. (cf Heb 5: 5-10) No one can say "this is my body" and "this is the cup of my blood" except in the name and in the person of Christ. The Holy Father stresses that the connection between Holy Orders and the

Eucharist is seen most clearly at Mass, when the Bishop or priest presides *in the person of Christ the Head*.

The Church teaches that priestly ordination is the indispensable condition for a valid Eucharist. In the ordained minister it is Christ himself who is present to his Church as head of his Body. The ordained ministers, acting also in the name of the Church, in their ministry should not put themselves or personal opinions before Jesus Christ. The priest above all is a servant of others especially in his humility, in leading the liturgical assembly, in obedience to the rite and in uniting himself to it in mind and heart.

### ***The Eucharist and priestly celibacy***

The Synod Fathers emphasized that the ministerial priesthood calls for complete configuration to Christ. There is a true need to reaffirm the profound meaning of priestly celibacy. This is also confirmed by the Eastern practice of only choosing Bishops from the ranks of the celibate clergy. Christ himself, the eternal priest, lived his mission even to the sacrifice of the cross in the state of virginity. He is the sure reference point for understanding the meaning of the tradition of the Latin Church. Benedict XVI makes clear that it is not sufficient to understand priestly celibacy in purely functional terms. Celibacy is a special way of conforming oneself to Christ's own way of life. The Holy Father states without equivocation that in the Latin tradition celibacy remains obligatory. Priestly celibacy lived with maturity, joy and dedication is an immense blessing for the Church and for all society.

### ***The clergy shortage and the pastoral care of vocations***

A shortage of priests happens not only in some areas of first evangelization but also in many countries of long-standing Christian tradition. The Synod discussed pastoral initiatives aimed at promoting, especially among the young, an attitude of interior openness to a priestly call. The situation cannot be resolved by purely practical decisions. Despite the urgent need, the Pope says that on no account should Bishops fail to carry out adequate vocational discernment and admit to seminary formation and ordination candidates who lack the necessary qualities.

The pastoral care of vocations needs to involve the entire Christian community in every area of its life. Families should generously embrace the gift of life and bring up their children to be open to doing God's will. They must have the courage to set before young people the radical decision to follow Christ.

### ***Gratitude and hope***

The Pontiff says that we need an ever-greater faith and hope in God's providence. We must never lose confidence that Christ continues to inspire men to leave all and dedicate themselves totally to this sacred ministry. Benedict offers the gratitude of the whole Church for all those Bishops and priests who carry out their respective missions with fidelity, devotion and zeal. He also notes the Church's gratitude to Deacons who are ordained to service. He offers a special thanks to the *Fidei Donum* priests (missionaries sent by Diocesan Bishops) who work faithfully and generously, devoting all their energy to serving the mission of the Church. We should thank God for all those priests who have suffered even to the sacrifice of their lives. The eloquence of their example shows what it means to be a priest to the end.

## **V. The Eucharist and Matrimony**

### ***The Eucharist, a nuptial sacrament***

The Eucharist, as the sacrament of charity, has a particular relationship to the love of man and woman in marriage. A deeper understanding of this relationship is needed at the present time.

Pope John Paul II frequently spoke of the nuptial character of the Eucharist, its special relationship with the sacrament of Matrimony. In his eyes "the entire Christian life bears the mark of Christ's spousal love for the Church." The Eucharist strengthens the indissoluble unity and love of Christian marriage. The marriage bond is intrinsically linked to the Eucharistic unity of Christ the Bridegroom and his Bride, the Church. (*cf. Eph 5:31-32*) In Pauline theology, conjugal love is a sacramental sign of Christ's love for his Church, culminating in the Cross, the expression of his "marriage" with humanity. It is as well the origin and heart of the Eucharist.

The family, the domestic Church is a primary sphere of the Church's life, the first place of evangelization. The Synod called for an acknowledgment of the unique mission of women in the family and in society. Marriage and motherhood represent essential realities that must never be denigrated.

### ***The Eucharist and the unicity of marriage***

The indissoluble bond uniting Christ and the Church finds sacramental expression in the Eucharist. The Pope says that it corresponds to the basic anthropological fact that man is meant to be definitively united to one woman and vice versa. (*cf. Gen 2:24, Mt 19:5*) There are occasions where polygamists find themselves called to the Gospel. They then need to be helped to integrate their life-plan into the radical newness of Christ. In their catechumenal process, Christ encounters them, calling them to embrace the full truth of love and to make whatever sacrifices are necessary to arrive at perfect ecclesial communion. The Church offers them pastoral care that is gentle yet firm, showing them the light shed by the Christian mysteries on nature and on human affections.

### ***The Eucharist and the indissolubility of marriage***

The Eucharist expresses the irrevocable love of God in Christ for his Church. With regard to the sacrament of Matrimony, it implies an indissolubility to which all true love aspires. The divorced and remarried represent a complex pastoral problem, a real scourge for modern society. It increasingly affects the Catholic community as well. Discerning each situation carefully, the Church must offer appropriate spiritual guidance to the faithful involved. The Synod of Bishops confirmed the Church's practice of not admitting the divorced and remarried to the sacraments (*cf. Mk 10:2-12*) since their state and their condition of life *objectively* contradict the loving union of Christ and the Church, signified and made present in the Eucharist. Yet, the divorced and remarried continue to belong to the Church that continues to accompany them with a special concern and encouragement.

In discerning the validity of prior marriages, Benedict VI emphasizes the grave obligation the Church has to bring its institutional activity in her tribunals ever closer to the faithful. The fundamental point of encounter between the law and pastoral care is *love of truth*. "Truth," the Pope states, "is never something purely abstract." It is a real part of the every human, Christian life-journey.

Continuing in this vane, the Holy Father says that where nullity of a marriage is not possible and it is impossible to cease cohabitation, then the faithful must live in accord with God's law abiding in a brother-sister relationship. In this way they can return to the reception of the Eucharist taking care to observe the Church's practice in this regard. To make this possible it must be supported by the Church's pastors although these relationships may not be blessed lest confusion arise among the faithful.

The Synod Fathers recommended a maximum effort in the training of couples preparing for marriage. It should be ascertained before hand that the couples are clearly aware of the responsibility that they are accepting in marriage lest they accept obligations that they later will find incapable of fulfilling. Marriage and family are institutions that must be promoted and defended since whatever is injurious to them is injurious to society itself.

### **The Eucharist and Eschatology**

#### ***The Eucharist: a gift to men and women on their journey***

The sacraments are part of the Church's pilgrimage towards full manifestation of the victory of the risen Christ. (eschatological fulfillment / the eschaton, the final end) The liturgy of the Eucharist gives us a real foretaste of the eschatological fulfillment for which every human being and all creation are destined. Man is created for that true and eternal happiness that only God's love can give. In our wounded freedom, Benedict says that we all need to be guided towards our final goal, Christ himself, who conquered sin and death and who is present to us in a special way in the Eucharistic celebration. Through the Eucharistic banquet we already share in the fullness of risen life.

#### ***The eschatological banquet***

The Pope says that in reflecting on this mystery we see how by Christ's self-gift, he objectively inaugurated the eschatological age. Christ came to gather the scattered People of God in a covenant to fulfill the promises made by God to the fathers of old. The calling of the Twelve is to be understood in relation to the twelve tribes of Israel. In the command that he gave them at the Last Supper to celebrate his memorial, Jesus showed that he wished to transfer to the entire community that he had founded the task of being the sign and instrument of the eschatological gathering originating in him. For us, then, the Eucharistic banquet is a real foretaste of the final banquet, foretold by the prophets, described in the New

Testament as “the marriage-feast of the Lamb” (cf Rev 19:7-9) to be celebrated in the joy of the communion of the saints.

### ***Prayer for the dead***

The Eucharistic celebration is a pledge of future glory. Celebrating the memorial of our salvation strengthens our hope in the resurrection of the body and of meeting once again, face to face, those who have died, marked with the sign of faith. In this context the Holy Father and the Synod fathers remind us of the importance of prayers for the dead, especially the offering of Mass for them.

### **The Eucharist and the Virgin Mary**

Though we still journey toward the completion of our hope, it does not preclude us from gratefully acknowledging that God’s gifts to us already have found perfect fulfillment in the Virgin Mary. Mary’s Assumption, body and soul, into heaven is for us a sign of sure hope. The eschatological goal of the sacrament of the Eucharist even now enables to experience a foretaste of that hope.

Pope Benedict XVI tells us that Mary of Nazareth appears from the beginning as someone who is always completely open to God’s will. He says that her immaculate conception is revealed precisely in her unconditional docility to God’s word. As a virgin attentive to it, she lives in complete harmony with his will. Mary is the great Believer who places herself confidently in God’s hands. The Holy Father echoes the Second Vatican Council when he says that the blessed Virgin advanced on her pilgrimage of faith until she stood at the Cross according to the divine plan, associating herself with her son’s sacrifice in her mother’s heart while lovingly consenting to the immolation of the victim born of her. Finally, the dying Christ gives her as a mother to his disciple, John.

From the Annunciation to the Cross, Mary is the one who received the Word, made flesh within her and then silenced in death. It is she who took into her arms the lifeless body of the one who truly loved his own “to the end.” As a result, the Pope says that every time we approach the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharistic liturgy, we also turn to her who, by her complete fidelity, received Christ’s sacrifice for the whole Church. The Synod Fathers declared that it is Mary who inaugurates the Church’s participation in the sacrifice of the Redeemer. In this she is the *Immaculata (the Immaculate One)*, the one associated with God’s work of salvation. Mary is the icon of the emerging Church, the model for each of us who are called to receive the gift that Jesus makes of himself for us in the Eucharist.

## **PART II**

### **THE EUCHARIST, A MYSTERY TO BE CELEBRATED**

**“Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.” (Jn 6:32)**

### ***Lex ordandi and lex credendi***

The Synod of Bishops reflected at length on the intrinsic relationship between Eucharistic faith and Eucharistic celebration. They pointed to the strong connection between *lex ordandi (the law of praying)* and *lex credendi (the law of believing)*. They stressed the primacy of the *liturgical action*. The Pope tells us that theological reflection here can never prescind from the sacramental order instituted by Christ himself. On the other hand, the liturgical action can never be considered *generically*, prescinding from the mystery of faith. He points out that *our faith and the Eucharistic liturgy both have their source in the same event*: Christ’s gift of himself in the Paschal Mystery.

### ***Beauty and the Liturgy***

The relationship between creed (*lex credendi*) and worship (*lex orandi*) is seen in a particular way in the rich theological and liturgical notion of beauty. The liturgy is inherently linked to beauty. It is *veritatis splendor* (splendor of the truth). This is the concrete way that the truth of God’s love in Christ encounters us, attracts us and delights us, drawing us towards our true vocation which is love.

In the Old Testament we see many signs of the grandeur of God’s power as he manifests his glory among the Chosen People. In the New Testament this epiphany of beauty reaches absolute fulfillment in God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, the full manifestation of the glory of God. Jesus Christ transformed the dark mystery of death into the radiant light of the resurrection. The truest beauty is the love of God, who definitively revealed himself to us in the paschal mystery.

The beauty of the liturgy is part of this mystery, a glimpse of heaven on earth. Beauty is not mere decoration, but an essential element of the liturgical action since it is an attribute of God himself and his revelation. Benedict XVI concludes with his own emphasis: "These considerations should make us realize the care which is needed, if the liturgical action is to reflect its innate splendor."

### **The Eucharistic Celebration, the work of "Christus Totus"**

#### ***Christus totus in capite et in corpore***

The "subject" of the liturgy's intrinsic beauty is Christ himself (the whole Christ in the head and in the body). St. Augustine understood that Christ the Lord willed to entrust to us his body and the blood which he shed for the forgiveness of our sins. He reminds us that if we have received them properly, "you yourselves are what you have received." We have become Christ himself. St. Augustine continues by telling us that this mysterious work brings about a profound unity between ourselves and the Lord Jesus, the complete Christ in the head and in the body."

#### ***The Eucharist and the risen Christ***

The Holy Synod teaches that the Eucharistic Liturgy is essentially an *actio Dei* (an action of God), drawing us into Christ. Its basic structure is not something within our power to change nor can it be held hostage by the latest trends. It is the Apostle of the Gentiles who assures us that with regard to the Eucharist, he is presenting not his own teaching but what he himself has received (*cf 1 Cor 11:23*). The Church celebrates the Eucharistic Sacrifice in obedience to Christ's command. From the beginning, the Christian community has gathered for the *fractio panis* (breaking of the bread) on the Lord's Day, Sunday, the day Christ rose from the dead. The Old Testament saw the first day of the week as the beginning of God's work of creation. The day of creation has now become the day of the "new creation" in Christ.

#### **Ars Celebrandi**

The Synod frequently insisted that there be no antithesis between *ars celebrandi*, (the art of proper celebration) and full, active participation of all the faithful. The *ars celebrandi* is the best way to ensure the active participation of all. Faithful adherence to liturgical norms has for two thousand years sustained the faith life of all believers, celebrating as the People of God, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.

#### ***The Bishop, celebrant par excellence***

It is true that the whole People of God participates in the Eucharistic liturgy. Yet, the sacrament of Holy Orders entails a specific responsibility. Bishops, Priests and Deacons must consider the celebration of the liturgy as their principal duty. Above all, the Diocesan Bishop is the moderator, promoter, and guardian of the whole of the Church's liturgical life. Communion with the Bishop is required for the lawfulness of every celebration within his territory. He himself is the celebrant par excellence within his Diocese. It is his responsibility to ensure unity and harmony in all celebrations taking place there. Benedict XVI here asks that every effort be made to ensure that the liturgies celebrated by the Bishop in his Cathedral be carried out in complete respect for the *ars celebrandi* so that they can be considered an example for the entire Diocese.

#### ***Respect for the liturgical books and the richness of signs***

*Ars celebrandi* should foster a sense of the sacred. The Eucharistic celebration is enhanced when priests and liturgical leaders are committed to making known the current liturgical texts and norms in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* and the *Order of Readings for Mass*. These texts contain riches that have preserved and expressed the faith and experience of the People of God over its two thousand-year history. A correct *ars celebrandi* requires attentiveness to the various kinds of language that the liturgy employs: words and music, gestures and silence, movement, the liturgical colors. The liturgy functions so as to engage the whole of the human person. The Pope notes how attentiveness and fidelity to the rite express recognition of the nature of the Eucharist as a gift and, on the part of the minister, a docile openness to receiving this ineffable gift.

#### ***Art at the service of the liturgy***

The Holy Father emphasizes that there is a profound connection between beauty and the liturgy. In particular, he sees church architecture as playing an important role in sacred art. This should be

highlighted by a unity of the furnishings in the sanctuary. Benedict makes it clear that the purpose of sacred architecture is to offer the Church a fitting place for the celebration of the mysteries of faith, especially the Eucharist. The very nature of a Christian church is defined by the liturgy. It is an assembly of the faithful (*ecclesia*), the living stones of the Church.

Sacred art, and religious iconography in particular, should be directed to sacramental mystagogy (*enlightenment*). It is essential that seminarians and priests be well rounded in the study of art history and liturgical norms, especially as it pertains to the sacred. Everything related to the Eucharist, vestments, furnishings and the sacred vessels, should be marked by beauty. All must foster awe for the mystery of God, manifest the unity of the faith and strengthen devotion.

### ***Liturgical song***

In the *ars celebrandi* (*the proper celebration of the liturgy*) liturgical song has a pre-eminent place. Singing is an expression of joy and love. Benedict points out that over her two thousand-year history, the Church has created, and still creates, music and songs, a rich patrimony of faith and love. This heritage must not be lost. Within the liturgy, he tells us that one song is not as good as another. Generic improvisation or the introduction of musical genres that fail to respect the meaning of the liturgy should be avoided. Everything, texts, music, execution, ought to correspond to the meaning of the mystery being celebrated. Finally, while respecting various styles and different, yet highly praiseworthy traditions, the Holy Father desires, in accordance with the request advanced by the Synod Fathers, that Gregorian chant be suitably esteemed and employed as the chant proper to the Roman liturgy.

### **The Structure of the Eucharistic Celebration**

If we are to remain faithful to the intention of the liturgical renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council in continuity with the great ecclesial tradition, then we must pay special attention to specific aspects of the structure of the Eucharistic celebration.

### ***The intrinsic unity of the liturgical action***

The Holy Father sees a need to reflect on the inherent unity of the rite of the Mass. Both in catechesis and in the actual manner of celebration, one must avoid giving the impression that the two parts of the liturgical rite are merely placed side by side. They are, in fact, so closely related that they form, in a single act of worship, an intrinsic bond between the word of God and the Eucharist. From the two tables, of the word of God and the body of Christ, the Church receives and gives to the faithful the bread of life. The word of God, proclaimed by the Church in the liturgy, leads to the Eucharist as to its own connatural end.

### ***The liturgy of the word***

Benedict begins this section by saying that the liturgical proclamation of the Word of God is to be entrusted to well-prepared readers. It must not be forgotten that when the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people. Christ, present in his own word, proclaims the Gospel. Indeed, the word that we proclaim and accept is the Word made flesh inseparably linked to Christ's person. Christ does not speak in the past, but in the present, even as he is present in the liturgical action.

Pope Benedict tells us that the faithful are to be helped to appreciate the riches of Sacred Scripture in various ways, especially in reading it within the context of prayer (*lectio divina*). The Liturgy of the Hours, especially Morning and Evening Prayers, are among the encouraged forms of prayer heavily based in Sacred Scripture. In the Divine Office we arrive at a deeper experience of Christ and the whole of the economy of salvation that in turn can enrich our participation in the celebration of the Eucharist.

### ***The Homily***

Given the importance of the word of God, the Holy Father, following the lead of Fathers of the Synod, feels that homilies need improvement. The homily is *part of the liturgical action* and is meant to deepen our understanding of it. Generic and abstract homilies are of little worth. They should closely relate the proclamation of the word to the sacramental celebration and the life of the community. Homilists cannot forget the catechetical aim of the homily. Throughout the liturgical year, based on the three-year lectionary, homilies treating of the great themes of the Christian faith and utilizing the four pillars of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* could well be offered the faithful in an ordered fashion.

### ***The Presentation of the Gift***

The Synod thought that the presentation of the gifts ought not to be viewed simply as an “interval” between the liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the Eucharist. It is significant. In the bread and wine, brought to the altar, all creation is taken up by Christ who transforms and presents it to the Father. God invites participation in bringing to fulfillment his handiwork, giving human labor its authentic meaning by uniting it to the redemptive sacrifice of Christ.

### ***The Eucharistic Prayer***

The Eucharistic prayer is “the center and summit of the entire celebration.” The faithful need to be enabled to appreciate this celebration. In the anaphora the profound unity between the invocation of the Holy Spirit and the institution narrative whereby “the sacrifice that Christ himself instituted at the Last Supper is continually enriching. Through the power of the Holy Spirit the gifts offered by human hands are consecrated, becoming Christ’s Body and Blood. This spotless Victim to be received in communion is for the salvation of those who will partake of it.

### ***The Sign of Peace***

The Eucharist is the Sacrament of peace, finding specific expression in the sign of peace. In our times, fraught with fear and conflict, this gesture has become particularly eloquent. Thus the Church gives voice to the hope for peace and reconciliation directing it towards the one who “is our peace.” Yet the Synod of Bishops felt a need for a greater restraint in this gesture. Nothing is lost when the sign of peace is marked by a greater sobriety and restricted to one’s immediate neighbors.

### ***The Distribution and Reception of the Eucharist***

In this regard, the Holy Father asks everyone, especially the ordained, to ensure that this simple act preserves its importance as a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus. All Christian communities are to observe the current norms faithfully. Furthermore, the precious time of thanksgiving after communion should not be neglected. Besides the singing of an appropriate hymn, it can also be most helpful to remain recollected in silence.

Pope Benedict now calls attention to such occasions as wedding Masses, funerals, etc. at which, beside practicing Catholics, there may be others who have long since ceased to attend Mass or are living in situations that preclude the reception of the sacraments. At other times there may be members of other Christian confessions and even other religions present. There is a need here to find a brief and clear way to remind those present of the meaning of sacramental communion and the conditions required for its reception. When this becomes impossible, the Pope emphasizes that in order to ensure that the meaning of the Eucharist be duly appreciated, it is appropriate to replace the celebration of the Eucharist with a celebration of the word of God.

### ***The Dismissal: “Ite missa est”***

The Pontiff notes the Synod Fathers’ consideration of the dismissal. After the blessing, the deacon or the priest dismisses the people with the words: *Ite, missa est*. These words help us grasp the relationship between the Mass just celebrated and the mission of Christians in the world. These few words succinctly express the missionary nature of the Church. In this context, it might also be helpful to provide new texts, duly approved, for the prayer over the people and the final blessing in order to make this connection clear.

### ***Actuosa Participatio***

#### ***Authentic participation***

The Second Vatican Council rightly emphasized the active, full, and fruitful participation of the entire People of God in the Eucharistic celebration. However, some misunderstanding has occasionally arisen concerning the precise meaning of this participation. “Participation” does not refer to mere external activity during the celebration. The active participation called for by the Council must be understood in more substantial terms. It refers to a greater awareness of the mystery being celebrated and its relationship to daily life. The conciliar Constitution, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, encourage the faithful to take part in the Eucharistic liturgy not “as strangers or silent spectators,” but as “participants” in the sacred action, conscious of what they are doing, actively and devoutly.” The Council went on to say that the faithful “should be instructed by God’s word, and nourished at the table of the Lord’s Body.” They

should offer the immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him. They should learn to make an offering of themselves.

### ***Participation and the Priestly Ministry***

This participation entails an acknowledgment of the hierarchical roles involved in the celebration. Pope Benedict points out that active participation is not per se equivalent to the exercise of a specific ministry. Active participation of the laity does not benefit from the confusion of not distinguishing the different functions proper to each. There is surely a need for clarity concerning the role of the priest. He alone, and no other, presides over the entire Eucharistic celebration. By virtue of Holy Orders, he represents Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, and in a specific way, the Church herself.

Every celebration of the Eucharist, in fact, is led by the Bishop, either in person or through the priest.” He is helped by a deacon, with specific duties: he prepares the altar, assists the priest, proclaims the Gospel, preaches the homily on occasion, reads the Prayer of the Faithful, and distributes the Eucharist to the faithful. Further, there are other ministries of liturgical service that can be carried out by religious and properly trained laity.

### ***The Eucharistic Celebration and Enculturation***

In order to foster this *actuosa participatio*, the Holy Father says that provisions may be made for a number of adaptations appropriate to different contexts and cultures. In the mystery of the Incarnation, the Lord Jesus, born of woman and fully human, entered directly into a relationship not only with the expectations of the Old Testament but also with those of all peoples. He thus showed that God wishes to encounter us in our own concrete situation. To this end, the Pope encourages Episcopal Conferences to strive to maintain a proper balance between the criteria and directives already issued in various church documents and new adaptations, always in accord with the Apostolic See.

### ***Personal Conditions for an “Active Participation”***

The Pope reminds us that one of these conditions is certainly the spirit of constant conversion that must mark the lives of all the faithful. Active participation in the Eucharistic liturgy can hardly be expected if one approaches it superficially. Only a heart reconciled to God makes genuine participation possible. There can be no *actuosa participatio* without an accompanying effort to participate actively in the life of the Church bringing Christ’s love into the life of society.

Clearly, full participation in the Eucharist takes place when the faithful approach the altar in person to receive communion. Even in cases where it is not possible to receive sacramental communion participation remains necessary and meaningful. In such circumstances, it is beneficial to cultivate a desire for full union with Christ through the practice of spiritual communion.

### ***Participation by Christians who are not Catholic***

Pope Benedict tells us that the intrinsic link between the Eucharist and the Church’s unity inspires us to long for the day when we will be able to celebrate the Holy Eucharist together with all believers in Christ. The respect we owe to the sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood prevents us from making it a mere “means” to attain that unity. The Eucharist in fact not only manifests our personal communion with Jesus Christ, but also implies full *communio* with the Church. These two are so conjoined that they make it generally impossible for non-Catholic Christians to receive the former without enjoying the latter. On the other hand, the Holy Father points out that for the sake of their eternal salvation, individual non-Catholic Christians can be admitted to the Eucharist, Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick. This is possible in specific and exceptional situations and the norms regulating these situations are to be faithfully observed.

### ***Participation through the Communications Media***

The Pope notes the impact of the media on “participation.” When Mass is broadcast on television, it tends to set an example. Care should be taken to ensure that, in addition to taking place in suitable and well-appointed locations, the celebration must respect the liturgical norms in force. It is to be noted that the obligation of fulfilling of Sunday Eucharist cannot be accomplished in this manner. Visual images can represent reality, but they do not reproduce it. It is, however, most praiseworthy that the elderly and the sick participate in Sunday Mass through radio and television.

### ***Active Participation by the Sick***

Because of sickness or advanced age, our brothers and sisters should have the opportunity to receive sacramental communion frequently. It strengthens their relationship with Christ, crucified and raised. It also helps them to feel more fully involved in the Church's life and mission as they offer their sufferings in union with our Lord's sacrifice. The disabled are to be given special attention as well. Buildings need to be designed to provide ready access to the disabled. In a compassionate reference to the mentally handicapped, the Pope said that if they have been baptized and confirmed then they may receive the Eucharist in the faith of the family or the community that accompanies them.

### ***Care for Prisoners***

The Church in its concern for prisoners has assigned their visitation a place amid the corporal works of mercy. Prisoners have a particular need to be visited personally by the Lord in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Receiving Holy Communion at this difficult and painful time in a person's life can surely contribute to the quality of a prisoner's faith journey and to full social rehabilitation. In this light he asks that the local churches do what is possible to alleviate the plight of prisoners.

### ***Migrants and Participation in the Eucharist***

The Synod expressed particular gratitude to all those engaged in the pastoral care of migrants, specifically of those belonging to the Eastern Catholic Churches who are not able to participate in the Eucharistic Liturgy in their own rite. Bishops should assist them when the need arises. Benedict says that contacts between the faithful of different rites can prove a source of mutual enrichment. This applies even more so to the clergy.

### ***Large-scale Concelebrations***

Large-scale celebrations held on special occasions, involving a great number of laity as well as concelebrating clergy, present a challenge. The importance of such occasions with the Bishop surrounded by the presbyterate and the deacons is not difficult to envision. However, it is not always easy in such cases to give clear expression to the unity of the presbyterate especially during the Eucharistic prayer and distribution of Holy Communion. The proper focus, nevertheless, can be maintained through good coordination and arrangement of the place of worship so that priests and lay faithful are truly able to fully participate.

### ***The Latin Language***

The Holy Father notes that large-scale celebrations have their place and importance especially at international gatherings. The most should be made of these occasions. Here he sets about endorsing the Synod of Bishops' proposal, in harmony with the directives of the Second Vatican Council that, with the exception of the readings, the homily and the prayer of the faithful, such liturgies should be celebrated in Latin. Similarly, the better-known prayers should be recited in Latin and, if possible, with selections of Gregorian chant being sung. Additionally, the Pope asks that future priests from their time in the seminary be schooled in Latin so as to be able to celebrate Mass in Latin, as well as be able to use Latin texts and execute Gregorian Chant. The lay faithful as well, on a more rudimentary level, is not to be neglected in this regard.

### ***Eucharistic Celebrations in Small Groups***

While the Pope recognizes the formative value of small groups, he also cautions that these celebrations always be consonant with the overall pastoral activity of the Diocese. The Synod Fathers thought it important that these groups meet certain criteria: that they serve to unify the community and not to fragment it; that the beneficial results be clearly evident; and that these groups encourage the fruitful participation of the entire assembly while maintaining the unity of the liturgical life of individual families.

## **Interior Participation in the Celebration**

### ***Mystagogical Catechesis***

Pope Benedict begins this section by telling us that fruitful participation in the liturgy requires that we be personally conformed to the mystery being celebrated, offering our life to God in unity with the sacrifice of Christ for the salvation of the whole world.

As we said last time, Pope Benedict begins this section by telling us that fruitful participation in the liturgy requires that we be personally conformed to the mystery being celebrated. Hence, there is need to provide an education in Eucharistic faith so that the faithful might live personally what they celebrate. This personal and conscious *participatio* is vitally important. A mystagogical approach to catechesis would help all to better understand the mysteries being celebrated. The Pope notes how the best catechesis on the Eucharist is the Eucharist itself, celebrated well. (Underlining my own emphasis)

The Liturgy itself can be an effective teaching device. That is why the Church's ancient tradition always had an experiential character. A systematic understanding of the faith was not downplayed. Yet, the Church did center on a vital and convincing encounter with Christ, as proclaimed by authentic witnesses. This initial encounter gains depth with catechesis and finds its source and summit in the celebration of the Eucharist. In this Christian mystagogical experience three elements need to be respected:

a) *The rites are interpreted in the light of the events of our salvation.* The celebration of the Eucharist makes constant reference to salvation history. In Christ crucified and risen, we truly celebrate the one who has united all things in himself. Especially in his Paschal Mystery all is tied to the history of the Old Testament.

b) *Mystagogical catechesis should also concern itself with presenting the meaning of the signs contained in the rites.* The Pope observes that in this technological age we are losing the ability to appreciate signs and symbols. A mystagogical catechesis should make the person more sensitive to the language of signs and gestures together with the word that makes up the rite.

c) *Finally, this method of catechesis should concern itself with bringing the significance of the rites to the Christian life in all its dimensions.* It should likewise demonstrate how the mysteries celebrated in the rite are linked to the missionary responsibility of the faithful. The fruits of this process are an awareness of one's life being progressively transformed. Benedict points out that, in fact, the aim of all Christian education is to train the believer in an adult faith that can make him a "new creation," capable of bearing witness in his surroundings.

The Holy Father says that to experience success in this endeavor the formators themselves must be formed. The Christian community needs to be a place where all can be taught about the mysteries celebrated in the faith. As a consequence, the Synod Fathers called for a greater involvement by communities of consecrated life, movements and groups that, by their specific charisms, can give significant impetus to Christian formation.

## **Interior Participation in the Celebration**

The Holy Father assures us that a convincing indication of the effectiveness of Eucharistic catechesis is an increased sense of the mystery of God, present among us and expressed in concrete signs of reverence for the Eucharist. He points to the importance of gestures and posture, such as kneeling during the central moments of the Eucharistic prayer. At each celebration we stand before the infinite majesty of God, who comes to us in the lowliness of the sacramental signs.

## **Adoration and Eucharistic Devotion**

### ***The Intrinsic Relationship between Celebration and Adoration***

In a most moving moment in St. Peter's Basilica, the Synod and a great number of the faithful gathered together for Eucharistic Adoration. By this means the Bishops wanted to point out the intrinsic relationship between the celebration of the Eucharist and Eucharistic adoration. They wished to foster a growing appreciation of this significant aspect of the Church's faith.

Benedict XVI is aware of a widespread attitude that argued that the Eucharistic bread was given to us not to be looked at, but to be eaten. The experience of the Church knows this to be a false dichotomy. St. Augustine put it this way: "No one eats that flesh without first adoring it; we should sin were we not to adore it." Eucharistic adoration is simply the natural consequence of the Eucharistic celebration, which is

itself the Church's supreme act of adoration. The act of adoration outside Mass prolongs and intensifies all that takes place during the liturgical celebration itself. The Pontiff notes that only in adoration can a profound and genuine reception of Holy Communion mature. This personal encounter with the Lord strengthens the social mission contained in the Eucharist.

### ***The Practice of Eucharistic Adoration***

With the Synod of Bishops, the Holy Father heartily recommends to the Church's pastors and to the People of God, the practice of Eucharistic adoration, both individually and in community. Wherever a sufficient population makes it possible, the Pope says that it would be appropriate to set aside specific churches or oratories for *Perpetual Adoration*. He also recommends that, in their catechetical training and especially in their preparation for First Holy Communion, children are taught the meaning and the beauty of spending time with Jesus. They should be helped to cultivate a sense of awe before his presence in the Eucharist.

Benedict XVI wants especially to encourage those associations and confraternities of the faithful specifically devoted to Eucharistic adoration. He says that they serve as a leaven of contemplation for the whole Church. They also summon individuals and communities to place Christ at the center of their lives.

### **Adoration and Eucharistic Devotion**

#### ***Forms of Eucharistic Devotion***

The following couple of sections almost defy condensation since they are so specific. Benedict XVI begins this particular section by highlighting the individual's personal relationship with Jesus present in the Eucharist. He says that this personal relationship constantly points beyond itself to the whole communion of the Church. Besides encouraging individuals to make time for personal prayer before the Sacrament of the Altar, the Pope feels bound to urge parishes and other church groups to set aside times for collective adoration. Here he is thinking of such long established forms of devotion as processions with the Blessed Sacrament on the occasion of the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, the Forty Hours devotion, Eucharistic Congresses at all levels, as well as other initiatives. Given updating, these forms of devotion are still worthy of being practiced today.

#### ***The Location of the Tabernacle***

The Synod of Bishops also discussed the question of the proper placement of the tabernacle in our churches. Their thought is that the correct positioning of the tabernacle contributes to the recognition of Christ's real presence in the Blessed Sacrament. Reservation of the Eucharistic species, marked by a sanctuary lamp, should be readily visible to everyone entering the church. In churches which do not have a Blessed Sacrament chapel and where the high altar with its tabernacle is still in place, the Pope says that it is appropriate to continue to use this structure for the reservation and adoration of the Eucharist, taking care not to place the celebrant's chair in front of it. In new churches, it is good to place the Blessed Sacrament chapel close to the sanctuary. Where not possible, it is preferable to locate the tabernacle in the sanctuary, in a sufficiently elevated place, at the center of the apse area (i.e. the altar area, often times domed). It might be positioned in another place where it would be equally *conspicuous*. The point is that the tabernacle's placement acknowledges its dignity.

Pope Benedict calls our attention to the obvious necessity of following the provisions of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*. It is crucial to understand that final judgment on these matters belongs to the Diocesan Bishop.

This concludes part two. In part three of this post-synodal document the Holy Father will be considering the Eucharist as a mystery to be lived. We will begin with that section next time.

## **PART III**

### **THE EUCHARIST, A MYSTERY TO BE LIVED**

**"As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me." (Jn 6:57)**

#### **The Eucharistic Form of the Christian Life Adoration and Eucharistic Devotion**

### ***Spiritual Worship – logiké latreía (Rom 12:1)***

The Lord Jesus speaks of the gift of his life and assures us that “if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever.” (Jn 6:51) The Holy Father says that this “eternal life” begins in us even now. These words of Jesus make us realize how the mystery “believed” and “celebrated” makes the Eucharist the principle of new life within us; the very form of our Christian existence. St. Augustine imagined the Lord saying to him, “I am the food of grown men; grow, and you shall feed upon me; nor shall you change me, like the food of your flesh, into yourself, but you shall be changed into me.” The Eucharistic food is not changed into us but we are mysteriously transformed by it. Christ draws us into himself.

Benedict XVI notes how the Eucharistic celebration expresses at once both the origin and the fulfillment of the new and definitive worship of God. Saint Paul’s exhortation makes our whole life a spiritual worship pleasing to God. He says, “...present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.” (Rom 12:1) This new worship appears as a total self-offering made in communion with the whole Church. The Apostle emphasizes the concrete human reality of a worship that is anything but disincarnate. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, says that “this is the sacrifice of Christians; that we though many, are one body in Christ.” The Church shows us that in what is offered, she herself is offered. She teaches that the Eucharist, as the sacrifice of Christ, is also the sacrifice of the whole Church. The Pope says that this insistence on sacrifice, a “making sacred” – expresses the transformation of our human reality as taken up by Christ. (cf Phil 3:12)

### ***The all-encompassing effect of Eucharistic Worship***

Christianity’s new worship includes and transfigures every aspect of life. The Pontiff says that the Eucharist embraces the concrete, everyday existence of the believer and makes possible the day by day transfiguration of all those called to reflect the image of the Son of God (cf Rom 8:29ff). He goes on to say that there is nothing authentically human that does not find in the sacrament of the Eucharist the form it needs to be lived to the full. The radical newness brought by Christ in the Eucharist cannot be relegated to something private and individual. This worship of God tends to permeate every aspect of our existence. Worship pleasing to God thus becomes a new way of living our whole life, lifted up because it is lived as part of a relationship with Christ and as an offering to God.

### ***Juxta Dominicam Viventes ~ Living in Accordance with the Lord’s Day***

From the beginning Christians were clearly conscious of the radical newness that the Eucharist brings to human life. Benedict XVI holds up Ignatius of Antioch as expressing this truth when he called Christians “those who have attained a new hope,” and described them as “those living in accordance with the Lord’s Day” (*juxta dominicam viventes*). This Antiochene Martyr highlights for us the connection between the reality of the Eucharist and everyday Christian life. His phrase “living in accordance with the Lord’s Day” becomes the model for every other day of the week.

Christians have always known this day as the first day of the week since it commemorates the radical newness brought by Christ. On Sundays Christians rediscover the Eucharistic form that their lives should have. “Living in accordance with the Lord’s Day,” means living in the awareness of the freedom brought by Christ and making our lives a constant self-offering to God, revealing a profoundly renewed existence.

### ***Living the Sunday Obligation***

The Synod Fathers reaffirmed the importance of the Sunday obligation for all the faithful, enabling them to live each day in accordance with what they celebrated on “the Lord’s Day.” The Holy Father points out that the life of faith is endangered when we lose the desire to share in the celebration of the Eucharist. Participating in the Sunday liturgical assembly, with whom we form one body in Jesus Christ, is demanded by our Christian conscience. Not only that, it at the same time forms that conscience. To lose a sense of Sunday as the Lord’s Day to be made holy is to lose an authentic sense of Christian freedom.

John Paul II made his own observations about the different dimensions of the Christian celebration of Sunday in his apostolic letter, *Dies Domini*. He said that it was *Dies Domini* with regard to the work of creation, *Dies Christi* as regards the day of the new creation, *Dies Ecclesiae* as to the day on which the Christian community gathers for the celebration, and *Dies Hominis* as the day of joy, rest and fraternal charity for the individual.

Pope Benedict says that Sunday gives rise to the Christian meaning of life and a new way of experiencing time, relationships, work, life and death. He further says that it is fitting that Church groups should organize themselves around Sunday Mass on the Lord's Day. While recognizing that Saturday evening, beginning with First Vespers, is already a part of Sunday and fulfills the Sunday obligation, nonetheless the Holy Father reminds us that it is Sunday itself that is meant to be kept holy.

### ***The Meaning of Rest and of Work***

Finally, the day of the Lord is also a day of rest from work, hopefully recognized by civil society thereby permitting individuals to refrain from work without penalty. Christians always have seen in the Lord's Day a day of rest from their daily exertions. It makes work relative and directs it to the person: work is for man and not man for work. This actually protects men and women emancipating them from a possible form of enslavement. The Pope recognizes that work is of fundamental importance to the fulfillment of the human being. It must always be organized and carried out with full respect for human dignity and must always serve the common good. It is on the Lord's Day that men and women come to understand the meaning of their lives and also of their work.

### ***Sunday Assemblies in the Absence of a Priest***

There exists a growing problem of lack of priests where the possibility exists of not being able to celebrate Mass in certain areas. The Synod recommended first that the faithful should go to one of the churches in their Diocese where the presence of a priest is assured, *even when this demands a certain sacrifice* (italics my emphasis). Wherever great distances make it practically impossible to participate in the Sunday Eucharist, Benedict says that it is still important for the Christian community to commemorate the Day set apart for him. However, an adequate instruction about the difference between Mass and Sunday assemblies in the absence of a priest must be provided. The liturgy of the word, led by a deacon or a community leader to whom this ministry has been duly entrusted by competent authority needs to be carried out according to a specific ritual prepared and approved for this purpose by the Bishops' Conferences.

The Holy Father makes it clear that only the Bishop may grant the faculty of distributing holy communion in such liturgies. Care should be taken that these assemblies do not create confusion about the central role of the priest and the sacraments in the life of the Church. Notwithstanding the importance of the role of the laity, their role must never obscure the indispensable ministry of priests for the life of the Church. Such assemblies in the absence of a priest should never encourage ecclesiological visions incompatible with the truth of the Gospel and the Church's tradition. Considering the incomparable good that comes from the celebration of the Eucharist, Pope Benedict asks all priests to visit willingly and as often as possible the communities entrusted to their pastoral care, lest they remain too long without the sacrament of love.

### ***A Eucharistic form of Christian life, membership in the Church***

Benedict XVI holds up for us the importance of Sunday as the *Dies Ecclesiae* (Day of the Church). On this day each Christian rediscovers the communal dimension of his life as one who has been redeemed. Truly, whoever eats Christ lives for him. The Eucharistic mystery helps us to understand the profound meaning of the *communio sanctorum* (Communion of Saints). The Pope points out that Communion always and inseparably has both a vertical and a horizontal sense, i.e. a communion with God and a communion with our brothers and sisters. He notes that wherever communion with God is destroyed, the root of our communion with one another is destroyed. Likewise, wherever we do not live communion among ourselves, communion with the Triune God is not alive as well.

The Eucharistic form of Christian life is clearly ecclesial and communitarian in form. Through the diocese and parish, each person of faith can experience concretely what it means to be a member of Christ's Body. The Holy Father tells us that associations, ecclesial movements and communities, along with Institutes of Consecrated Life, have a real responsibility to make the faithful aware that they *belong to the Lord* (cf. *Rom 14:8*). Christianity from the beginning has meant fellowship, a network of relationships constantly strengthened by hearing God's word and sharing in the Eucharist.

### ***Spirituality and Eucharistic culture***

The Synod Fathers stated that “the Christian faithful need a fuller understanding of the relationship between the Eucharist and daily life. Eucharistic spirituality ...embraces the whole of life.” One of the most serious effects of secularization is that it has relegated the Christian faith to the margins of life as if it were irrelevant. The futility of this style of life, “to live as if God did not exist,” is now evident to everyone. Pope Benedict says that today there is a need to rediscover that Jesus Christ is a real person, who by becoming part of human history, is capable of renewing the life of every man and woman.

It is significant as well that Saint Paul in his *Letter to the Romans* invites his hearers to offer new spiritual worship and, at the same time, he speaks of the need for a change in their way of living and thinking (cf *Rom 12:2*). The Apostle to the Gentiles emphasizes the link between true spiritual worship and the need for a new way of understanding and living one’s life. It is noteworthy that the Eucharistic form of the Christian life includes a new way of thinking as well (cf *Eph 4:14*).

### ***The Eucharist and the Consecrated Life***

Consecrated men and women should find in the celebration of the Eucharist and in Eucharistic adoration the strength necessary for the radical following of Christ. In their contemplative contribution, the Church expects more of them in the order of *being* than of *doing*. The special witness of virginity conjoined to priestly celibacy, both oriented around the Eucharist, is an expression of the Church’s exclusive devotion to Christ. In the Eucharist, consecrated virginity finds inspiration and nourishment for its complete dedication to Christ. At the same time, it draws strength from the Eucharist to be a sign in our times of God’s gracious and fruitful love for humanity. Finally, consecrated love becomes an objective sign and foreshadowing of the “wedding feast of the Lamb” (Rev 19:7-9), the goal of all salvation history.

### ***The Eucharist and Moral Transformation***

The Eucharist is the source of authentic freedom for the children of God. Benedict recalls the important connection between a Eucharistic life and moral transformation. He notes that Pope John Paul II had spoken of how the moral life “had the value of “spiritual worship” flowing from the sacraments especially the Eucharist. Eucharistic communion includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. Truly, a Eucharist that does not flow into a concrete practice of love is fragmented. The moral transformation implicit in the new worship instituted by Christ is a heartfelt yearning to respond to the Lord’s love with one’s whole being. A case in point is the story of Zacchaeus (cf *Lk 19:1-10*).

### ***Eucharistic Consistency***

Benedict XVI here teaches in an area of particular importance for us today. He says worship pleasing to God can never be a purely private matter. That is to say without consequences for our relationships with others. It demands a public witness to our faith. While true for all, it is especially incumbent upon those who, by virtue of their social or political position, must make decisions regarding fundamental values, such as the respect for human life and its defense from conception to natural death. Other issues also pertain, such as the family built upon marriage between a man and a woman, the freedom to educate one’s children and the promotion of the common good in all its forms. The Holy Father emphasizes that “these values are not negotiable.” As a result, Catholic politicians and legislators, conscious of their grave responsibility before society, must feel particularly bound, on the basis of a properly formed conscience, to offer and support legislation grounded in human nature. There is an objective connection here with the Eucharist. Bishops are bound to reaffirm constantly these values as part of their responsibility to the flock entrusted to them.

### ***The Eucharist, a Mystery to Be Proclaimed***

#### ***The Eucharist and Mission***

The Holy Father begins by reminding us of a homily he gave as he began his papacy. In it he said that there is nothing more beautiful than to know him (*Christ*) and to speak to others of our friendship with him. The love that we celebrate in the Eucharist is not something we can keep to ourselves. By its very nature, it demands to be shared with all. He emphasizes that “an authentically Eucharistic Church is a missionary Church.” The institution of the Eucharist anticipates the very heart of Jesus’ mission. The Father for the redemption of the world sent him. At the Last Supper, Jesus entrusts to his disciples the sacrament that makes present his self-sacrifice for the salvation of us all. Missionary outreach then is an essential part of the Eucharistic form of the Christian life.

### ***The Eucharist and Witness***

The first and fundamental mission that we receive from the sacred mysteries we celebrate is that of bearing witness by our lives. Witness could be described as the means by which the truth of God's love comes to men and women in history, inviting them to accept freely this radical newness. Jesus is himself the faithful and true witness (*cf Rev 1:5; 3:14*), the one who came to testify to the truth (*cf Jn 18:37*). The early Christians were wont to give eloquent witness even to the offering of their own life, to the point of martyrdom. The Holy Father recalls such as St. Polycarp of Smyrna, a disciple of John, the Apostle, through his martyrdom becoming Eucharist for those around him. Saint Ignatius of Antioch described his own imminent martyrdom. He sees himself as "God's wheat" and desires to become in martyrdom "Christ's pure bread." Today too, the Church does not lack martyrs who offer the supreme witness to God's love. Even though martyrdom may not be asked of us all, Benedict says that worship pleasing to God demands that we should be inwardly prepared for it.

### ***Christ Jesus, the One Savior***

The Pope says that the more ardent the love for the Eucharist in the hearts of the Christian people, the more clearly will they recognize the goal of all mission: *to bring Christ to others*, the gift of his very person. The Eucharist is the sacrament of our salvation. It reminds us of the oneness of Christ and the salvation that he won for us by his blood. The mystery of the Eucharist demands a constant catechesis on the need for all to engage in a missionary effort centered on the proclamation of Jesus as the one Savior.

### ***Freedom of Worship***

The Synod Fathers expressed concern over the grave difficulties experienced by Christians where as a minority they are denied religious freedom. In many places, simply going to church represents a heroic witness. Wherever religious freedom is lacking, people lack the most meaningful freedom of all. The Pope wishes that all of us pray for greater religious freedom in every nation.

### **The Eucharist, a Mystery to Be Offered to the World**

#### ***The Eucharist, Bread Broken for the Live of the World***

The Gospels frequently speak of Jesus' feelings towards others, especially the suffering and sinners. Each celebration of the Eucharist makes sacramentally present the gift that the crucified Lord made of his life. In the Eucharist, Jesus also makes us witnesses of God's compassion towards all. The Eucharistic mystery gives rise to a service of charity in which, in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know. I learn to view this other person from the perspective of Jesus Christ.

The Pope says that our communities, when they celebrate the Eucharist, must become ever more conscious that the sacrifice of Christ is for all. Each of us is truly called, together with Jesus, to be bread broken for the life of the world.

#### ***The Social Implications of the Eucharistic Mystery***

Our union with Christ brought about by the Eucharist also brings newness to our social relations. Union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself. I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become, his own. Benedict XVI says that the Eucharist is the sacrament of communion between brothers and sisters who allow themselves to be reconciled in Christ. In the memorial of his sacrifice, the Lord strengthens our fraternal communion and, in a particular way, urges those in conflict to hasten their reconciliation. The Eucharist becomes in life what it signifies in its celebration. While it is not the proper task of the Church to engage in political work, nonetheless she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the struggle for justice.

The Synod Fathers noted that the sacrifice of Christ is a mystery of liberation that constantly and insistently challenges us. All who partake of the Eucharist must commit themselves to peacemaking in a world of horrendous social ills. Even though solutions may be extremely difficult, because of the mystery we celebrate, we must denounce situations contrary to human dignity. Christ shed his blood for all.

### ***The Food of Truth and Human Need***

We cannot remain passive before certain processes of globalization that increase the gap between the rich and the poor. It is impossible to remain quiet in the face of images of immense suffering, of refugees who are living in makeshift conditions in order to escape a worse fate. Yet they remain in dire need. A great part of humanity continues to live in extreme poverty. The Pope asks rhetorically, "Are these human beings not our brothers and sisters? The Lord Jesus, the bread of eternal life, heightens our awareness that we bear a clear and disquieting responsibility toward these alarming situations. From the beginning, Christians were concerned to share their goods and to help the poor. (*Acts 4:32*)

### ***The Church's Social Teaching***

The Pope tells us that the Mystery of the Eucharist impels us to work courageously to bring about a renewal of relationships. The "Give us this day our daily bread" in each Mass obliges us to make real efforts to end or at least reduce the scandal of hunger and malnutrition afflicting our world. In this regard, the Christian laity, formed in the school of the Eucharist, is called to assume their specific political and social responsibilities. The Synod Fathers considered it necessary that Dioceses and Christian communities teach and promote the Church's social doctrine, a precious legacy handed down from the earliest ecclesial tradition. There is great wisdom in it to guide Christians in their dealing with today's burning social issues.

### ***The Sanctification of the World and the Protection of Creation***

The Christian people, in giving thanks to God through the Eucharist, do so in the name of all creation. In so acting, they aspire to the sanctification of the world. A Eucharistic form of life can help foster a real change in the way we approach history and the world. In the offering, "fruit of the earth," "fruit of the vine," "work of human hands," made by the priest at Mass, the rite not only includes in our offering to God all human efforts and activity, but also leads us to see the world as God's creation. The Holy Father notes that the world is part of God's good plan, in which all of us are called to be sons and daughters in the one Son of God, Jesus Christ. (*cf Eph 1:4-12*)

Christian hope commits us to work towards responsible protection of creation. The relationship between the Eucharist and the cosmos helps us to see the unity of God's plan, to grasp the profound relationship between creation and the "new creation" inaugurated in the resurrection of Christ. Even now we take part in that new creation by virtue of our Baptism. Benedict XVI explains that our Christian life, nourished by the Eucharist gives us a glimpse of the "new heavens and a new earth," where the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven, "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." (*Rev 21:2*)

### ***The Usefulness of a Eucharistic Compendium***

The Synod Fathers advanced as a means of helping the Christian people to believe, celebrate and live ever more fully the mystery of the Eucharist a *Compendium*. The Roman Curia will publish it assembling the texts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It is meant to be an aid to the correct understanding, celebration and adoration of the Sacrament of the altar. The Holy Father is hopeful that this book will be an encouragement for each member of the faithful to make his or her life a true act of spiritual worship.

## **CONCLUSION**

In his conclusion, the Holy Father says that the Eucharist is at the root of every form of holiness. At this point, he gives us a litany of Saints who had advanced along the way of perfection thanks to their Eucharistic devotion. Here is a sampling: Ignatius of Antioch, Augustine, Benedict, Francis of Assisi, Thomas Aquinas, Clare of Assisi, Catherine of Sienna, Peter Julian Eymard, Alfonsus Liguori, John Vianney, Therese of Lisieux, Padre Pio, Mother Theresa of Calcutta, etc. For these and many more, holiness always found its center in the Eucharist.

For Benedict XVI, this most holy mystery must be firmly believed, devoutly celebrated and intensely lived in the Church. The Eucharistic celebration enables us to draw near to God's love and persevere in that love until we are united to the Lord. The offering of our lives and our solidarity with all men and women are examples of the spiritual worship, holy and pleasing to the Lord, transforming every aspect of our human existence. The Pope asks all pastors to diligently promote an authentically Eucharistic

spirituality. In Eucharistic ministry, priests, deacons and all others who carry it out, should find in this service the inspiration for personal and communal sanctification. The Pope exhorts the laity, and families in particular, to find in the Eucharist ever anew the energy needed to make their lives an authentic sign of the presence of the risen Lord.

At the beginning of the fourth century while Christian worship was still forbidden, some of the Christians of North Africa defied the prohibition. After declaring that it was not possible for them to live without the Eucharist, they were martyred. May these Martyrs of Albitinae intercede for us and teach us to be faithful to our encounter with the risen Christ. We, too, should desire to reflect in our lives what we celebrate on the Lord's Day, the day of our definitive deliverance

May Mary Most Holy, the Immaculate Virgin, ark of the new and eternal covenant accompany us to meet the Lord who comes. The Holy Father notes how in her we find most perfectly realized the essence of the Church. The Church sees in Mary her finest icon and she contemplates the Virgin as a singular model of Eucharistic life. The canon of the Mass declares, "We honor Mary, the ever-virgin mother of Jesus Christ our Lord and God." The laity "commend to Mary, Mother of the Church, their lives and the work of their hands..." She is the *tota pulchra*, the all-beautiful. For in her the radiance of God's glory shines forth. From Mary we must learn to become persons of the Eucharist and the Church, holy and blameless, even as the Lord wished us to be from the beginning.

Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, may the Holy Spirit kindle within us the same ardor experienced by the disciples on the road to Emmaus! Those disciples arose and returned in haste to Jerusalem in order to share their joy with their brothers and sisters in the faith. True joy is found in recognizing that the Lord is still with us. The Eucharist makes us discover Christ, raised from the dead, in the mystery of the Church. Of this mystery of love we have become witnesses and the Lord is truly with us "always, until the end of the world." (*cf Mt 28:20*)