
THE EUCHARIST AT THE HEART OF OUR LIVES



On Corpus Christi Sunday, the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, June 10, 2004, His Holiness Pope John Paul II announced that an entire year would be dedicated to the Holy Eucharist and that it would be celebrated worldwide from October 10, 2004, the opening of the Guadalajara (Mexico) International Eucharistic Congress, to October 29, 2005, which marks the conclusion of the World Synod of Bishops. The theme would be: “The Eucharist, Source and Summit of the Church’s Life and Mission.”

WHY A YEAR OF THE EUCHARIST?

The documents received so far do not give all the reasons why the Holy Father reached this decision. However, three main reasons stand out: to move all believers to discover in the Eucharist the source and summit of the Christian life; to invite all those who have distanced themselves from the Eucharist or are indifferent to it, to rediscover and welcome in a new heart this great gift from God; and to manifest before all humankind the Eucharist as the core element of the new evangelisation and of reconciliation among humans. We are all aware of the Pope’s great love of the Eucharist. He even wrote his first encyclical of the new millennium on the great mystery of the Eucharist and of the Church. “Through the Eucharist the ecclesial community is constructed like a new Jerusalem, the basis of the unity in Christ of different persons and nations. Christ the living bread come down from heaven, is the only food that can satisfy humankind’s hunger at all time and everywhere on earth. Christ gives his Body and Blood for the life of humankind. All who are worthy to eat at his table become living instruments of his loving, merciful, and peaceful presence.” This quote is indicative of the aim and the depth of his reflection, and it challenges us to consider in our hearts this great mystery of our faith.

MANY QUESTIONS

In his interesting book, *With Burning Hearts*, the late Henri J.M. Nouwen raises many questions: “I celebrate the Eucharist every day. I sometimes do so in my parish church in the presence of hundreds of faithful, sometimes in the chapel at Daybreak for the members of my community, sometimes in a hotel room with a few friends, and sometimes in my father’s living room, alone with him. Rare for me are the days when I don’t say, ‘Lord, have mercy,’ when I don’t read and reflect on the daily [liturgical] texts, when I don’t make a profession of faith, when I don’t share the body and blood of Christ, and when I don’t make a prayer for a fruitful day. But I always ask myself: Do I really know what I am doing? Do those who are at table with me know what is happening before their eyes? Even if everything is so familiar to us, is there anything really going on to influence our daily lives? And what happens to those who are absent? Is the Eucharist for them, too? Do they think about it? Where is the relationship between this daily celebration and the lives of all the men and women today, whether they are present or not? Do we see here more than just a nice ceremony, a comforting ritual, or a simple routine? Finally, is the Eucharist the bearer of life, of a life with the power to overcome death?”¹

A FEW ANSWERS

All these questions can be ours, and they call for answers based on lasting convictions. Henri Nouwen continues his reflection: “The Eucharist gives meaning to my being in the world. But as the world is being transformed, does the Eucharist continue to give it meaning?” Every day and especially on Sunday we are invited to participate in the Eucharist: what meaning do we give to this undertaking? What sense does Jesus’

¹Tr. LG from the French version, *Au cœur de ma vie l’Eucharistie*

initiative still have today, in having us share in his paschal mystery? On the occasion of the Holy Year (2000) we held five diocesan Eucharistic Congresses: What has remained, of these events? Year after year our children prepare for their "first of communions:" how do we prepare, as families and as Christian communities, for this journey of faith? How do we show respect for the Eucharist? How and why do we proclaim the death of Jesus? How and why do we celebrate his resurrection? How and why do we await his coming again in glory? As a matter of fact, these are all bonds we have and could have with Jesus, through the sacrament of the Eucharist.

A FEW SUGGESTIONS

Taking into account the action plans and priorities at the individual, family, parish and diocesan organisations levels, all I can do is ask you to find the best way of celebrating the Eucharist, this year. Perhaps reading an interesting book on the subject would be of help. Pope John Paul II's encyclical and Henri Nouwen's book would be excellent. Perhaps a family catechesis on the Eucharist would bring answers to the questions above or – even better – to those that you yourselves have on the Eucharist. Perhaps a sermon on the Eucharist, a spiritual retreat or a meditation on the subject could be beneficial to you. Giving greater value to the Sunday assembly and participation in the liturgy would be the very thing needed, to better understand the Eucharist. Being part of a network of adoration or holy hour or forty hours' devotion could perhaps strengthen your faith in the Eucharist.

A BEAUTIFUL HYMN

"Jesus, Eucharist in our history, you fill our hearts with your presence. Make us a loving Christian community to praise your love and your glory. We are members of your Body and temples of the Spirit. May your Body be the strength of our bodies. We are your holy Church, show us the way. Lord, come and fill our lives, feed us with your bread. In our divided world, you tell us, 'Be messengers' to humankind, along the path to unity. You are the source of light, a star of our lives, limitless, boundless, a sun for today."

+ François Thibodeau ym

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.
Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (562) (12 October 2004)