



# The Holy See

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PASTORAL VISIT TO ANCONA

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION  
FOR THE CONCLUSION OF THE  
25th ITALIAN NATIONAL EUCCHARISTIC CONGRESS

***HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI***

*Shipyards of Ancona*  
*Sunday, 11 September 2011*

[[Video](#)]

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

Six years ago, the first Apostolic Journey of my pontificate took me to Bari for the 24th National Eucharistic Congress. Today I have come to conclude solemnly the 25th, here in Ancona. I thank the Lord for these intense ecclesial moments that strengthen our love for the Eucharist and see us united round the Eucharist! Bari and Ancona, two cities facing the Adriatic Sea; two cities rich in history and in Christian life, two cities open to the East, to its culture and its spirituality; two cities which the themes of the Eucharistic Congresses have helped to bring closer to each other: in Bari we commemorated how “*Without Sunday We Cannot Live*”; today our gathering is under the banner of the “*Eucharist for Daily Life*”.

Before offering you some thoughts, I would like to thank you for your unanimous participation: in you I spiritually embrace the whole of the Church in Italy. I address a grateful greeting to Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, President of the Episcopal Conference, for the cordial words he addressed to me also on your behalf; to Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, my Legate at this Congress; to Archbishop Edoardo Menichelli of Ancona-Osimo, to the Bishops of the Metropolis and of the Marches and to those who have come in great numbers from every part of the country. With them,

I greet the priests, deacons and consecrated men and women, as well as the lay faithful, among whom I see many families and many young people. I also extend my gratitude to the civil and military authorities and to all those, in their various capacities, who have contributed to the success of this event.

“This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” (Jn 6:60). The reaction of the disciples – many of whom abandoned Jesus – to his discourse on the Bread of Life in the Synagogue of Capernaum is not very different from our own resistance to the total gift he makes of himself. For truly accepting this gift means losing oneself, letting oneself be involved and transformed, as the Apostle Paul reminded us in the Second Reading: “If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's” (Rom 14:8).

“This is a hard saying”; it is hard because we often confuse freedom with the absence of bonds, in the conviction that we can manage by ourselves, without God who is seen as a restriction of freedom. This is an illusion that does not take long to become a delusion, giving rise to anxiety and fear and, paradoxically, leading to nostalgia for the bonds of the past: “Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt...”, the Jews in the wilderness said, as we heard (Ex 16:3). In fact, only in openness to God, in receiving his gift, do we become truly free, free from the slavery of sin that disfigures man's face, and capable of serving the true good of our brethren.

“This is a hard saying”; it is hard because man often succumbs to the illusion that he can “make stones become bread”. After setting God aside, or after having tolerated him as a private choice that must not interfere with public life, some ideologies have aimed to organize society with the force of power and of the economy. History shows us, dramatically, that the objective of guaranteeing everyone development, material well-being and peace, by leaving out God and his revelation, has been resolved by giving people stones instead of bread.

Bread, dear brothers and sisters, is “a fruit of the work of human hands”, and this truth contains the full responsibility entrusted to our hands and to our ingenuity; but bread is also and before that: “a fruit of the earth”, which receives the sun and the rain from on high: it is a gift to ask for that takes away all our pride and enables us to invoke with the trust of the humble: “Our Father... give us this day our daily bread” (Mt 6:11).

The human being is incapable of giving life to himself, he understands himself only by starting from God: it is the relationship with him that gives our humanity consistence and makes our life good and just. In the “Our Father” we ask that *his* name be hallowed, that *his* kingdom come, that *his* will be done. It is first and foremost God's primacy that we must recover in our world and in our life, because it is this primacy that enables us to discover the truth of what we are, and it is in knowing and following God's will that we find our own good; giving time and space to God, so that he may be the vital centre of our existence.

Where should we start from, from what source, in order to recover and to reaffirm the primacy of God? From the Eucharist; here God makes himself so close that he makes himself our food, here he makes himself energy on the often difficult journey, here he makes himself a friendly presence that transforms. The Law given through Moses was already considered as “bread from Heaven”, thanks to which Israel became the People of God, but in Jesus the ultimate and definitive word of God becomes flesh, comes to meet us as a Person. He, the eternal Word, is the true manna, the Bread of Life (cf. Jn 6:32-35) and doing the works of God is believing in him (cf. Jn 6:28-29).

At the Last Supper Jesus summed up the whole of his life in an act that is inscribed in the great paschal blessing to God, an act that he lives as Son in thanksgiving to the Father for his immense love. Jesus broke the bread and shared it, but with a new depth, because he was giving himself. He took the cup and shared it so that all might drink from it, but with this gesture he was giving the “new covenant of his Blood”, he was giving himself.

Jesus anticipated the act of supreme love, obedience to the Father’s will: the sacrifice of the Cross. His life will be taken on the Cross, but he was already offering it himself. So it is that Christ’s death is not reduced to a violent execution but was transformed by him into a free act of love, of self-giving, which passed through death itself victoriously and reaffirmed the goodness of creation that came from God’s hands, that was humiliated by sin and redeemed at last. This immense gift is accessible to us in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. God gives himself to us, to open our life to him, to involve it in the mystery of love of the Cross, to make it share in the eternal mystery from which we come, and to anticipate the new condition of full life in God, of which we in live expectation.

Yet what does starting from the Eucharist in order to reaffirm God’s primacy entail for our daily life? Eucharistic communion, dear friends, wrenches us from our individualism, communicates to us the spirit of Christ dead and risen, and conforms us to him. It closely unites us with our brethren in that mystery of communion, which is the Church, where the one Bread makes many one body (1 Cor 10:17), fulfilling the prayer of the Christian community recorded in the Book of the Didaché: “As this broken bread was once scattered on the mountains and after it had been brought together became one, so may your Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth unto your kingdom” (ix, 4).

The Eucharist sustains and transforms the whole of daily life. As I recalled in my first Encyclical: “Eucharistic communion includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn”, therefore, “A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented” (*Deus Caritas Est*, n. 14).

The 2,000-year-old history of the Church is spangled with saints whose existence is an eloquent sign of how in communion with the Lord and from the Eucharist a new and intense assumption of responsibility comes into being at all the levels of community life; thus a new positive social

development is born which is centred on the person, especially when he or she is poor, sick or in need. Being nourished by Christ is the way not to be foreign or indifferent to the fate of the brethren, but rather to enter into the same logic of love and of the gift of the sacrifice of the Cross; anyone who can kneel before the Eucharist, who receives the Body of the Lord, cannot but be attentive in the ordinary daily routine to situations unworthy of the human being; anyone who can bend over the needy in the first person, who can break his own bread with the hungry and share water with the thirsty, who can clothe the naked and visit the sick person and the prisoner (cf. Mt 25:34-36).

This person will be able to see in every individual that same Lord who did not hesitate to give the whole of himself for us and for our salvation. A Eucharistic spirituality, then, is the true antidote to the individualism and selfishness that often mark daily life. It leads to the rediscovery of giving freely, to the centrality of relationships, starting with the family, and pays special attention to alleviating the wounds of broken families.

A Eucharistic spirituality is the soul of an ecclesial community which surmounts divisions and antagonism and appreciates the diversity of charisms and ministries, putting them at the service of the Church, of her vitality and mission. A Eucharistic spirituality is the way to restore dignity to the days of human beings, hence to their work, in the quest for its reconciliation with the times of celebration and of the family, and in the commitment to overcome the uncertainty of precarious situations and the problem of unemployment.

A Eucharistic spirituality will also help us to approach the different forms of human frailty, aware that they do not dim the value of a person but require closeness, acceptance and help. A renewed educational ability will draw strength from the Bread of Life, attentive to witnessing to the fundamental values of existence, of knowledge of the spiritual and cultural heritage; its vitality will enable us to dwell in the human city with the readiness to expend ourselves on the horizon of the common good in order to build a fairer and more brotherly society.

Dear friends, let us start out from the Marches with the power of the Eucharist in a constant osmosis between the mystery we are celebrating and the contexts of our daily life. There is nothing authentically human that does not find in the Eucharist the form it needs to be lived to the full: may daily life therefore become a place of spiritual worship, in order to live in all circumstances the primacy of God, as part of a relationship with Christ and as an offering to the Father (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, n. 71). Yes, “man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4): we live by obedience to these words, which are living bread, until, like Peter, we consign ourselves with the understanding of love: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God” (Jn 6:68-69).

Like the Virgin Mary, let us too become a “womb”, willing to offer Jesus to the people of our time,

reawakening the deep desire for that salvation which comes only from him. I wish the whole Church which is in Italy a good journey with Christ, the Bread of Life! Amen.

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