



The Holy See

OPENING OF THE ECCLESIAL CONVENTION
OF THE DIOCESE OF ROME ON THE THEME:
"THEIR EYES WERE OPENED,
THEY RECOGNIZED HIM AND ANNOUNCED HIM:
THE SUNDAY EUCHARIST AND THE WITNESS OF CHARITY"
(JUNE 15-17, 2010)

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Basilica of Saint John Lateran
Tuesday, 15 June 2010*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Psalm says: "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity"! (Ps 133[132]: 1). It is just like that and it gives me deep joy to meet you and to be informed of all the good that the parishes and other ecclesial realities of Rome have done in this pastoral year. I greet the Cardinal Vicar with brotherly affection and thank him for his courteous words and for his daily dedication to the governance of the Diocese and his support of the priests and parish communities. I greet the Auxiliary Bishops, the entire Presbyterate and each one of you. I address a cordial thought to all who are sick and in particular difficulty, while I assure them of my prayers.

As Cardinal Vallini recalled, since last year we have been engaged in reviewing our ordinary pastoral work. This evening we are reflecting on two points of primary importance: "The Sunday Eucharist and the witness of charity". I am acquainted with the important work that the parishes, associations and movements have done through meetings of formation and exchanges, to study more deeply and to live better these two fundamental elements of the life and mission of the Church and of every individual believer. This has encouraged that pastoral co-responsibility which in the diversity of ministries and charisms must become ever more widespread if we really want the Gospel to reach the heart of every inhabitant of Rome. A great deal has been done, and we

thank the Lord; but, again with his help, much still remains to be done.

Faith can never be taken for granted, because every generation needs to receive this gift through the proclamation of the Gospel and to know the truth that Christ revealed to us. The Church, therefore, is always engaged in presenting to all the deposit of the faith; this also contains the doctrine on the Eucharist a central mystery in which "is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch" (Second Vatican Council, Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 5); a doctrine whose profound value and importance for the life of believers is unfortunately not sufficiently understood. For this reason it is important that a deeper knowledge of the mystery of the Body and Blood of the Lord be perceived as a need of the different communities of our Diocese of Rome. At the same time, in the missionary spirit that we wish to encourage, it is necessary to spread the commitment to proclaim this faith in the Eucharist so that every person may encounter Jesus Christ who revealed to us the "close" God, the friend of humanity. It is also necessary to witness to it with an eloquent life of charity.

Throughout his public life, Jesus proclaimed the Father's goodness and mercy for mankind by preaching the Gospel and working miraculous signs. This mission culminated on Golgotha, where the Crucified Christ revealed the Face of God so that in contemplating the Cross man might recognize the fullness of love (cf. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 12). The sacrifice of Calvary is mysteriously anticipated at the Last Supper when Jesus, in sharing the bread and the wine with the Twelve, transforms them into his Body and his Blood, that he was shortly to offer as the immolated Lamb. The Eucharist is the memorial of the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, of his love for each one of us to the very end, a memorial that he wished to entrust to the Church so that it might be celebrated down the centuries. According to the meaning of the Hebrew verb *zakar*, the "memorial" is not a mere commemoration of something that happened in the past but the celebration that actualizes the event in such a way as to reproduce its power and saving efficacy. Thus, "it makes present and actual the sacrifice which Christ offered to the Father on the Cross, once and for all on behalf of mankind" (*Compendium of the Catholic Church*, n. 280). Dear brothers and sisters, in our time the word "sacrifice" is not popular; indeed it seems to belong to other epochs and another way of understanding life. Nevertheless, properly understood, it has remained fundamental, because it reveals to us the love with which God, in Christ, loves us.

In Jesus' offering of himself we find the full newness of Christian worship. In antiquity, people offered the divinities animal sacrifices or the first fruits of the earth. Jesus instead offers himself, his Body and his whole life: he in person becomes that sacrifice which the Liturgy offers in Holy Mass. In fact, with consecration, the bread and the wine become his true Body and Blood. St Augustine asked his faithful not to stop at what appeared to their eyes but to go further: "Recognize in the bread", he said, "that same Body which hung on the Cross, and in the cup, the same Blood which flowed from his side" (*Discourse 228 B*, 2). To explain this transformation theology coined the term "transubstantiation", a word that resounded in this Basilica for the first time during the Fourth Lateran Council whose eighth centenary will be celebrated in five years

time. On that occasion the following words will be incorporated into the profession of faith: "His Body and his Blood are truly contained in the Sacrament of the Altar, under the species of the bread and the wine, for the bread is transubstantiated into his Body, and the wine into his Blood through divine power" (DS, 802). It is consequently fundamental to stress in the syllabus for the education in the faith of children, adolescents and young people, as well as in "Centres for listening" to the Word of God, that Christ is truly, really and substantially present in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Holy Mass, celebrated with respect for the liturgical norms and with appropriate appreciation of the riches of the signs and gestures, encourages and develops growth in Eucharistic faith. In the Eucharistic celebration we do not invent something but rather enter into a reality that precedes us, indeed that embraces Heaven and earth and therefore also past, future and present. This universal openness, this encounter with all Gods' sons and daughters is the greatness of the Eucharist: let us go to meet the reality of God present among us in the Body and Blood of the Risen One. Therefore, the liturgical prescriptions dictated by the Church are not external appendices but express in practice this reality of the revelation of Christ's Body and Blood, and thus prayer reveals faith, according to the ancient principle *lex orandi - lex credendi*. And for this reason we can say that "the best Catechesis on the Eucharist is the Eucharist itself, celebrated well" (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, n. 64). The transcendent dimension must stand out clearly in the Liturgy, that of the Mystery, of the encounter with the Divine which also illuminates and raises the "horizontal" dimension, meaning the bond of communion and solidarity which exists between all the members of the Church. In fact, when the horizontal dimension prevails it is impossible to understand fully the beauty, depth and importance of the mystery celebrated. Dear brothers in the priesthood, on the day of your priestly Ordination the Bishop entrusted to you the task of presiding at the Eucharist. May you always have at heart the exercise of this mission: celebrate the divine mysteries with intense inner participation so that the men and women of our City may be sanctified and put in touch with God, the absolute truth and eternal love.

And let us also keep in mind that the Eucharist, linked to the Cross, to the Resurrection of the Lord, has dictated a new structure to our time. The Risen One showed himself the day after the Sabbath, the first day of the week, the day of the sun and of creation. From the outset Christians have celebrated their encounter with the Risen One, the Eucharist on this first day, in this new day of the true sun of history, the Risen Christ. And thus time always begins anew with the encounter with the Risen One and this encounter gives purpose and force to every day life. It is therefore very important for us Christians to follow this new pace of time, to encounter the Risen One on Sundays and thus to "take" with us his presence that transforms us and transforms our time. Furthermore, I ask everyone to rediscover the fruitfulness of Eucharistic adoration: before the Most Blessed Sacrament we experience in a quite special way that "abiding" in Jesus, which he himself, in John's Gospel, imposes as a prerequisite for bearing much fruit (cf. Jn 15: 5). Thus we avoid the reduction of our apostolic action to sterile activism and instead ensure that it bears witness to

God's love.

Communion with Christ is always also communion with his Body which is the Church, as the Apostle Paul recalls, saying: "The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the Body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10: 16-17). Indeed, it is the Eucharist that transforms a simple group of people into an ecclesial community: the Eucharist builds the Church. It is therefore fundamental that the celebration of Holy Mass be effectively the culmination, the "backbone" of the life of every parish community. I urge everyone to do their best to take care, also through special liturgical groups, of the preparation and celebration of the Eucharist, so that all who take part in it may encounter the Lord. It is the Risen Christ who makes himself present in our today and gathers us around him. By nourishing ourselves with him we are set free from the bonds of individualism and, through communion with him, we ourselves become, together, only one thing, his mystical Body. In this way are overcome the differences due to profession, class and nationality, for we discover that we are members of one large family, the family of God's children, in which each one is endowed with a particular grace for the benefit of all. The world and human beings do not need further social aggregation but rather are in need of the Church which in Christ "is in the nature of sacrament a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men" (Second Vatican Council, Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n. 1), called to make the light of the Risen Lord shine out upon all peoples.

Jesus came to reveal to us the love of the Father, because "man cannot live without love" (John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, n. 10). Love is in fact the fundamental experience of every human being, what gives meaning to daily life. Nourished by the Eucharist, we too, after Christ's example, live for him, to be witnesses of love. In receiving the Sacrament, we enter into communion of blood with Jesus Christ. In the Jewish conception blood means life; thus we can say that by nourishing ourselves with the Body of Christ we accept God's life and learn to look at reality with his eyes, abandoning the logic of the world in order to follow the divine logic of the gift freely given. St Augustine recalls that during a vision it seemed to him that he heard the Lord's voice saying to him: "I am the food of the mature: grow, then, and you shall eat me. You will not change me into yourself like bodily food; but you will be changed into me" (cf. *Confessioni* VII, 10, 16). When we receive Christ, the love of God expands within us, radically changes our hearts and makes us capable of actions that because of the diffusive power of good, can transform the life of those beside us. Charity can generate an authentic and permanent change of society, acting in the hearts and minds of human beings and when it is lived in the truth, it "is the principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity" (Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 1). For the disciple of Jesus the witness of charity is not a fleeting sentiment but on the contrary it is what shapes life in every circumstance. I encourage all, and in particular *Caritas* and Deacons, to devote themselves to the delicate and fundamental field of education in charity, as an ongoing dimension of personal and community life.

This City of ours asks Christ's disciples, with a renewed proclamation of the Gospel, for a clearer and more transparent witness of charity. It is with the language of love, desirous of the human being's integral good, that the Church speaks to the inhabitants of Rome. In these years of my ministry as your Bishop, I have been able to visit various places where charity is lived intensely. I am grateful to all who work in the different charitable structures for the dedication and generosity with which they serve the poor and the marginalized. The needs and the poverty of so many men and women profoundly challenge us: it is Christ himself who every day, in the poor, asks us to satisfy his hunger and his thirst, to visit him in hospitals and prisons, to welcome and clothe him. The Eucharist celebrated obliges us, and at the same time enables us, to become in our turn, bread broken for our brothers and sisters, meeting their needs and giving ourselves. For this reason a Eucharistic celebration that does not lead to meeting people where they live, work and suffer, in order to bring them God's love, does not express the truth it contains. In order to be faithful to the mystery that is celebrated on the altars we must, as the Apostle Paul exhorts us, offer our bodies, ourselves, as a spiritual sacrifice pleasing to God (cf. Rom 12: 1) in those circumstances that ask us to make our "I" die and that constitute our daily "altar". The gestures of sharing create communion, renew the fabric of interpersonal relations, impressing them with free giving and with the gift, and permit the construction of a civilization of love. At a time like the present with a financial and social crisis, let us show solidarity to those who live in poverty in order to give all the hope of a better future worthy of the human being. If we really live as disciples of God-Love, we will help the inhabitants of Rome to discover that they are brothers and sisters and children of the one Father.

The very nature of love demands definitive and irrevocable choices of life. I address you in particular, dear young people: do not be afraid to choose love as the supreme rule of life. Do not be afraid to love Christ in the priesthood and, if in your heart you become aware of the Lord's call, follow him in this extraordinary adventure of love, abandoning yourselves to him with trust! Do not be afraid to form Christian families who live faithful and indissoluble love that is open to life! Bear witness that love, as Christ lived it and as the Church's Magisterium teaches, takes nothing from our happiness but on the contrary provides that profound joy that Christ promised his disciples.

May the Virgin Mary accompany with her motherly intercession the journey of our Church in Rome. May Mary, who, in a totally unique way, lived communion with God and the sacrifice of her own Son on Calvary, obtain that we may live ever more intensely, devoutly and wisely the mystery of the Eucharist, in order to proclaim with our words and our life the love that God feels for every human being. Dear friends, I assure you of my prayers and from my heart I impart to you all the Apostolic Blessing. Thank you.

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana