



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 21 June 2000

1. "*Jesus Christ, the one Saviour of the World, Bread for New Life*": this is the theme of the 47th International Eucharistic Congress, which opened last Sunday and will end next Sunday with the *Statio Orbis* in St Peter's Square.

The Congress puts the Eucharist at the centre of the Great Jubilee of the Incarnation and expresses all its spiritual, ecclesial and missionary depth. It is from the Eucharist, in fact, that the Church and every believer draw the indispensable strength to proclaim and bear witness before all to the Gospel of salvation. The celebration of the Eucharist, the sacrament of the Lord's Passover, *is in itself a missionary event*, which plants the fertile seed of new life in the world.

This *missionary* aspect of the Eucharist is explicitly recalled by St Paul in the Letter to the Corinthians: "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 *Cor* 11: 26).

2. The Church repeats St Paul's words in the doxology after the consecration. The Eucharist is a "missionary" sacrament not only because the grace of mission flows from it, but also because it contains in itself the principle and eternal source of salvation for all. The celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice is therefore the most effective missionary act that the Ecclesial Community can perform in the history of the world.

Every Mass ends with the missionary mandate "*Go*", an invitation to the faithful to bring the message of the risen Lord to their families, workplaces and societies throughout the world. It was for this reason that in my Letter *Dies Domini* I invited the faithful to imitate the example of the disciples of Emmaus who, once they had recognized the risen Christ "in the breaking of the bread" (cf. *Lk* 24: 30-32), felt the need to return immediately to share with all their brethren the joy of

meeting the Lord (cf. n. 45). The "*bread that is broken*" opens the life of Christians and of the entire community to sharing and to self-giving for the life of the world (cf. *Jn* 6: 51). The Eucharist brings about that unbreakable bond between *communion and mission*, which makes the Church the sacrament of the unity of the whole human race (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 1).

3. Today it is particularly necessary for every Christian community to draw from the celebration of the Eucharist the inner conviction and spiritual strength to *come out of itself and open itself to other poorer communities* in need of support in the areas of evangelization and missionary cooperation, by encouraging that fruitful exchange of reciprocal gifts which enriches the whole Church.

It is also very important to *discern*, on the basis of the Eucharist, *missionary vocations and ministries*. After the example of the early community in Antioch, engaged together "in the liturgy of the Lord", every Christian community is called to listen to the Spirit and to accept his invitations, setting apart for the universal mission the best energies of its children, sent out joyfully into the world and accompanied by the prayer and the spiritual and material support they need (cf. *Acts* 13: 1-3).

The Eucharist is also a *permanent school of charity, justice and peace* for renewing the surrounding world in Christ. From the presence of the Risen One, believers draw the courage to be artisans of solidarity and renewal, committed to transforming the structures of sin in which individuals, communities and at times entire peoples are entangled (cf. *Dies Domini*, n. 73).

4. Lastly, this reflection on the meaning and missionary content of the Eucharist cannot fail to mention those outstanding "*missionaries*" and witnesses to the faith and love of Christ who are *the martyrs*. The relics of the martyrs, preserved since antiquity beneath the altars where the memorial of the "Victim whose death has reconciled us" is celebrated, are a clear sign of the power flowing from Christ's sacrifice. This spiritual energy spurs all who are nourished by the Body of the Lord to offer their lives for him and for their brothers and sisters by giving themselves without reserve and, if necessary, even by shedding their blood.

May the International Eucharistic Congress, through the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Christ offered in sacrifice for us, help to make believers more conscious of the missionary responsibility that stems from their participation in the Eucharist. The "Body given" and the "Blood poured out" (cf. *Lk* 22: 19-20) are the highest criterion they must always use in giving themselves for the world's salvation.

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To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

I welcome the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Ireland, the Philippines, Hong Kong and the United States of America. Though the gift of Christ's Body and Blood, may you be renewed in faith, hope and charity, and may you willingly undertake the task of witnessing to the Gospel in your daily lives.

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