



The Holy See

LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO CARDINAL JAMES ROBERT KNOX

IN VIEW OF THE INTERNATIONAL

EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS IN LOURDES To Cardinal James Robert Knox

President of the Permanent Committee

for International Eucharistic Congresses The International Eucharistic Congress that will take place in Lourdes in 1981 will constitute for the Church a special time of prayer and spiritual renewal. Its announcement is a source of joy and an invitation to begin preparing it carefully and without delay, not only at the level of the Committee of which you are the head but also in respect to the many Pastors and members of the faithful who will take an active part in it. "Jesus Christ, bread broken for a new world": such is the theme chosen by the Permanent Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses and today confirmed by the Pope. In order to grasp fully the specific and radical newness that Jesus Christ introduces into every member of the faithful who shares in the Eucharist, into the Church, and therefore into society, it is fitting that the Congress should especially emphasize the foundations of Eucharistic doctrine, just as this doctrine has been uninterruptedly received, meditated upon and lived, from the Apostles, the martyrs, the Fathers of the Church, from mediaeval Christendom, from the Councils, from modern piety, and from the legitimate research carried out in our own age. Like Saint Paul (cf. 1 Cor 11:23), the pastors and theologians of the Congress must pass on what they themselves have received from living Tradition, which is guided by the Holy Spirit. Thus there will appear, in the wholeness of its mystery, the full meaning of the "broken Bread". This Bread, in fact, refers entirely not only to a generous sharing based upon the example of Jesus but also to the sacrifice of Christ, who gave his body and shed his blood to take away the sin of the world (cf. Jn 1:29), to break down the wall between the hostile brethren (cf. Eph 2:14) and to grant them access to the Father's Love (cf. Rom 5:2). These are most important words of the Saviour reported by Saint John: "The bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the World" (Jn 6:51). And the Apostle Paul in his turn proclaims: "the blessing-cup that we bless is a communion with the blood of Christ, and the bread that we break is a communion with the body of Christ" (1 Cor 10:16). It is by beginning from this lived Tradition that the Congress will be able to deepen and to express to the people of today how and why the new world" is linked with the Eucharist, and the Eucharist on its part is linked with Christ's Passion and Resurrection. It will be a great grace to become more deeply aware of the fact that this Sacrament is made present to us in every Eucharistic action, and that believers can

receive its fruit as their daily food, and prolong its effects in their lives. The first stage of the Congress will therefore be a stage of contemplating the "mystery of faith"; it will be a stage of adoration, in union with the Virgin Mary who "stored up all these things in her heart" (Lk 2:19, 51). It is precisely the force of this unheard-of message, this "folly" and "wisdom" of God (cf. 1 Cor 1:21) that should impress the world. The Lourdes assembly will be a fortunate one, if it succeeds in promoting this authentic understanding of the Eucharist, in evoking renewed thanksgiving for such a gift, and in leading to a more reverent reception, more worthy celebration and more ardent desire of sharing in the Eucharist fruitfully through a better preparation. Christ "gave up his life for us; and we, too, ought to give up our lives for our brothers" (1 Jn 3:16). A "new nature" (Col 3:10), a new world marked by filial relationships with God and fraternal relationships with people, let us say a new humanity: these are the fruits that we expect from the Bread of Life that the Church breaks and distributes in the name of Christ. Here is something that must be stated: the deepest level at which this link with Christ's Body is realized in communicants, this "osmosis" of Christ's divine love, is higher than human feelings and measures. It belongs to the order of grace, to the mysterious sharing, through faith, in the life of the Risen Christ according to the spirit of holiness (cf. Rom 1:4). But normally there should flow from it great moral consequences, those which Saint Paul enumerates in the second part of each of his Letters. These consequences are simultaneously demands and invitations, for they presuppose the openness and responsibility of those taking part. What profound implications for the relationships between those who communicate, especially: "The Eucharist makes the Church", it joins together as the members of one body those who share in the same Body of Christ: "That all may be one." (Jn 17:21). And also, what great consequences for society itself, for the manner of bringing people together in fraternal unity, especially the very poor, of serving them, of sharing with them the bread of the earth and the bread of love, of building up with them a more just world, a world more worthy of the children of God, and at the same time of preparing a new world for the future, in which God himself will bring definitive renewal and total and endless communion (cf. Rev 21:1, 5; cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 39, 45). The Lourdes Congress will have the task of in some way confirming all the spiritual and ethical dynamism that the Eucharistic Christ imparts to those who feed on him with the necessary dispositions. The Congress will take care to place all these possibilities of personal and social transformation in the context of the attitudes and beatitudes found in the Gospel, through conversion, for conversion is at the heart of Christian renewal. On this point, the message of the Eucharistic Congress will be linked with the perennial message of Lourdes. May the Immaculate Virgin help hearts to purify themselves in preparation for this great event. I have taken care to recall these major orientations because the Catholic Church particularly needs them today. I strongly encourage the work that will be done in this direction by the International Committee and by all those who at the various levels will work together in preparing and organizing the housing of pilgrims, the liturgy, teaching, witness and exchanges. Upon all of them I invoke the enlightenment and strength of the Holy Spirit. The Marian City, which is already familiar with so many admirable pilgrimages, is a matchless setting, almost unique in the world, for expressing homage to Christ in the Eucharist and for spreading his message. To all those in charge of the Congress I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing. *From the Vatican, 1 January 1979. IOANNES PAULUS PP. II*

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