



The Holy See

MIRAE CARITATIS

ENCYCLICAL OF POPE LEO XIII

ON THE HOLY EUCHARIST

*To Our Venerable Brethren, the Patriarchs, Primates,
Archbishops, Bishops, and other Local Ordinaries,
having Peace and Communion with the Holy See.*

Venerable Brethren, Health and Apostolic Benediction.

To examine into the nature and to promote the effects of those manifestations of His wondrous love which, like rays of light, stream forth from Jesus Christ - this, as befits Our sacred office, has ever been, and this, with His help, to the last breath of Our life will ever be Our earnest aim and endeavour. For, whereas Our lot has been cast in an age that is bitterly hostile to justice and truth, we have not failed, as you have been reminded by the Apostolic letter which we recently addressed to you, to do what in us lay, by Our instructions and admonitions, and by such practical measures as seemed best suited for their purpose, to dissipate the contagion of error in its many shapes, and to strengthen the sinews of the Christian life. Among these efforts of Ours there are two in particular, of recent memory, closely related to each other, from the recollection whereof we gather some fruit of comfort, the more seasonable by reason of the many causes of sorrow that weigh us down. One of these is the occasion on which We directed, as a thing most desirable, that the entire human race should be consecrated by a special act to the Sacred Heart of Christ our Redeemer; the other that on which We so urgently exhorted all those who bear the name Christian to cling loyally to Him Who, by divine ordinance, is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life," not for individuals alone but for every rightly constituted society. And now that same apostolic charity, ever watchful over the vicissitudes of the Church, moves and in a manner compels Us to add one thing more, in order to fill up the measure of what We have already conceived and carried out. This is, to commend to all Christians, more earnestly than heretofore, the all-holy Eucharist, forasmuch as it is a divine gift proceeding from the very Heart of the Redeemer, Who "with desire desireth" this singular mode of union with men, a gift most admirably adapted to be the means whereby the salutary fruits of His redemption may be distributed. Indeed We have not failed in the past, more than once, to use Our authority and to exercise Our zeal in this behalf. It gives Us much pleasure to recall to mind that We have officially approved, and enriched with canonical privileges, not a few institutions and confraternities having for their object the perpetual adoration of the Sacred Host; that We have encouraged the holding of Eucharistic

Congresses, the results of which have been as profitable as the attendance at them has been numerous and distinguished; that We have designated as the heavenly patron of these and similar undertakings St. Paschal Baylon, whose devotion to the mystery of the Eucharist was so extraordinary.

2. Accordingly, Venerable Brethren, it has seemed good to Us to address you on certain points connected with this same mystery, for the defence and honour of which the solicitude of the Church has been so constantly engaged, for which Martyrs have given their lives, which has afforded to men of the highest genius a theme to be illustrated by their learning, their eloquence, their skill in all the arts; and this We will do in order to render more clearly evident and more widely known those special characteristics by virtue of which it is so singularly adapted to the needs of these our times. It was towards the close of His mortal life that Christ our Lord left this memorial of His measureless love for men, this powerful means of support "for the life of the world" (St. John vi., 52). And precisely for this reason, We, being so soon to depart from this life, can wish for nothing better than that it may be granted to us to stir up and foster in the hearts of all men the dispositions of mindful gratitude and due devotion towards this wondrous Sacrament, wherein most especially lie, as We hold, the hope and the efficient cause of salvation and of that peace which all men so anxiously seek.

3. Some there are, no doubt, who will express their surprise that for the manifold troubles and grievous afflictions by which our age is harassed We should have determined to seek for remedies and redress in this quarter rather than elsewhere, and in some, perchance, Our words will excite a certain peevish disgust. But this is only the natural result of pride; for when this vice has taken possession of the heart, it is inevitable that Christian faith, which demands a most willing docility, should languish, and that a murky darkness in regard of divine truths should close in upon the mind; so that in the case of many these words should be made good: "Whatever things they know not, they blaspheme" (St. Jude, 10). We, however, so far from being hereby turned aside from the design which We have taken in hand, are on the contrary determined all the more zealously and diligently to hold up the light for the guidance of the well disposed, and, with the help of the united prayers of the faithful, earnestly to implore forgiveness for those who speak evil of holy things.

The Source of Life

4. To know with an entire faith what is the excellence of the Most Holy Eucharist is in truth to know what that work is which, in the might of His mercy, God, made man, carried out on behalf of the human race. For as a right faith teaches us to acknowledge and to worship Christ as the sovereign cause of our salvation, since He by His wisdom, His laws, His ordinances, His example, and by the shedding of His blood, made all things new; so the same faith likewise teaches us to acknowledge Him and to worship Him as really present in the Eucharist, as verily abiding through all time in the midst of men, in order that as their Master, their Good Shepherd, their most acceptable Advocate with the Father, He may impart to them of His own inexhaustible abundance the benefits of that redemption which He has accomplished. Now if any one will seriously consider the benefits which flow from the Eucharist he will understand that conspicuous and chief among them all is that in which the rest, without exception, are included; in a word it is for men the source of life, of that life which best deserves the name. "The bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world" (St. John vi., 52). In more than one way, as We have elsewhere declared, is Christ "the life." He Himself declared that the reason of His advent among men was this, that He might bring them the assured fulness of a more than merely human life. "I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly" (St. John x., 10). Everyone is aware that no sooner had "the goodness and kindness of God our Saviour appeared" (Tit. iii., 4), than there at once burst forth a certain creative force which issued in

a new order of things and pused through all the veins of society, civil and domestic. Hence arose new relations between man and man; new rights and new duties, public and private; henceforth a new direction was given to government, to education, to the arts; and most important of all, man's thoughts and energies were turned towards religious truth and the pursuit of holiness. Thus was life communicated to man, a life truly heavenly and divine. And thus we are to account for those expressions which so often occur in Holy Writ, "the tree of life," "the word of life," "the book of life," "the crown of life," and particularly "the bread of life."

5. But now, since this life of which We are speaking bears a definite resemblance to the natural life of man, as the one draws its nourishment and strength from food, so also the other must have its own food whereby it may be sustained and augmented. And here it will be opportune to recall to mind on what occasion and in what manner Christ moved and prepared the hearts of men for the worthy and due reception of the living bread which He was about to give them. No sooner had the rumour spread of the miracle which He had wrought on the shores of the lake of Tiberias, when with the multiplied loaves He fed the multitude, than many forthwith flocked to Him in the hope that they, too, perchance, might be the recipients of like favour. And, just as He had taken occasion from the water which she had drawn from the well to stir up in the Samaritan woman a thirst for that "water which springeth up unto life everlasting" (St. John iv., 14), so now Jesus availed Himself of this opportunity to excite in the minds of the multitude a keen hunger for the bread "which endureth unto life everlasting" (St. John vi., 27). Or, as He was careful to explain to them, was the bread which He promised the same as that heavenly manna which had been given to their fathers during their wanderings in the desert, or again the same as that which, to their amazement, they had recently received from Him; but He was Himself that bread: "I," said He, "am the bread of life" (St. John vi., 48). And He urges this still further upon them all both by invitation and by precept: "if any man shall eat of this bread, he shall live for ever; and the bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world" (St. John vi., 52). And in these other words He brings home to them the gravity of the precept: "Amen, Amen, I say to you, unless you shall eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you" (St. John vi., 54). Away then with the widespread but most mischievous error of those who give it as their opinion that the reception of the Eucharist is in a manner reserved for those narrow-minded persons (as they are deemed) who rid themselves of the cares of the world in order to find rest in some kind of professedly religious life. For this gift, than which nothing can be more excellent or more conducive to salvation, is offered to all those, whatever their office or dignity may be, who wish - as every one ought to wish - to foster in themselves that life of divine grace whose goal is the attainment of the life of blessedness with God.

6. Indeed it is greatly to be desired that those men would rightly esteem and would make due provision for life everlasting, whose industry or talents or rank have put it in their power to shape the course of human events. But alas! we see with sorrow that such men too often proudly flatter themselves that they have conferred upon this world as it were a fresh lease of life and prosperity, inasmuch as by their own energetic action they are urging it on to the race for wealth, to a struggle for the possession of commodities which minister to the love of comfort and display. And yet, whithersoever we turn, we see that human society, if it be estranged from God, instead of enjoying that peace in its possessions for which it had sought, is shaken and tossed like one who is in the agony and heat of fever; for while it anxiously strives for prosperity, and trusts to it alone, it is pursuing an object that ever escapes it, clinging to one that ever eludes the grasp. For as men and states alike necessarily have their being from God, so they can do nothing good except in God through Jesus Christ, through whom every best and choicest gift has ever proceeded and proceeds. But the source and chief of all these gifts is the venerable Eucharist, which not only nourishes and sustains that life the desire whereof demands our

most strenuous efforts, but also enhances beyond measure that dignity of man of which in these days we hear so much. For what can be more honourable or a more worthy object of desire than to be made, as far as possible, sharers and partakers in the divine nature? Now this is precisely what Christ does for us in the Eucharist, wherein, after having raised man by the operation of His grace to a supernatural state, he yet more closely associates and unites him with Himself. For there is this difference between the food of the body and that of the soul, that whereas the former is changed into our substance, the latter changes us into its own; so that St. Augustine makes Christ Himself say: "You shall not change Me into yourself as you do the food of your body, but you shall be changed into Me" (*confessions* 1. vii., c. x.).

The Mystery of Faith

7. Moreover, in this most admirable Sacrament, which is the chief means whereby men are engrafted on the divine nature, men also find the most efficacious help towards progress in every kind of virtue. And first of all in faith. In all ages faith has been attacked; for although it elevates the human mind by bestowing on it the knowledge of the highest truths, yet because, while it makes known the existence of divine mysteries, it yet leaves in obscurity the mode of their being, it is therefore thought to degrade the intellect. But whereas in past times particular articles of faith have been made by turns the object of attack; the seat of war has since been enlarged and extended, until it has come to this, that men deny altogether that there is anything above and beyond nature. Now nothing can be better adapted to promote a renewal of the strength and fervour of faith in the human mind than the mystery of the Eucharist, the "mystery of faith," as it has been most appropriately called. For in this one mystery the entire supernatural order, with all its wealth and variety of wonders, is in a manner summed up and contained: "He hath made a remembrance of His wonderful works, a merciful and gracious Lord; He hath given food to them that fear Him" (Psalm cx, 4-5). For whereas God has subordinated the whole supernatural order to the Incarnation of His Word, in virtue whereof salvation has been restored to the human race, according to those words of the Apostle; "He hath purposed...to re-establish all things in Christ, that are in heaven and on earth, in Him" (Eph. i., 9-10), the Eucharist, according to the testimony of the holy Fathers, should be regarded as in a manner a continuation and extension of the Incarnation. For in and by it the substance of the incarnate Word is united with individual men, and the supreme Sacrifice offered on Calvary is in a wondrous manner renewed, as was signified beforehand by Malachy in the words: "In every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to My name a pure oblation" (Mal. i., II). And this miracle, itself the very greatest of its kind, is accompanied by innumerable other miracles; for here all the laws of nature are suspended; the whole substance of the bread and wine are changed into the Body and the Blood; the species of bread and wine are sustained by the divine power without the support of any underlying substance; the Body of Christ is present in many places at the same time, that is to say, wherever the Sacrament is consecrated. And in order that human reason may the more willingly pay its homage to this great mystery, there have not been wanting, as an aid to faith, certain prodigies wrought in His honour, both in ancient times and in our own, of which in more than one place there exist public and notable records and memorials. It is plain that by this Sacrament faith is fed, in it the mind finds its nourishment, the objections of rationalists are brought to naught, and abundant light is thrown on the supernatural order.

8. But that decay of faith in divine things of which We have spoken is the effect not only of pride, but also of moral corruption. For if it is true that a strict morality improves the quickness of man's intellectual powers, and if on the other hand, as the maxims of pagan philosophy and the admonitions of divine wisdom combine to teach us, the keenness of the mind is blunted by bodily pleasures, how much more, in the region of revealed truths, do these same pleasures

obscure the light of faith, or even, by the just judgment of God, entirely extinguish it. For these pleasures at the present day an insatiable appetite rages, infecting all classes as with an infectious disease, even from tender years. Yet even for so terrible an evil there is a remedy close at hand in the divine Eucharist. For in the first place it puts a check on lust by increasing charity, according to the words of St. Augustine, who says, speaking of charity, "As it grows, lust diminishes; when it reaches perfection, lust is no more" (*De diversis quaestionibus*, lxxxiii., q. 36). Moreover the most chaste flesh of Jesus keeps down the rebellion of our flesh, as St. Cyril of Alexandria taught, "For Christ abiding in us lulls to sleep the law of the flesh which rages in our members" (Lib. iv., c. ii., *in Joan.*, vi., 57). Then too the special and most pleasant fruit of the Eucharist is that which is signified in the words of the prophet: "What is the good thing of Him," that is, of Christ, "and what is His beautiful thing, but the corn of the elect and the wine that engendereth virgins" (Zach. ix., 17), producing, in other words, that flower and fruitage of a strong and constant purpose of virginity which, even in an age enervated by luxury, is daily multiplied and spread abroad in the Catholic Church, with those advantages to religion and to human society, wherever it is found, which are plain to see.

9. To this it must be added that by this same Sacrament our hope of everlasting blessedness, based on our trust in the divine assistance, is wonderfully strengthened. For the edge of that longing for happiness which is so deeply rooted in the hearts of all men from their birth is whetted even more and more by the experience of the deceitfulness of earthly goods, by the unjust violence of wicked men, and by all those other afflictions to which mind and body are subject. Now the venerable Sacrament of the Eucharist is both the source and the pledge of blessedness and of glory, and this, not for the soul alone, but for the body also. For it enriches the soul with an abundance of heavenly blessings, and fills it with a sweet joy which far surpasses man's hope and expectations; it sustains him in adversity, strengthens him in the spiritual combat, preserves him for life everlasting, and as a special provision for the journey accompanies him thither. And in the frail and perishable body that divine Host, which is the immortal Body of Christ, implants a principle of resurrection, a seed of immortality, which one day must germinate. That to this source man's soul and body will be indebted for both these boons has been the constant teaching of the Church, which has dutifully reaffirmed the affirmation of Christ: "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood bath everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (St. John vi., 55).

10. In connection with this matter it is of importance to consider that in the Eucharist, seeing that it was instituted by Christ as "a perpetual memorial of His Passion" (*Opusc. lvii. Offic. de festo Corporis Christi*), is proclaimed to the Christian the necessity of a salutary self-chastisement. For Jesus said to those first priests of His: "Do this in memory of Me" (Luke xxii, 18); that is to say, do this for the commemoration of My pains, My sorrows, My grievous afflictions, My death upon the Cross. Wherefore this Sacrament is at the same time a Sacrifice, seasonable throughout the entire period of our penance; and it is likewise a standing exhortation to all manner of toil, and a solemn and severe rebuke to those carnal pleasures which some are not ashamed so highly to praise and extol: "As often as ye shall eat this bread, and drink this chalice, ye shall announce the death of the Lord, until He come" (1 Cor. xi., 26).

The Bond of Charity

11. Furthermore, if anyone will diligently examine into the causes of the evils of our day, he will find that they arise from this, that as charity towards God has grown cold, the mutual charity of men among themselves has likewise cooled. Men have forgotten that they are children of God and brethren in Jesus Christ; they care for nothing except their own individual interests; the interests and the rights of others they not only make light of, but often attack and invade. Hence

frequent disturbances and strifes between class and class: arrogance, oppression, fraud on the part of the more powerful: misery, envy, and turbulence among the poor. These are evils for which it is in vain to seek a remedy in legislation, in threats of penalties to be incurred, or in any other device of merely human prudence. Our chief care and endeavour ought to be, according to the admonitions which We have more than once given at considerable length, to secure the union of classes in a mutual interchange of dutiful services, a union which, having its origin in God, shall issue in deeds that reflect the true spirit of Jesus Christ and a genuine charity. This charity Christ brought into the world, with it He would have all hearts on fire. For it alone is capable of affording to soul and body alike, even in this life, a foretaste of blessedness; since it restrains man's inordinate self-love, and puts a check on avarice, which "is the root of all evil" (1 Tim. vi., 10). And whereas it is right to uphold all the claims of justice as between the various classes of society, nevertheless it is only with the efficacious aid of charity, which tempers justice, that the "equality" which St. Paul commended (2 Cor. viii., 14), and which is so salutary for human society, can be established and maintained. This then is what Christ intended when he instituted this Venerable Sacrament, namely, by awakening charity towards God to promote mutual charity among men. For the latter, as is plain, is by its very nature rooted in the former, and springs from it by a kind of spontaneous growth. Nor is it possible that there should be any lack of charity among men, or rather it must needs be enkindled and flourish, if men would but ponder well the charity which Christ has shown in this Sacrament. For in it He has not only given a splendid manifestation of His power and wisdom, but "has in a manner poured out the riches of His divine love towards men" (Conc. Trid., Sess. XIII., *De Euch.* c. ii.). Having before our eyes this noble example set us by Christ, Who bestows on us all that He has assuredly we ought to love and help one another to the utmost, being daily more closely united by the strong bond of brotherhood. Add to this that the outward and visible elements of this Sacrament supply a singularly appropriate stimulus to union. On this topic St. Cyprian writes: "In a word the Lord's sacrifice symbolises the oneness of heart, guaranteed by a persevering and inviolable charity, which should prevail among Christians. For when our Lord calls His Body bread, a substance which is kneaded together out of many grains, He indicates that we His people, whom He sustains, are bound together in close union; and when He speaks of His Blood as wine, in which the juice pressed from many clusters of grapes is mingled in one fluid, He likewise indicates that we His flock are by the commingling of a multitude of persons made one" (Ep. 96 *ad Magnum* n. 5 (a1.6)). In like manner the angelic Doctor, adopting the sentiments of St. Augustine (Tract. xxxvi., *in Joan.* nn. 13, 17), writes: "Our Lord has bequeathed to us His Body and Blood under the form of substances in which a multitude of things have been reduced to unity, for one of them, namely bread, consisting as it does of many grains is yet one, and the other, that is to say wine, has its unity of being from the confluent juice of many grapes; and therefore St. Augustine elsewhere says: 'O Sacrament of mercy, O sign of unity, O bond of charity!' " (*Summ. Theol.* P. IIL, q. lxxix., a.1.). All of which is confirmed by the declaration of the Council of Trent that Christ left the Eucharist in His Church "as a symbol of that unity and charity whereby He would have all Christians mutually joined and united. . . a symbol of that one body of which He is Himself the head, and to which He would have us, as members attached by the closest bonds of faith, hope, and charity" (Conc. Trid., Sess. XIII., *De Euchar.*, c. ii.). The same idea had been expressed by St. Paul when he wrote: "For we, being many, are one bread, one body, all we who partake of the one bread" (1 Cor. x., 17). Very beautiful and joyful too is the spectacle of Christian brotherhood and social equality which is afforded when men of all conditions, gentle and simple, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, gather round the holy altar, all sharing alike in this heavenly banquet. And in the records of the Church it is deservedly reckoned to the special credit of its first ages that "the multitude of the believers had but one heart and one soul" (Acts iv., 32), there can be no shadow of doubt that this immense blessing was due to their frequent meetings at the Divine table; for we find it recorded of them: "They were persevering in the doctrine of the Apostles and in the communion of the breaking of bread" (Acts ii., 42).

12. Besides all this, the grace of mutual charity among the living, which derives from the Sacrament of the Eucharist so great an increase of strength, is further extended by virtue of the Sacrifice to all those who are numbered in the Communion of Saints. For the Communion of Saints, as everyone knows, is nothing but the mutual communication of help, expiation, prayers, blessings, among all the faithful, who, whether they have already attained to the heavenly country, or are detained in the purgatorial fire, or are yet exiles here on earth, all enjoy the common franchise of that city whereof Christ is the head, and the constitution is charity. For faith teaches us, that although the venerable Sacrifice may be lawfully offered to God alone, yet it may be celebrated in honour of the saints reigning in heaven with God Who has crowned them, in order that we may gain for ourselves their patronage. And it may also be offered - in accordance with an apostolic tradition - for the purpose of expiating the sins of those of the brethren who, having died in the Lord, have not yet fully paid the penalty of their transgressions.

13. That genuine charity, therefore, which knows how to do and to suffer all things for the salvation and the benefit of all, leaps forth with all the heat and energy of a flame from that most holy Eucharist in which Christ Himself is present and lives, in which He indulges to the utmost. His love towards us, and under the impulse of that divine love ceaselessly renews His Sacrifice. And thus it is not difficult to see whence the arduous labours of apostolic men, and whence those innumerable designs of every kind for the welfare of the human race which have been set on foot among Catholics, derive their origin, their strength, their permanence, their success.

14. These few words on a subject so vast will, we doubt not, prove most helpful to the Christian flock, if you in your zeal, Venerable Brethren, will cause them to be expounded and enforced as time and occasion may serve. But indeed a Sacrament so great and so rich in all manner of blessings can never be extolled as it deserves by human eloquence, nor adequately venerated by the worship of man. This Sacrament, whether as the theme of devout meditation, or as the object of public adoration, or best of all as a food to be received in the utmost purity of conscience, is to be regarded as the centre towards which the spiritual life of a Christian in all its ambit gravitates; for all other forms of devotion, whatsoever they may be, lead up to it, and in it find their point of rest. In this mystery more than in any other that gracious invitation and still more gracious promise of Christ is realised and finds its daily fulfilment: "Come to me all ye that labour and are heavily burdened, and I will refresh you" (St. Matt. xi., 28).

15. In a word this Sacrament is, as it were, the very soul of the Church; and to it the grace of the priesthood is ordered and directed in all its fulness and in each of its successive grades. From the same source the Church draws and has all her strength, all her glory, her every supernatural endowment and adornment, every good thing that is here; wherefore she makes it the chiefest of all her cares to prepare the hearts of the faithful for an intimate union with Christ through the Sacrament of His Body and Blood, and to draw them thereto. And to this end she strives to promote the veneration of the august mystery by surrounding it with holy ceremonies. To this ceaseless and ever watchful care of the Church or Mother, our attention is drawn by that exhortation which was uttered by the holy Council of Trent, and which is so much to the purpose that for the benefit of the Christian people We here reproduce it in its entirety. "The Holy Synod admonishes, exhorts, asks and implores by the tender mercy of our God, that all and each of those who bear the name of Christian should at last unite and find peace in this sign of unity, in this bond of charity, in this symbol of concord; and that, mindful of the great majesty and singular love of Jesus Christ our Lord, Who gave His precious life as the price of our salvation, and His flesh for our food, they should believe and revere these sacred mysteries of His Body and Blood with such constancy of unwavering faith, with such interior devotion and worshipful piety, that they may be in condition to

receive frequently that supersubstantial bread, and that it may be to them the life of their souls and keep their mind in soundness of faith; so that strengthened with its strength they may be enabled after the journey of this sorrowful pilgrimage to reach the heavenly country, there to see and feed upon that bread of angels which here they eat under the sacramental veils" (Conc. Trid., Sess. XXII, c. vi).

16. History bears witness that the virtues of the Christian life have flourished best wherever and whenever the frequent reception of the Eucharist has most prevailed. And on the other hand it is no less certain that in days when men have ceased to care for this heavenly bread, and have lost their appetite for it, the practice of Christian religion has gradually lost its force and vigour. And indeed it was a needful measure of precaution against a complete falling away that Innocent III, in the Council of the Lateran, most strictly enjoined that no Christian should abstain from receiving the communion of the Lord's Body at least in the solemn paschal season. But it is clear that this precept was imposed with regret, and only as a last resource; for it has always been the desire of the Church that at every Mass some of the faithful should be present and should communicate. "The holy Synod would wish that in every celebration of the Mass some of the faithful should take part, not only by devoutly assisting thereat, but also by the sacramental reception of the Eucharist, in order that they might more abundantly partake of the fruits of this holy Sacrifice" (conc. Trid., Sess. XIII. *de Euchar.* c. viii).

The Sacrifice of the Mass

17. Most abundant, assuredly, are the salutary benefits which are stored up in this most venerable mystery, regarded as a Sacrifice; a Sacrifice which the Church is accordingly wont to offer daily "for the salvation of the whole world." And it is fitting, indeed in this age it is specially important, that by means of the united efforts of the devout, the outward honour and the inward reverence paid to this Sacrifice should be alike increased. Accordingly it is our wish that its manifold excellence may be both more widely known and more attentively considered. There are certain general principles the truth of which can be plainly perceived by the light of reason; for instance, that the dominion of God our Creator and Preserver over all men, whether in their private or in their public life, is supreme and absolute; that our whole being and all that we possess, whether individually or as members of society, comes from the divine bounty; that we on our part are bound to show to God, as our Lord, the highest reverence, and, as He is our greatest benefactor, the deepest gratitude. But how many are there who at the present day acknowledge and discharge these duties with full and exact observance? In no age has the spirit of contumacy and an attitude of defiance towards God been more prevalent than in our own; an age in which that unholy cry of the enemies of Christ: "We will not have this man to rule over us" (Luke xix., 14), makes itself more and more loudly heard, together with the utterance of that wicked purpose: "let us make away with Him" (Jer. xi., 11); nor is there any motive by which many are hurried on with more passionate fury, than the desire utterly to banish God not only from the civil government, but from every form of human society. And although men do not everywhere proceed to this extremity of criminal madness, it is a lamentable thing that so many are sunk in oblivion of the divine Majesty and of His favours, and in particular of the salvation wrought for us by Christ. Now a remedy must be found for this wickedness on the one hand, and this sloth on the other, in a general increase among the faithful of fervent devotion towards the Eucharistic Sacrifice, than which nothing can give greater honour, nothing be more pleasing, to God. For it is a divine Victim which is here immolated; and accordingly through this Victim we offer to the most blessed Trinity all that honour which the infinite dignity of the Godhead demands; infinite in value and infinitely acceptable is the gift which we present to the Father in His only-begotten son; so that for His benefits to us we not only signify our gratitude, but actually make an adequate return.

18. Moreover there is another twofold fruit which we may and must derive from this great Sacrifice. The heart is saddened when it considers what a flood of wickedness, the result - as We have said - of forgetfulness and contempt of the divine Majesty, has inundated the world. It is not too much to say that a great part of the human race seems to be calling down upon itself the anger of heaven; though indeed the crop of evils which has grown up here on earth is already ripening to a just judgment. Here then is a motive whereby the faithful may be stirred to a devout and earnest endeavour to appease God the avenger of sin, and to win from Him the help which is so needful in these calamitous times. And they should see that such blessings are to be sought principally by means of this Sacrifice. For it is only in virtue of the death which Christ suffered that men can satisfy, and that most abundantly, the demands of God's justice, and can obtain the plenteous gifts of His clemency. And Christ has willed that the whole virtue of His death, alike for expiation and impetration, should abide in the Eucharist, which is no mere empty commemoration thereof, but a true and wonderful though bloodless and mystical renewal of it.

19. To conclude, we gladly acknowledge that it has been a cause of no small joy to us that during these last years a renewal of love and devotion towards the Sacrament of the Eucharist has, as it seems, begun to show itself in the hearts of the faithful; a fact which encourages us to hope for better times and a more favourable state of affairs. Many and varied, as we said at the commencement, are the expedients which an inventive piety has devised; and worthy of special mention are the confraternities instituted either with the object of carrying out the Eucharistic ritual with greater splendour, or for the perpetual adoration of the venerable Sacrament by day and night, or for the purpose of making reparation for the blasphemies and insults of which it is the object. But neither We nor you, Venerable Brethren, can allow ourselves to rest satisfied with what has hitherto been done; for there remain many things which must be further developed or begun anew, to the end that this most divine of gifts, this greatest of mysteries, may be better understood and more worthily honoured and revered, even by those who already take their part in the religious services of the Church. Wherefore, works of this kind which have been already set on foot must be ever more zealously promoted; old undertakings must be revived wherever perchance they may have fallen into decay; for instance, Confraternities of the holy Eucharist, intercessory prayers before the blessed Sacrament exposed for the veneration of the faithful, solemn processions, devout visits to God's tabernacle, and other holy and salutary practices of some kind; nothing must be omitted which a prudent piety may suggest as suitable. But the chief aim of our efforts must be that the frequent reception of the Eucharist may be everywhere revived among Catholic peoples. For this is the lesson which is taught us by the example, already referred to, of the primitive Church, by the decrees of Councils, by the authority of the Fathers and of the holy men in all ages. For the soul, like the body, needs frequent nourishment; and the holy Eucharist provides that food which is best adapted to the support of its life. Accordingly all hostile prejudices, those vain fears to which so many yield, and their specious excuses from abstaining from the Eucharist, must be resolutely put aside; for there is question here of a gift than which none other can be more serviceable to the faithful people, either for the redeeming of time from the tyranny of anxious cares concerning perishable things, or for the renewal of the Christian spirit and perseverance therein. To this end the exhortations and example of all those who occupy a prominent position will powerfully contribute, but most especially the resourceful and diligent zeal of the clergy. For priests, to whom Christ our Redeemer entrusted the office of consecrating and dispensing the mystery of His Body and Blood, can assuredly make no better return for the honour which has been conferred upon them, than by promoting with all their might the glory of His Eucharist, and by inviting and drawing the hearts of men to the health-giving springs of this great Sacrament and Sacrifice, seconding hereby the longings of His most Sacred Heart.

20. May God grant that thus, in accordance with Our earnest desire, the excellent fruits of the Eucharist may daily manifest themselves in greater abundance, to the happy increase of faith, hope, and charity, and of all Christian virtues; and may this turn to the recovery and advantage of the whole body politic; and may the wisdom of God's most provident charity, Who instituted this mystery for all time "for the life of the world," shine forth with an ever brighter sight.

21. Encouraged by such hopes as these, Venerable Brethren, We, as a presage of the divine liberality and as a pledge of our own charity, most lovingly bestow on each of you, and on the clergy and flock committed to the care of each, our Apostolic Benediction.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's on the 28th day of May, being the Vigil of the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, in the year 1902, of Our Pontificate the five and twentieth.

LEO XIII

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