

# SACRA MYSTERIA VENERARI

APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION

THE MOST REVEREND JAMES SEÁN WALL BISHOP OF GALLUP

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To all the priests, deacons, religious, and lay faithful of the Diocese of Gallup On the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist

1. "To revere the sacred mysteries of Your Body and Blood." This is what Saint Thomas Aquinas asks of the Lord Jesus in his collect prayer for the great feast of Corpus Christi. This oration summarizes in a few words what should be the great desire of our hearts: to adore Christ in the Eucharist - there through Christ to worship the Father "in spirit and in truth" (Jn. 4:23-24)\(^1\)—that, as the collect continues, "we may always experience in ourselves the fruits of your redemption." In this way, we begin already in this life to anticipate the pervading joys and blessedness of heaven, and in fact have a prelude to heavenly worship itself. It is no wonder, then, that Holy Mother Church exalts the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist as the "source and summit of the Christian life": as the very Presence of Christ Himself among us, the Eucharist is the reality toward and from which all of the Church's activity flows.\(^2\) It cannot be otherwise.

2. With this in mind, dear sons and daughters in Christ, I have undertaken to write this apostolic exhortation to you. My earnest desire is that that each of us in our own way and state of life may better learn to "revere the sacred mysteries" of Christ in the Eucharist. It is no secret that Eucharistic faith has drastically declined in recent years. This has had many causes: irreverent liturgies, poor catechesis, and a lack of available times for confession and adoration are only a few that I could name. Simply to be a harbinger of doom bemoaning the sad state of things is not my purpose, however. I would rather like to laud the mysteries of Christ, so that, please God, in some small way we can see the

<sup>1.</sup> All citations of Sacred Scripture come from the Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition.

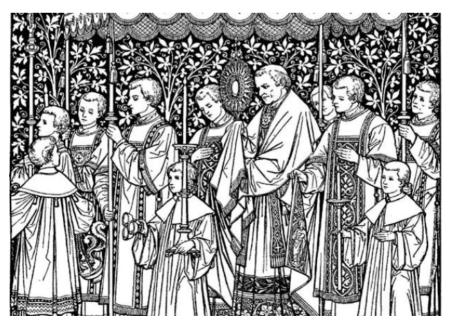
<sup>2.</sup> See Catechism of the Catholic Church [henceforth CCC], 1324.

beauty of the Eucharistic Lord anew, and, like the disciples on that first Easter evening, we may draw near to Him with hearts set on fire by His Presence (cf. Lk. 24:32).

3. The structure of this exhortation will be three-fold. First, we will examine briefly the meaning and importance of the Incarnation, that is, the coming of the Son of God in the flesh. This will pave the way for a proper understanding of the Eucharist as the Body of Christ, which will be the focus of part two. Finally, in part three we will take some time to examine the context in which Christ gives us the Eucharist, namely the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

4. At the outset of this exhortation, therefore, I would like to ask, even beg for your prayers, that all in our diocese and throughout the whole Church may be drawn to the refreshing waters of life found in the Eucharist; that my simple words here may help to increase our understanding of and reverence for these sacred mysteries; and ultimately that Jesus Christ, our Crucified and Risen Lord and Savior, may be given all the glory that is His due, whether on these pages, on the altars, or in our hearts.

"O Sacrament Most Holy, O Sacrament Divine, All praise and all thanksgiving Be every moment thine!"



# PART I The Word Became Flesh: The Incarnation

#### Why did God become man?

- 5. Saint John the Evangelist begins his Gospel with one of the most fascinating portions in all of Scripture (cf. Jn. 1:1-18). Whether examined for its literary qualities or its theological profundity, it has always provided a deep well from which to draw spiritual nourishment. So important have these verses been in the life of the Church that, until quite recently, they were read over the faithful at the end of every Mass as a reminder of the great work that God had accomplished in Christ.
- 6. Now, right at the heart of these verses is the truth that changed the world: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only-begotten Son from the Father" (Jn. 1:14). Elsewhere Saint Paul would describe the same matter this way as he sought to describe the reality of the Incarnation: "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:4). Essentially, what both of these saints are describing is the fact that the Father sent the Son to take on our human nature by assuming it unto His Divine Personhood. The Son became like us in all things but sin (cf. Heb. 4:14-16). This matter was then later taken up in the Church's solemn profession of faith at the Council of Nicaea in the year 325. From that day to this, we pray regularly that "for us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven; and by the Holy Spirit, was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man."
- 7. What this brief line from the Creed shows us is that the Church has long asked the question "Why did God become man?" In other words, what was the purpose of the Incarnation, and, by extension, what impact does it have on my life? This is in fact a question that should arise in the heart of every believer, for by asking it, one is forced to wrestle with the almost incredible truth that God is one of us (cf. Mt. 1:18-23; Lk. 1:26-38); that in His Incarnate Son, God chose to humble Himself to be like us (cf. Lk. 2:1-7; Ph. 2:6-11), to live with us (cf. Lk. 2:39-40), to have needs (cf. Lk. 19:31), and even to undergo temptations (cf. Mt. 4:1-11; Lk. 4:1-13), suffering, and death (cf. Mt. 26-27; Mk. 14-15; Lk. 22-23; Jn. 18-19). The more one meditates on these facts and passages, the more he is forced

to recognize the "marvelous exchange" that takes place in Christ: the Creator becomes a creature, so as to show creatures the way back to the Creator.

8. Already this gives a first answer to the question we just proposed. Why did God become man? So that we could be taken back to God after we had been lost in sin (cf. e.g. Lk. 15). This is not the only answer to the question, however. Many saints and doctors of the Church have had varying answers to the "why" of the Incarnation, and each gives a glimpse of the whole truth. Holy Mother Church for Her part has summarized all of these into four essential points.<sup>3</sup> She says that the Word became flesh:

- in order to save us by reconciling us with God (cf. IJn. 4:10; 4:14; 3:5);<sup>4</sup>
- that we might know God's love (cf. Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:9);<sup>5</sup>
- $\bullet$  to be our model of holiness (cf. Mt. 11:29; Mk. 8:34; 9:7; Jn. 14:6; 15:12);  $^6$
- and to make us partakers of divine nature (cf. 2 Pt.1:4).7

9. In each of these reasons we see God's immense desire to unite us to Himself so intimately and closely that He became one of us. So great is this gift of God Himself to mankind that no greater gift could be given. As humble recipients of such a gift, we should always seek to make some return to the Lord for all of His goodness to us (cf. Ps. 116:12). This happens, of course, in our prayers of thanksgiving and praise, and by our way of life, which is meant to reflect Christ to the world (cf. Gal. 2:20). It also

<sup>3.</sup> Cf. CCC, 456-460. The Catechism also contains in these paragraphs various Patristic quotations which are worth our prayerful reflection.

<sup>4.</sup> One can think here of the Easter Sequence, which offers "thankful praises" to God since "a Lamb the sheep redeems; Christ, who only is sinless, reconciles sinners to the Father." Another Paschal chant, the Exultet, says "Who for our sake paid Adam's debt to the eternal Father, and, pouring out his own dear Blood, wiped clean the record of our ancient sinfulness."

<sup>5. &</sup>quot;In the pierced heart of the Crucified, God's own heart is opened up." Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 48.

<sup>6.</sup> Consider the baptismal rite, which, at the clothing with a white garment, says "you have become a new creation, and have clothed yourself in Christ. See in this white garment the outward sign of your Christian dignity. With your family and friends to help you by word and example, bring that dignity unstained into the everlasting life of heaven." It is because of Christ's holiness, given to us in the Incarnation, that we can be holy. He enables us to do so by His grace, especially in the sacrament of baptism, where we are first made holy.

<sup>7. &</sup>quot;When he appeared in our mortal nature, you made us new by the glory of his immortal nature." *Roman Missal*, Preface of the Epiphany of the Lord. The Prefaces of the Nativity contain similar themes.

happens, principally and par excellence, in the Mass, which we will examine below.

#### He became like us in all things but sin

10. In addition to the question of "why," another question that has been asked since the beginning of the Christian Era has been "how far did the incarnation go?" In other words, to what extent did the Son of God truly become one of us? The answer that the Church has given is rather straightforward: while remaining fully God, He was also fully man, truly becoming like us in all things but sin. The implications of such an answer, however, are immense.

11. First let us examine what it means to be fully human. It means having a body composed of bones, muscles, flesh, and tissues. It means having a rational soul that has powers of memory, intelligence, and volition. It means having emotions, feelings, personality, and the like. More than all this, it means we are created as male or female in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-27).

12. Now, while this is clearly a summary of human nature, already it gives us a deep insight into Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God. For in becoming one of us, He took all of this on. As the Gospels clearly show, and as the early Councils of the Church defended, He truly was a man Who had His own flesh, body, mind, and soul. This means He had hands that healed the sick and feet that ached as He walked the ancient pathways of Galilee and Jerusalem. He had hair which grew and teeth which chewed His food. He also really had emotions and a personality, which He expressed in ways just like us: He cried and was sorrowful at the death of Lazarus, and He rejoiced when the disciples returned successfully from their first mission. Likewise, as a man He had friends and family. He even underwent temptation throughout His life, though He never fell to sin because of that.8 His life was a genuine life, His suffering was bloody, and His death was as real as it gets. He was like us in all things.

13. As I mentioned above, the implications of all this are enormous. Saint Gregory Nazianzus once explained why, when he said that "whatever was not assumed [in the Incarnation] was not healed." This means that "to redeem man in the totality of his body, soul and spirit, Christ assumed all the elements of human

<sup>8.</sup> Sin, as that which is opposed to God and His grace, is not properly part of human nature, but rather something which makes us less human. This is why Christ's sinlessness is not an argument against His being fully man.

nature, otherwise man would not have been saved." In other words, had Christ neglected some aspect of our human nature when He became one of us, that part of us would have remained unredeemed, and we would only have been partially saved, if at all. Christ would be a failed Savior in such a case, for His work would not have been total or complete—it would not have been finished (cf. Jn. 19:30). In His abounding, generous, and perfect love for us, however, He did not forsake a single portion of who we are, that we might be given new life in the entirety of our human nature.

14. It is easy to see, then, how essential the Incarnation is to our redemption. Without it, we would still be lost in our sins. Without it, Christ would not truly have suffered, died, and been raised. And, as Saint Paul so pointedly puts it, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. [...] But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:17, 20). For this reason we can join Saint Paul in saying too: "thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57).

#### "I am with you always"

15. The Gospel of Saint Matthew begins and ends with a striking parallel. In the first chapter, we hear that Jesus is the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy from the book of Isaiah: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel' (which means, God with us)" (Mt. 1:23; cf. Is. 7:14). Then, at the end of the book, Jesus Who is Emmanuel tells His disciples just before His ascends to the Father, "behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt. 28:20).

16. What we can draw from these two passages is the fact that Jesus, even after ascending to the right hand of God in heaven, never abandons His people or His Church. He does not leave us orphans, as we hear in Saint John's Gospel (cf. Jn. 14:18). Rather, He promises to stay with us always—He promises to extend His Incarnation in this world in some way. He does this, of course, through His Church, His Mystical Body. Even more particularly, He does this in the Most Blessed Sacrament, which is His glorified Body and Blood hidden under the appearances of bread and wine. To this sacrament of Christ's Presence we now turn.

<sup>9.</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, "General Audience: Saint Gregory Nazianzus (2)," Vatican Website, August 22, 2007, accessed April 19, 2022, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2007/documents/hf\_ben-xvi\_aud\_20070822.html.



PART II
The Flesh Became Bread:
The Eucharist

#### Mysterium Fidei

17. "This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh" (John 6:50-51). In these couple verses, Jesus sums up the teaching on the Eucharist which He gave to the people who had come to Capernaum after the multiplication of the loaves and fishes (cf. John 6). His words on this occasion shocked His listeners. Though we usually see Jesus consoling those around Him with words or actions of mercy, here He intentionally speaks in terms that will leave many confused and scandalized. They think He is speaking of cannibalism, and are disgusted since they misunderstand the way in which He would leave us "His flesh" to eat under forms of bread and wine. Jesus did not water down His teaching in this moment, however, but rather reemphasized it: "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood,

you have no life in you" (Jn. 6:53). He even allowed many of His listeners to walk away if they were unable to accept His words (cf. Jn. 6:60-66). This shows the importance He placed on this essential reality of the Faith.

18. From that day to this, the Church has seen many occasions of confusion and misunderstanding when it comes to the Eucharist. One example of this came shortly after the Second Vatican Council. Pope Saint Paul VI foresaw that there were some who, in an effort to renew the liturgy and our understanding of the Blessed Sacrament, were in danger of misrepresenting the Church's teaching on the Eucharist. To avoid this, he wrote the encyclical letter Mysterium Fidei (The Mystery of Faith). In that letter, he refers to the Eucharist in the first place as a "mystery." Now, a mystery for Christians does not refer to something we cannot know, but rather to something we seek to know ever more, the depth of which goes far beyond what we can understand with our senses and intellect alone. It is something that can only be illuminated by faith. Saint Thomas Aquinas said this very specifically about the Eucharist in one of his Eucharistic hymns, Tantum ergo: "Let faith supply for the defect of the senses." One implication of this is that our human language will always fall short when we try to describe the Blessed Sacrament.

19. Over the centuries, however, as She has sought to understand the full meaning of the Faith, the Church has been able to express the truth of the Eucharist in a clear and consistent way. It is important to review this teaching regularly, and to renew our understanding of it often, both so that we can stay in the fullness of truth in Christ, and so that we can continually go deeper into the depths of the sacred mysteries. In this part of the present exhortation, I will seek to lead us in such an exercise of faith by examining four main areas of Catholic teaching on the Eucharist: sacrifice, food and nourishment, the sacrament of Christ's Presence, and Holy Communion.

#### His Body and Blood Given in Sacrifice

20. Throughout the Old Testament, the blood of sacrificed animals can be seen on nearly every page. From the moment of the Fall, when God clothed Adam and Eve with the skins of

<sup>10.</sup> The original text is "Praestet fides supplementum sensuum defectui." Saint Thomas says much the same in another hymn, Adoro Te devote: "Visus, tactus, gustus in te fallitur, / Sed auditu solo tuto creditur. / Credo quidquid dixit Dei Filius; / Nil hoc verbo Veritátis verius." "Vision, touch, taste all fail in beholding You, / But all is believed by hearing alone. / I believe all that the Son of God has said; / Nothing is truer than this Word of Truth."

animals (cf. Gen. 3:21), to the thousands of lambs sacrificed in the Temple every year at Passover, many animals died as a constant reminder of our sin as well as the death that is the result thereof. The difficulty with all these sacrifices was that it did not change the lives of those who offered them". They remained unaffected by the external sacrifices of animals, and their hearts stayed rooted in sin.

21. Through the course of time, then, God worked through His holy prophets to teach His people that bloody animal sacrifices are not the true way to worship—that this is not the true way to sacrifice. In other words, He called them to interior worship of the heart, a worship that obeyed God's Word.ll This understanding finally began to take hold in times of distress for the Israelites, particularly during the Babylonian Exile, when they could not offer sacrifice in the Temple, which had itself been destroyed. Consider, for example, the Prayer of Azariah, which expresses the idea that true sacrifice to God would come from the suffering of the people themselves, and that their prayers would take on the nature of sacrifice:

At this time there is no prince, or prophet, or leader, no burnt offering, or sacrifice, or oblation, or incense, no place to make an offering before you or to find mercy. Yet with a contrite heart and a humble spirit may we be accepted, as though it were with burnt offerings of rams and bulls, and with tens of thousands of fat lambs; such may our sacrifice be in your sight this day, and may we wholly follow you, for there will be no shame for those who trust in you (Dan. 3:38-40, emphasis added).

22. One difficulty still remains: since human hearts are not pure and unblemished, the sacrifice given to God would not be whole and complete. It would not be perfect. And so even though the Old Testament was beginning to see the importance of proper worship and sacrifice, the people in it could not accomplish such a thing. God Himself had to provide the answer.

23. This is where the Sacrifice of Jesus enters in. We see hints of it already at Capernaum, where Jesus spoke about "the bread that I shall give." As the bread of life Himself (cf. Jn. 6:35), He was referring to His Passion and Death, where He would give Himself up for our salvation. Later on, at the Last Supper, Jesus ful-

<sup>11.</sup> Cf. 1 Kgs. 15:22; Ps. 49:15, 23; Is. 1:11, 2:5, 12:1ff, 28:12, 55:3, 58:5ff, 66:2; Jer. 8:3; Hos. 6:6; Amos 5:14-15; Mic. 3:11, 6:8. Cf. Ex. 19:5-8; Jer. 7:22-23. These passages, listed in the *Dictionnarie de Théologie Catholique* under "Culte en Général," are just a few that show the prophetic critique of sacrifices that did not involve the heart and soul of man.

filled this promise when He took bread and wine and said, "This is my Body...this is my Blood of the covenant" (Mk. 14: 22-24; Lk. 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-24). Already, the words evoke the sacrifices of the Old Testament, but there is something new here: to these words Jesus adds, "which is given for you...poured out for you and for many." There is a reference in these words to the Suffering Servant Songs (cf. Is. 50:4-7; 52:13-53:12), which help us to understand them more deeply as signifying a redemptive sacrifice, one which forgives sins and converts hearts to God. 12

24. With these few words, Jesus fulfills what He promised in the sixth chapter of Saint John's Gospel by giving us His Flesh under the appearances of bread, and also anticipates the Passion and Death He would undergo the next day. More than this, He shows that His Death is meant to be understood as a sacrifice, and that the Eucharist—His very Body and Blood given up and poured out—is that sacrifice. This helps us understand why He commanded His disciples to "do this in memory of me": so that they could always enter into that sacrifice made "once for all" (Heb. 10:10). This is also why we say that the memorial of the Eucharist at Mass re-presents the sacrifice of Jesus to us, now in an unbloodied way, upon the altar. 15

25. The Eucharist is therefore a sacrifice. In truth, because of the resurrection of our Lord, the Eucharist is the "living sacrifice" of the of the Lamb of God who was slain for the sins of the world (cf. Rom. 12:1; Jn. 1:29; Rev. 5:12), and it is this Lamb of God, offered eternally to the Father, Whom we worship and adore at every Mass.

<sup>12.</sup> Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, God is Near Us, (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2003), 33-35.

<sup>13.</sup> Saint Paul shows that the early Church understood the Death of Christ this way when he says "Christ, our Paschal Lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:7).

<sup>14.</sup> Cf. CCC, 1366: "The Eucharist is thus a sacrifice because it re-presents (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross, because it is its memorial and because it applies its fruit."

<sup>15.</sup> Cf. CCC, 1363: "In the sense of Sacred Scripture the memorial is not merely the recollection of past events but the proclamation of the mighty works wrought by God for men. In the liturgical celebration of these events, they become in a certain way present and real." See also Second Vatican Council, Sacrosanctum concilium, 47: "At the Last Supper, on the night when He was betrayed, our Savior instituted the eucharistic sacrifice of His Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again, and so to entrust to His beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of His death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity..."

#### Our Daily Bread

26. The Eucharist is not only the memorial of Christ's sacrifice for us, but also a meal given for our nourishment. We can consider this analogy: whatever normal bread does for our physical bodies, from sating hunger to providing strength and growth, the Eucharist does for our souls.

27. Now, this holy food was given to us at the Last Supper, when Jesus chose the bread and wine of the Passover meal as the elements that would become His Body and Blood. It was also at this meal where the sacrificial lamb was eaten by those participating in the memorial sacrifice. Jesus, the true Paschal Lamb, was sacrificed on the cross for us and, in that sacrificial banquet, offered us Himself as food for the journey.

28. We can therefore refer to the altar of sacrifice as the "table of the Lord," and to the Mass as a banquet that is prepared for us, but with the understanding that it is not an ordinary meal. Just as a Passover meal was no ordinary dinner, but rather a banquet accompanying a sacrifice, so too the Mass is not "just a meal," not just a gathering of friends and family. It is rather the memorial banquet that accompanies the sacrifice of Christ. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, then, is both sacrifice and spiritual nour-ishment.

29. One of the best places we can go to understand this is the Lord's Prayer, which begs the Father to "give us this day our daily bread" (Mt. 6:11). The Catechism of the Catholic Church summarizes well what these important words mean:

"Daily" (epiousios) occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. Taken in a temporal sense, this word is a pedagogical repetition of "this day," to confirm us in trust "without reservation." Taken in the qualitative sense, it signifies what is necessary for life, and more broadly every good thing sufficient for subsistence. Taken literally (epi-ousios: "super-essential"), it refers directly to the Bread of Life, the Body of Christ, the "medicine of immortality," without which we have no life within us. Finally in this connection, its heavenly meaning is evident: "this day" is the Day of the Lord, the day of the feast of the kingdom, anticipated in the Eucharist that is already the foretaste of the kingdom to come. For this reason it is fitting for the Eucharistic liturgy to be celebrated each day. 16

30. Thus, even while there are a few ways to understand this

<sup>16.</sup> CCC, 2837.

phrase, the primary and most exalted way is in reference to the Bread of Christ's Flesh given to us in the Eucharist. This helps us to make sense of Christ's actions at the Last Supper: He chose bread as something that can be eaten daily, and changed that bread into Himself so that it can be our heavenly, "super-essential" subsistence.

31. In this regard, we must say that considering the Eucharist as our daily bread helps to stir up missionary impetus in our hearts. Just as we should, out of love for Christ, strive to provide the hungry with their daily bread so that they do not starve, so too we should strive to spread the Catholic faith to those who do not have it—to those that are hungering for truth and goodness—so that they too can share in this super-essential Bread with us who know Christ in the Eucharist. Put simply, the Eucharist leads both to serving the poor and to evangelization.17

#### The Real Presence of Christ

32. Pope Saint Paul VI, in his Encyclical Mysterium Fidei, distinguished at least eight ways that Christ is present to us in the Church. 18 These "presences" of Christ are real and should be venerated by all the faithful, and they include "where two or three are gathered" in His name, the various works of mercy that the Church performs in His name, His presence in the Word of God, and in each of the sacraments. Saint Paul VI then continued: "There is another way in which Christ is present in His Church, a way that surpasses all the others. It is His presence in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, which is, for this reason, 'a more consoling source of devotion, a lovelier object of contemplation and holier in what it contains than all the other sacraments..." The saintly Pontiff calls the Eucharist a "Real" presence, not because the others are not real but "because it is substantial and through it Christ becomes present whole and entire, God and man." The Eucharist is therefore the presence of Christ "par excellence," a presence to which nothing else in this world can compare.

33. Let it be said in absolute terms: the Eucharist does not simply "represent" Jesus. He is not present in the Blessed Sacrament merely as a symbol. No, rather the Blessed Sacrament is the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ. It is He Who truly, really, and substantially present in this Sacrament. Additionally, He is not present in the bread and the wine, since

<sup>17.</sup> Cf. CCC, 2831-2835.

<sup>18.</sup> Mysterium Fidei, 35-39.

after the Consecration the bread and the wine no longer exist.<sup>19</sup> Just as in the Incarnation His humanity hid His divinity, so too in the Consecration the appearances of bread and wine hide His glory once more. When we are before the Eucharist then, we are before a great miraculous event and mystery: for even though we see and taste what appears to be bread and wine, we are in fact in the very Presence of God.

34. Since Christ is present in the Eucharist, God is truly present. This means that we give to the Blessed Sacrament the worship and adoration that we give to God alone. We see this especially in our liturgies, when we kneel and genuflect only before the Blessed Sacrament: these are postures that are due to God and only to God as signs of adoration. These were in fact the postures used by the Magi when they came to adore the new born Christ Child (cf. Mt. 2:11), and by His disciples after the Resurrection (cf. Mt. 28:9; Lk. 24:52). Similarly, the use of incense, which from ancient times was used only in worship of the divine, shows that we recognize Christ is present in the Eucharist.

#### Holy Communion, with God and Man

35. When we look at the Latin roots of the word "communion," we see that it means "in union with," or "one with." This is why "Holy Communion" is such an appropriate title for the sacrament of the Eucharist: it unites us to Christ and makes us one with Him and His Church, both in heaven and on earth.21 In other words, we receive His Body in the Host, and are therefore united to His Mystical Body the Church. Think here of Saint Paul, who said that "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? 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).22

<sup>19.</sup> Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III Pars, Q. 77, Art. 1. Saint Thomas says the same thing in his sequence Lauda Sion: "This the truth each Christian learns, / Bread into His Flesh He turns, / To His Precious Blood the wine."

<sup>20.</sup> CCC, 2628: "Adoration is the first attitude of man acknowledging that he is a creature before his Creator. It exalts the greatness of the Lord who made us and the almighty power of the Savior who sets us free from evil. Adoration is homage of the spirit to the "King of Glory," respectful silence in the presence of the "ever greater" God. Adoration of the thrice-holy and sovereign God of love blends with humility and gives assurance to our supplications."

<sup>21.</sup> Cf. CCC, 1331.

<sup>22.</sup> Another translation for "participation" in these verses is in fact "communion."

36. This all takes place by the power of the Holy Spirit, Who makes Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament and unifies us as His Church. Whenever we receive Holy Communion, therefore, this unity is strengthened, and we are more wholly and integrally united to Christ. Additionally, since the Eucharist is the memorial of Christ's Passion and Death, receiving Communion unites us intimately to Christ's redemptive act, bonding us in His charity. The divine charity of Christ on the Cross, then, is the ultimate source of the union created by the reception of Holy Communion.

37. In addition to this, we can say that Holy Communion not only signifies unity, but that it also creates and fosters that unity in the Church. In his encyclical letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Pope Saint John Paul II states that

Saint John Chrysostom's commentary on these words [1 Cor. 10:16-17] is profound and perceptive: "For what is the bread? It is the body of Christ. And what do those who receive it become? The Body of Christ — not many bodies but one body. For as bread is completely one, though made up of many grains of wheat, and these, albeit unseen, remain nonetheless present, in such a way that their difference is not apparent since they have been made a perfect whole, so too are we mutually joined to one another and together united with Christ." The argument is compelling: our union with Christ, which is a gift and grace for each of us, makes it possible for us, in him, to share in the unity of his body which is the Church. The Eucharist reinforces the incorporation into Christ which took place in Baptism though the gift of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 12:13, 27). <sup>23</sup>

38. Because the Eucharist is a sign and cause of Communion, we must actually seek to live such a communion in our daily lives. This means we must do all we can to foster and promote our union with God, especially through regular and consistent prayer. This also means that we cannot work against that communion in any way. We must therefore strive to avoid anything that makes us less "at one" with Christ, such as, for example, consuming materials or media that would erode our faith in Christ

<sup>23.</sup> Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, April 17, 2003, 23. The pope also makes reference here (in footnote 42) to a text from the early life of the Church, the Didache, or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, where we find this prayer: "Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Your Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Your kingdom; for Yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever."

and the Church and Her teachings. Furthermore, it means avoiding sin at all costs, especially mortal sin, for this excludes us from that unity. Finally, it means refraining from making an unworthy Communion at Mass, for if we were to do so we would "be guilty of profaning the Body and Blood of the Lord," and would thereby "eat and drink judgment" upon ourselves (cf. 1 Cor. 11:27-29).<sup>24</sup>

39. In addition to doing all we can to maintain our communion with God, we must also try to foster unity within the Church, and avoid those things which go against it (cf. e.g. Gal. 5:19-21). Consider the mandate of Jesus: "if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Mt. 5:23-24). Our Lord makes it a requirement that we be at peace with those around us before approaching the altar. This is because communion with God requires communion with our neighbor. Otherwise we become white-washed tombs for whom communion has no meaning or effect in our lives or in our hearts.

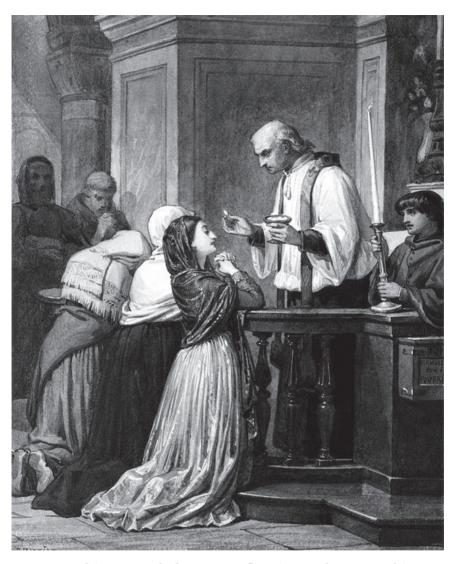
#### O Sacrum Convivium

**40**. As is so often the case, the saints can say briefly what it takes us pages to say. Saint Thomas Aquinas does just this in a single antiphon from his Office for Corpus Christi. I will take up his words here to help to summarize what I have said in this part on the Most Blessed Sacrament:

"O sacrum convivium! in quo Christus sumitur: recolitur memoria passionis eius: mens impletur gratia: et futurae gloriae nobis pignus datur."

"O sacred banquet! in which Christ is received, the memory of his Passion is renewed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us."

<sup>24.</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas, in his *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, 687-697, says there are three ways to make an unworthy Communion: 1) to celebrate Mass unworthily, i.e. in a way that varies from what Christ has handed on; 2) to approach the Eucharist a Communion with a contemptable lack of devotion; or 3) to receive Communion in a state of mortal sin.



41. May this prayer help us to reflect in our hearts and in our lives that great and beauteous treasure which is Christ in the Eucharist, and to receive Him there with utmost fervor and devotion!

# PART III Bread Becomes the Word: The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass

What is the liturgy?

42. The Sacred Liturgy of the Church "is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows." 25 In other words, the liturgy of the Church, inasmuch as it is an exercise of the very priesthood of Jesus Christ, is the most important thing the Church does and can do. It is that "great work wherein God is perfectly glorified and men are sanctified." 26 Within this, the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the high point, for the Eucharist is the "source and summit of the Christian life," 27 as we saw above. Because of all this, I think it is important at this point to discuss two significant matters: liturgical participation in the Eucharist and the celebration of Holy Mass.

43. Before we can do this, we must first discuss the simple question: what is the liturgy? In the plainest of terms, the Sacred Liturgy of the Church is nothing less than the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ made present in the sacraments and liturgical actions of the Church.28 It is our redemption from sin and our reconciliation with the Father renewed at every celebration.29 It is even "a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims."30 This definition truly makes the liturgy more than something we do or are in charge of. It is instead God working in the midst of His people and on their behalf. This is why it is important, at all times, to approach the liturgy with a sense of reverence and awe. For it is not our attempt to please God, but rather God Himself teaching us how to pray to Him, how to glorify and worship Him. To this end, we can say that the purpose, the "why" of liturgy, is primarily to give glory to God, and thereby to bring salvation to souls. This order is important, because it keeps the emphasis on God rather than us.

<sup>25.</sup> Sacrosanctum concilium, 10.

<sup>26.</sup> Sacrosanctum concilium, 7.

<sup>27.</sup> CCC, 1324.

<sup>28.</sup> Cf. Sacrosanctum concilium, 5; CCC, 1069-1070.

<sup>29.</sup> Cf. Sacrosanctum concilium, 2, 47.

<sup>30.</sup> Sacrosanctum concilium, 8.

#### Participating in Mass

44. With this basis in mind, it is easy to see why we would want to participate in the liturgy, especially that of the Eucharist, and to do so well. It is a well-known fact that one of the aims of the Second Vatican Council was just this: to foster "full, active, and conscious participation" in the liturgical rites. 31 Now, this has in many cases been misunderstood as some sort of liturgical "activism" in which everybody is required to take up some role in the liturgy. This is not what the phrase means, however. It means instead that each person involved in a given liturgy is exercising his baptismal priesthood by internally engaging with the liturgy as it happens before us. In other words, we must be actually participating in the liturgy, whether that means attentively listening to the readings and prayers, interceding for the Church and the world, or prayerfully receiving Holy Communion. Our hearts must be engaged, meaning that no word or gesture should be made haphazardly, but rather with love and devotion. When this takes place, the Sacred Liturgy forms hearts and souls into proper dwelling places for the Lord. It readies Christians for Christian living, and prepares them to go forth from the liturgy properly strengthened to do the work of God in the world. This is why it is important that each person know what he is doing in the liturgy, that he be familiar with it, so that he can enter into it fully, actively, and consciously. This is true for clergy and laity alike.32

#### Ars celebrandi

45. This brings me to the second point: the significance of celebrating the liturgy, and especially the Eucharist, well—the significance of having a good and beautiful way of celebrating the liturgy, also known as ars celebrandi (the art of celebrating). This is in fact closely related to active participation in the liturgy, as Pope Benedict XVI has pointed out:

The primary way to foster the participation of the People of God in the sacred rite is the proper celebration of the rite itself. The ars celebrandi is the best way to ensure their actuosa participatio [active participation]. The ars celebrandi is the fruit of faithful adherence to the liturgical norms in all their richness; indeed, for two thousand years this way of celebrating has sus-

<sup>31.</sup> Cf. Sacrosanctum concilium, 14, 48.

<sup>32.</sup> General Instruction for the Roman Missal [henceforth GIRM], 17, 18.

tained the faith life of all believers, called to take part in the celebration as the People of God, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (cf. 1 Pet 2:4-5, 9).<sup>33</sup>

46. Without falling into any sort of ritualism, which would be simply saving and doing the liturgical actions for their own sake. we should rather strive to fulfill all that the Church asks of us in the liturgy so as to give glory to God and bring salvation to souls. Each small nuance in the liturgy can serve such a grand purpose, as in fact the liturgy expects: when speaking of how the priest should comport himself, the Missal makes this poignant remark: "Therefore, when he celebrates the Eucharist, he must serve God and the people with dignity and humility, and by his bearing and by the way he pronounces the divine words he must convey to the faithful the living presence of Christ."34 In other words, all efforts should be made to express the "living presence" of Christ," even through the way we speak and pray and carry ourselves in the Sacred Liturgy. The admonition of Saint John the Baptist is fitting in this regard: "He must increase, we must decrease" (cf. In. 3:30).

47. Pope Benedict XVI emphasized this same fact by showing how the whole of the liturgical celebration should fall under the category of "beauty." He said that in the liturgy

the splendour of God's glory surpasses all worldly beauty. The truest beauty is the love of God, who definitively revealed himself to us in the paschal mystery. The beauty of the liturgy is part of this mystery; it is a sublime expression of God's glory and, in a certain sense, a glimpse of heaven on earth. [...] Beauty, then, is not mere decoration, but rather an essential element of the liturgical action, since it is an attribute of God himself and his revelation. These considerations should make us realize the care which is needed, if the liturgical action is to reflect its innate splendor.<sup>35</sup>

48. Our obedience to what the Church asks of us in the liturgy, particularly at Mass, is not simply a matter of following onerous rules, but rather of allowing the beauty of the liturgy to express the beauty of God Himself, albeit through sensible and sacramental signs. "Attentiveness and fidelity to the specific structure

<sup>33.</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Sacramentum caritatis, February 22, 2007, 38.

<sup>34.</sup> GIRM. 93.

<sup>35.</sup> Sacramentum caritatis, 35

of the rite express both a recognition of the nature of Eucharist as a gift and, on the part of the minister, a docile openness to receiving this ineffable gift."36 This is why the Church is so strict when it comes to changing elements of the liturgy. Indeed, nobody "even if he be a priest, may add, remove, or change anything in the liturgy on his own authority."37

49. In sum, the purpose of all the liturgical norms and rubrics present in the various liturgical books and documents are not to be seen as hindrances to our creativity and expression, but rather ways in which we can express our love for God. More than this, they are also ways through which the Church shows forth the glorious splendor of God, and of Jesus Christ present in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the altar. Liturgical law, seen in this light, is something precious that we should joyfully follow. To do otherwise could in fact prevent the faithful from receiving the sacraments and the fullness of Catholic liturgy, to which they have a right by baptism.38

#### Practical Points

50. Knowing these foundational principles helps us to enter into the liturgy on a daily basis more fully. As such, with these essentials in mind, I would like to emphasize as well some practical matters that each of us can implement as ways of fostering

<sup>36.</sup> Sacramentum caritatis, 40. The earlier part of this paragraph details how this applies to all parts of the Mass: "Emphasizing the importance of the ars celebrandi also leads to an appreciation of the value of the liturgical norms. The ars celebrandi should foster a sense of the sacred and the use of outward signs which help to cultivate this sense, such as, for example, the harmony of the rite, the liturgical vestments, the furnishings and the sacred space. The eucharistic celebration is enhanced when priests and liturgical leaders are committed to making known the current liturgical texts and norms, making available the great riches found in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal and the Order of Readings for Mass. Perhaps we take it for granted that our ecclesial communities already know and appreciate these resources, but this is not always the case. These texts contain riches which have preserved and expressed the Faith and experience of the People of God over its two-thousand-year history. Equally important for a correct ars celebrandi is an attentiveness to the various kinds of language that the liturgy employs: words and music, gestures and silence, movement, the liturgical colours of the vestments. By its very nature the liturgy operates on different levels of communication which enable it to engage the whole human person. The simplicity of its gestures and the sobriety of its orderly sequence of signs communicate and inspire more than any contrived and inappropriate additions." Another helpful document here is *Redemptionis Sacramentum* by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

<sup>37.</sup> Sacrosanctum concilium, 22.3.

<sup>38.</sup> Cf. Code of Canon Law, c. 213-214.

the liturgical lives of our parishes and families.

#### Preparation

- 51. Anything that is worthwhile involves some degree of preparation. Sports fans know this: not only does one have to purchase tickets, often well in advance, but he must also know the details of the game and players if he is to enjoy the sport. This is to say nothing of those avid fans that travel great distances to see their favorite team, and even arrive hours early so as to throw a tailgate party.
- 52. Now, if this is true for mere sporting events, how much more is it true for participating in the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ? We cannot simply wander in with no preparation and expect to "get something out of Mass." Venerable Fulton Sheen used to say "Do you know the reason why you don't get anything out of Mass? It is because you don't bring anything to it." The question, then, is how do we prepare for Mass, and what do we bring in our hearts?
- 53. One way to prepare for Mass over time is to read some book that helps you to understand what is happening. This can be a commentary on the Mass or the readings, some devotional book, or an explanation of Catholic liturgy. There is a suggested reading list at the end of this exhortation to help you find at least one or two things to read. Additionally, parishes can and should offer times of liturgical formation, whereby the faithful are helped to understand the sacred mysteries.
- 54. More immediately, preparation can be a simple and prayerful reading of the Mass texts and readings for a given day, perhaps the night before. The old custom of having a personal hand missal can be very helpful for this. The *Daily Roman Missal* from Midwest Theological Forum, the *Saint Joseph Weekday/Sunday Missal*, and the *Magnificat* publication are all good resources in this regard.
- 55. As we prepare we should ask the Lord for particular graces, either for ourselves of for others, so that we have an intentionality in our liturgical prayer.
- 56. We must remember in this regard the required one-hour fast before receiving Holy Communion. While one hour is not long, even such a small sacrifice of self-denial helps us to prepare, both mentally and physically, to come into the Presence of God.
- 57. I would also urge everyone to arrive at Mass early, at least by fifteen minutes. When we show up right as Mass begins, or

worse, late, we show that God is not a priority in our lives, and we have difficulty shrugging off the weight of the world as we try to enter into prayer.39 Arriving early allows us time to calm down and pray with more piety, attention, and devotion.

58. Finally, preparation for Mass also necessarily includes regular confession, especially for mortal sins. Confession is the primary sacramental way in which are souls are prepared to meet the Lord. I recommend to all a monthly confession, if not more frequently. I also at this time renew my encouragement to our priests: be generous in offering this sacrament of reconciliation. Your time spent hearing confessions will always be time well spent.

#### Thanksgiving

59. Just as we should have a proper preparation for Mass, we would do well to foster proper acts of thanksgiving afterwards. Consider for a moment the important events in life: birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, etc. In each case, gifts are given as a sign of love for those celebrating a special day. There is in these situations an unwritten and proper expectation that the person receiving the gift express gratitude, either by word of mouth or by a written thank-you note. This is simply part of having manners and virtue.

60. Again, if this applies for the important moments of our lives, why would it not apply to the most important thing we can possibly do at Mass? God Himself is choosing to gift Himself to us—there is no greater gift than Him. We ought, in justice, to thank Him for this. This can take place after Mass, either by means of spontaneous personal prayers, particular devotions like the Rosary, or specific prayers of Thanksgiving. Many saints have easily accessible prayers for after Mass.

61. This of course means we should stay after Mass, for at least a few minutes, to pray instead of rushing out at the first chance. If I may harken again to sports: some games last four to five hours, and the fans willingly stay through the whole of it. Our Lord asks us today, just as He did His disciples, "So, could you not watch with me one hour?" (Mt. 26:40). It is rare for Mass to go longer than this on a Sunday, and even if it does, this is not wasted time. Keep that time with Jesus, and let nothing rob you of that precious time with Him.

<sup>39.</sup> There are of course circumstances—from ordinary (e.g. preparing small children for Mass) to extraordinary (car accidents on the road, inclement weather, etc.)—that could make us arrive just in time or late. These are understandable. I only refer here to general situations.

#### Sunday Obligation

62. On that note, I would like to say just a couple things about attending Mass on Sunday. While daily attendance is laudable for those that are able, we are required by Church law to participate at Mass on Sundays. This is in no way the Church simply giving us another rule, but rather Her helping us to fulfill the Third Commandment of keeping the Lord's Day holy. Pope Benedict XVI reminds us in this regard:

The life of faith is endangered when we lose the desire to share in the celebration of the Eucharist and its commemoration of the paschal victory. Participating in the Sunday liturgical assembly with all our brothers and sisters, with whom we form one body in Jesus Christ, is demanded by our Christian conscience and at the same time it forms that conscience. To lose a sense of Sunday as the Lord's Day, a day to be sanctified, is symptomatic of the loss of an authentic sense of Christian freedom, the freedom of the children of God.<sup>40</sup>

**63.** The whole of Sunday, then, is meant to be given over to prayer, family, and rest from work.

#### Reception of Holy Communion

- 64. As a final practical matter, I would like to give a few important points on the actual reception of Holy Communion. Inasmuch as we receive the Living God in the Host, we must be careful to treat the Blessed Sacrament with the utmost respect. This applies first and foremost to priests and deacons who regularly handle the Sacred Species. It applies also, and no less so, to those who receive Jesus at the time of Holy Communion.
- 65. The first point is not to rush. Rushing through Mass or Communion is not only possibly sinful, it is also a dangerous occasion to drop the Host or lose particles along the way. Taking time to respectfully handle the Blessed Sacrament is of utmost importance.
- 66. The second point is for those receiving Communion. Holy Mother Church allows for two methods of reception: on the

<sup>40.</sup> Sacramentum caritatis, 73. In this same place, Pope Benedict stresses the importance of worshipping God on Sunday itself, and not allowing Saturday evening to become the norm: "while recognizing that Saturday evening, beginning with First Vespers, is already a part of Sunday and a time when the Sunday obligation can be fulfilled – we need to remember that it is Sunday itself that is meant to be kept holy, lest it end up as a day 'empty of God."

tongue or in the hands. Notice the wording here. The first is on the tongue, not in the mouth or with the teeth. The second is in the hands, one on top of the other, not on a single hand or with the fingers. This means both hands are to be free and not holding anything, so that the Host can go immediately and directly into the mouth. If both hands cannot be free, as when, for example, parents are holding a child in their arms, it would be more appropriate to receive on the tongue.

67. A helpful way to think about this is to remember that receive Communion - we humbly receive the gift of God. We do not take, grab, or mishandle it in any way. Again, considering the greatness of the gift will help each person to present themselves in the proper manner for Holy Communion.

#### Spiritual Communion

68. Inasmuch as the Communion procession is for the actual reception of the Eucharist, it is not appropriate at that time to come forward for blessings. Additionally, priests and deacons should not give blessings at this time either. If, for any reason, someone is unable to receive Communion on a given Sunday or even for a time, he should instead remain in the pew and use that time at Mass to make an Act of Spiritual Communion, keeping in mind that a blessing is given to the entire gathered assembly at the end of Mass. Saint Alphonsus Liguori has one of the best prayers for Spiritual Communion.<sup>41</sup>

#### From Mass to Life and Back

69. At the end of every Mass, we are told to "go forth." The hope in this instruction is that, strengthened by what we have heard and seen and witnessed, we will be able to go back into our everyday lives with and for Christ, even bringing Him to others we meet (cf. 1 Jn. 1:1-4). Then, as life wears us down, we can prepare to return to Mass to encounter Christ Crucified and Risen once more, where we can be nourished at His altar with that Heavenly Bread.

70. In this way, our lives become shaped by the Eucharist, and we move from one Mass to another, from one Communion to the next, each time being strengthened and renewed by His

<sup>41. &</sup>quot;My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the most Blessed Sacrament. I love You above all things and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot now receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You were already there, and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen."

Body and Blood. Let us not, therefore, let our time with Jesus become routine! Instead, please God, may it be that time we look forward to each day and each week as the time with our Blessed Lord, remembering that "we are our Beloved's and His desire is for us" (cf. Song 7:11).

#### Veneremur cernui

71. Whether it be in the psalms of daily prayer, at Christmas, on Good Friday, or in the middle of summer, we are constantly reminded to worship and adore the Lord.<sup>42</sup> It is with this theme of adoration that I would like to close the present apostolic exhortation, for it is one that has particular resonance when it comes to the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist. I have written on this topic before when I encouraged the priests and people of our diocese to make a regular Holy Hour,<sup>43</sup> and so here I would simply like to indicate a few texts that help us understand more fully what adoration is meant to be.

72. First, I would like to point us to a homily from Pope Francis, in which he reminds us of the necessity of adoring the Lord if we are to know Him personally and bring Him to others. He also prompts us toward a simplicity in our adoration of God Almighty:

All of this is only possible only if we recognize Jesus Christ, because it is He who has called us, invited us to follow His way, chosen us. To announce and give witness is possible only if we are close to Him, just like Peter, John and the other disciples are around the Risen Jesus in the Gospel passage today [Jn. 21]; there is a daily closeness with Him, and they know well who He is, the know Him. The Evangelist emphasizes that "nobody dared to ask Him: 'Who are you?', because they knew well it was the Lord" (Jn. 21:12). And this is an important point for us: to live an intense relationship with Jesus, an intimacy of dialog and life, so as to recognize Him as "the Lord." To adore Him! [...] I would

<sup>42.</sup> Psalm 95:6: "O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!" Psalm 96:9: "Worship the LORD in holy attire." At Christmas we hear "O come let us adore Him!" in "O come, all ye faithful." On Good Friday, as the Cross is processed into the church, we pray "Behold the wood of the Cross, on which hung the salvation of the world. Come let us adore." As a final example, a well-known and wonderful hymn sings "Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore him! All that has life and breath, come now with praises before him."

<sup>43.</sup> Bishop James Wall, "From the Bishop: Why Priests (and Laity!) Should Make a Holy Hour Every Day," Voice of the Southwest, Diocese of Gallup, January 14, 2020, accessed April 22, 2022, https://voiceofthesouthwest.org/from-the-bishop/fulton-sheen-holy-hour.

like all of us to pose a question to ourselves: You, me, do we adore the Lord? Do we go to God only to ask, to thank, or do we go to Him also to adore Him? What does it mean then to adore Him? It means to learn to be with Him, to stop ourselves so as to dialog with Him, feeling that His presence is the most true, the most good, the most important of all. Each of us, in our own life, in a conscious way and perhaps sometimes without realizing it, have a precise order to the things we hold more or less important. To adore the Lord means to give Him the place He should have; to adore the Lord means to affirm, believe, and not simply with words, that He alone guides our life; to adore the Lord means that we are convinced before Him that He alone is God, the God of our life, the God of our history.<sup>44</sup>

73. These words should cause all of us to pause and reflect: do I actually come to God simply to spend time with Him, or is it always and only about things I need in my life? There is of course time, place, and need for that, but we should also remember that adoring the Lord means, in the words of Saint Teresa of Avila, "taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us," or as the peasant of Ars said, simply "looking at Him who looks at us." 46

74. Next we can look to Pope Benedict XVI, who reminds us that Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is an extension of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass:

In the Eucharist, the Son of God comes to meet us and desires to become one with us; eucharistic adoration is simply the natural consequence of the eucharistic celebration, which is itself the Church's supreme act of adoration. Receiving the Eucharist means adoring him whom we receive. Only in this way do we become one with him, and are given, as it were, a foretaste of the beauty of the heavenly liturgy. The act of adoration outside Mass prolongs and intensifies all that takes place during the liturgical celebration itself. Indeed, "only in adoration can a profound and genuine reception mature. And it is precisely this personal encounter with the Lord that then strengthens the social mission contained in the Eucharist, which seeks to break down not only the walls that separate the Lord and ourselves, but also

<sup>44.</sup> Pope Francis, Homily, Mass at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, on the Third Sunday of Easter, April 14, 2013, n. 3.

<sup>45.</sup> CCC, 2709.

<sup>46.</sup> CCC, 2715.

75. Pope Benedict is here reminding us that our adoration of God will not be complete until we take time, regularly and consistently, to behold His dwelling among us in the Blessed Sacrament. As easily distracted humans, we must constantly return to the source of all goodness if we are to learn throughout our lives Who He truly is, as well as who we are in His light. This means, in addition to Sunday Mass, we should make time each week, and even each day, to visit our Lord hidden in the tabernacle. He waits there for us, longingly desiring to see our faces before Him.

76. As a last guidepost, I would like us once again to hear from the Angelic Doctor. Through the centuries, Saint Thomas Aquinas has been a sure guide for those who desire an increased devotion to the Lord Jesus in the Eucharist.<sup>48</sup> The same has been true in these pages. I therefore look to yet another line from Saint Thomas' Eucharistic hymnody, one which the Church Herself takes up both on Holy Thursday and at every occasion of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. While familiar to many, it has a profound meaning to be explored by all in our prayer.

77. Our saint teaches us to sing "Tantum ergo sacramentum veneremur cernui." Quite literally, we could say that this means "Such a great Sacrament, therefore, let us worship, falling headlong, with our faces towards the ground." A little more fluidly, we could say "Let us, then, lying prostrate, worship so great a Sacrament." In either case, it is clear that Saint Thomas is reminding us of the proper attitude to have in the presence of God, and in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament: absolute humility and utmost reverence, even to the point of falling flat on our faces out of holy fear, love, and devotion!

78. With that, I will bring this exhortation to a close. At this point I would simply like to express my great desire for each of

<sup>47.</sup> Sacramentum caritatis, 66.

<sup>48.</sup> Cf. e.g. Pope Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Studiorum ducem*, June 29, 1923, 23: "Lastly, our Doctor possessed the exceptional and highly privileged gift of being able to convert his precepts into liturgical prayers and hymns and so became the poet and panegyrist of the Divine Eucharist. For wherever the Catholic Church is to be found in the world among whatsoever nations, there she zealously uses and ever will continue to use in her sacred services the hymns composed by St. Thomas. They are the expression of the ardent supplications of a soul in prayer and at the same time a perfect statement of the doctrine of the august Sacrament transmitted by the Apostles, which is pre-eminently described as the Mystery of Faith. If these considerations are borne in mind as well as the praise bestowed by Christ Himself to which We have already referred, nobody will be surprised that St. Thomas should also have received the title of the Doctor of the Eucharist."

us in the Diocese of Gallup, from myself as your bishop to each priest, deacon, religious brother and sister, family, and individual: that in the coming months and years, and in our daily lives, each of us may learn to long for the Lord in the Eucharist just like the deer longs for flowing streams (cf. Ps. 42:2); and that with the psalmist we can truly say to the Lord in the Eucharist: "O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where no water is. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory" (Ps. 63:2-3). Let us pray for one another to this praiseworthy end!

"May the heart of Jesus
In the Most Blessed Sacrament of the altar
be praised, adored, and loved with grateful affection,
at every moment, in all the tabernacles of the world,
even to the end of time. Amen."

79. Given in Gallup, at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, this 19th day of June, in the Year of our Lord MMXXII, the thirteenth of Our Episcopate, on the solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ.

+ James S. Wall

The Most Reverend James Seán Wall Bishop of Gallup

### **Suggested Readings**

#### For Part I on the Incarnation

- Saint Athanasius, On the Incarnation of the Word
- Catechism of the Catholic Church, 456-483, 512-570
- Father Romano Guardini, The Lord
- Ludolph of Saxony, The Life of Jesus Christ
- Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 3 volumes
- Frank Sheed, To Know Christ Jesus
- Venerable Fulton Sheen, Life of Christ

#### For Part II on the Eucharist

- Benedict XVI, Sacramentum caritatis
- Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1322-1419
- Joseph Crownwood and Kenneth Howell, Mystery of the Altar: Daily Meditations on the Eucharist
- Scott Hahn, The Lamb's Supper
- Saint John Paul II, Ecclesia de Eucharistia
- Brant Pitre, Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist
- Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, God is Near Us

#### For Part III on the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1135-1199 (on the liturgy)
- Mike Aquilina, Understanding the Mass
- Father Romano Guardini, Meditations before Mass
- Father Romano Guardini, Sacred Signs
- Father Paul O'Sullivan, The Wonders of the Mass
- Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, The Spirit of the Liturgy
- Venerable Fulton Sheen, Calvary and the Mass
- Edward Sri, A Biblical Walk through the Mass

### Eucharistic Examination of Conscience

#### **Priests**

- Do I pray regularly before the Blessed Sacrament?
- Do I celebrate Mass and the sacraments according to the liturgical books?
- Do I handle the Eucharist with reverence or haphazardly?
- Do I distribute Communion reverently?
- Do I show reverence in the Presence?
- Do I allow people to receive Communion that ought not to (i.e. those in irregular situations or those expressly forbidden)?
- Do I go to confession regularly?
- Do I readily hear requested confessions, even outside scheduled times?

#### **Parishes**

- How often do we have Eucharistic Adoration? At least once a week?
- How often do we have Confession to allow people to prepare for Mass and Communion?
- Are adoration and confession at times that are reasonable and accessible for the faithful?
- Do we have a Eucharistic procession for Corpus Christi?
- Is the music we have at Mass orthodox, liturgical, sacred, scripturally sound, and conducive to prayer?

#### **Deacons**

- Do I assist at Mass and the liturgy "competently and well"?
- Do I know my role at Mass and the sacraments?
- Do I handle the Eucharist with reverence or haphazardly?
- Do I distribute Communion reverently?
- Do I go to confession regularly?

#### Families and Individuals

- Do I/we go to Mass on Sundays without fail, or do other things replace this?
- Are Sundays totally given over to prayer, family, and rest?
- Do I/we prepare for Mass by reading the readings beforehand and making the one hour fast?
- Do I/we pray (together) regularly?
- Do I/we regularly go to Confession and Adoration (together)?
- Do our children know how to be respectful and reverent in church and at Mass?

#### **Teachers and Catechists**

- Do I know, believe, and teach the Catholic teaching regarding the Eucharist?
- Do I express this faith by taking my students for visits to the Blessed Sacrament?
- Do I teach my students to behave well in church and at Mass?



## <u>Notes</u>

