

The Eucharist: The Greatest Gift of Love - Jesus' Real Presence par Excellence

~ The Teachings of our Holy Fathers ~

Pope Saint Paul VI
1963 - 1978

From the Encyclical *Mysterium Fidei* by Paul VI - Sept 3, 1965
~ Excerpts on Fostering Eucharistic Devotion ~

The Eucharist: the ineffable gift; a pledge of Jesus' immense love; and the Church's most precious treasure

¶1. The Mystery of Faith, that is, the ineffable gift of the Eucharist that the Catholic Church received from Christ, her Spouse, as a pledge of His immense love, is something that she has always devoutly guarded as her most precious treasure, and during the Second Vatican Council she professed her faith and veneration in a new and solemn declaration...

¶2. For if the sacred liturgy holds first place in the life of the Church, then the Eucharistic Mystery stands at the heart and center of the liturgy, since it is the font of life that cleanses us and strengthens us to live not for ourselves but for God and to be united to each other by the closest ties of love.

Christ Sacramentally Present in the Sacrifice of the Mass

¶35. All of us realize that there is more than one way in which Christ is present in His Church. We want to go into this very joyful subject, which the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy presented briefly, at somewhat greater length. Christ is present in His Church when she prays, since He is the one who "prays for us and prays in us and to whom we pray: He prays for us as our priest, He prays in us as our head, He is prayed to by us as our God"; and He is the one who has promised, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them." He is present in the Church as she performs her works of mercy, not just because whatever good we do to one of His least brethren we do to Christ Himself, but also because Christ is the one who performs these works through the Church and who continually helps men with His divine love. He is present in the Church as she moves along on her pilgrimage with a longing to reach the portals of eternal life, for He is the one who dwells in our hearts through faith, and who instills charity in them through the Holy Spirit whom He gives to us.

¶36. In still another very genuine way, He is present in the Church as she preaches, since the Gospel which she proclaims is the word of God, and it is only in the name of Christ, the Incarnate Word of God, and by His authority and with His help that it is preached, so that there might be "one flock resting secure in one shepherd."

¶37. He is present in His Church as she rules and governs the People of God, since her sacred power comes from Christ and since Christ, the "Shepherd of Shepherds," is present in the bishops who exercise that power, in keeping with the promise He made to the Apostles.

¶38. Moreover, Christ is present in His Church in a still more sublime manner as she offers the Sacrifice of the Mass in His name; He is present in her as she administers the sacraments. On the matter of Christ's presence in the offering of the Sacrifice of the Mass, we would like very much to call what St. John Chrysostom, overcome with awe, had to say in such accurate and eloquent words: "I wish to add something that is clearly awe-inspiring, but do not be surprised or upset. What is this? It is the same offering, no matter who offers it, be it Peter or Paul. It is the same one that Christ gave to His disciples and the same one that priests now perform: the latter is in no way inferior to the former, for it is not men who sanctify the latter, but He who sanctified the former. For just as the words which God spoke are the same as those that the priest now pronounces, so too the offering is the same." No one is unaware that the sacraments are the actions of Christ who administers them through men. And so the sacraments are holy in themselves and they pour grace into the soul by the power of Christ, when they touch the body. The Highest Kind of Presence.

*"There is... a way that surpasses all the others...
His presence in the Sacrament of the Eucharist"*

These various ways in which Christ is present fill the mind with astonishment and offer the Church a mystery for her contemplation. But 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; for it contains Christ Himself and it is "a kind of consummation of the spiritual life, and in a sense the goal of all the sacraments."

¶39. This presence is called "real" not to exclude the idea that the others are "real" too, but rather to indicate presence par excellence, because it is substantial and through it Christ becomes present whole and entire, God and man. And so it would be wrong for anyone to try to explain this manner of presence by dreaming up a so-called "pneumatic" nature of the glorious body of Christ that would be present everywhere; or for anyone to limit it to symbolism, as if this most sacred Sacrament were to consist in nothing more than an efficacious sign "of the spiritual presence of Christ and of His intimate

Sacrament were to consist in nothing more than an efficacious sign "of the spiritual presence of Christ and of His intimate union with the faithful, the members of His Mystical Body."

Daily Mass and Holy Communion

¶66. It is desirable to have the faithful in large numbers take an active part in the sacrifice of the Mass each and every day and receive the nourishment of Holy Communion with a pure and holy mind and offer fitting thanks to Christ the Lord for such a great gift. They should remember these words: "The desire of Jesus Christ and of the Church to see all the faithful approach the sacred banquet each and every day is based on a wish to have them all united to God through the Sacrament

and to have them draw from it the strength to master their passions, to wash away the lesser sins that are committed every day and to prevent the serious sins to which human frailty is subject." And they should not forget about paying a visit during the day to the Most Blessed Sacrament in the very special place of honor where it is reserved in churches in keeping with the liturgical laws, since this is a proof of gratitude and a pledge of love and a display of the adoration that is owed to Christ the Lord who is present there.

Dignity Bestowed by Eucharist

¶67. No one can fail to see that the divine Eucharist bestows an incomparable dignity upon the Christian people. For it is not just while the Sacrifice is being offered and the Sacrament is being confected, but also after the Sacrifice has been offered and the Sacrament confected—while the Eucharist is reserved in churches or oratories—that Christ is truly Emmanuel, which means "God with us." For He is in the midst of us day and night; He dwells in us with the fullness of grace and of truth. He raises the level of morals, fosters virtue, comforts the sorrowful, strengthens the weak and stirs up all those who draw near to Him to imitate Him, so that they may learn from his example to be meek and humble of heart, and to seek not their own interests but those of God. Anyone who has a special devotion to the sacred Eucharist and who tries to repay Christ's infinite love for us with an eager and unselfish love of his own, will experience and fully understand—and this will bring great delight and benefit to his soul—just how precious is a life hidden with Christ in God and just how worthwhile it is to carry on a conversation with Christ, for there is nothing more consoling here on earth, nothing more efficacious for progress along the paths of holiness.

¶68. You also realize, Venerable Brothers, that the Eucharist is reserved in churches or oratories to serve as the spiritual center of a religious community or a parish community, indeed of the whole Church and the whole of mankind, since it contains, beneath the veil of the species, Christ the invisible Head of the Church, the Redeemer of the world, the center of all hearts, "by whom all things are and by whom we exist."

¶69. Hence it is that devotion to the divine Eucharist exerts a great influence upon the soul in the direction of fostering a "social" love, in which we put the common good ahead of private good, take up the cause of the community, the parish, the universal Church, and extend our charity to the whole world because we know that there are members of Christ everywhere.

A Sign and Cause of Unity

¶70. Because, Venerable Brothers, the Sacrament of the Eucharist is a sign and cause of the unity of Christ's Mystical Body, and because it stirs up an active "ecclesial" spirit in those who are more fervent in their Eucharistic devotion, never stop urging your faithful, as they approach the Mystery of the Eucharist, to learn to embrace the Church's cause as their own, to pray to God without slackening, to offer themselves to God as an acceptable sacrifice for the peace and unity of the Church; so that all the sons of the Church may be united and feel united and there may be no divisions among them but rather unity of mind and intention, as the Apostle commands. May all those who are not yet in perfect communion with the Catholic Church and who glory in the name of Christian despite their separation from her, come as soon as possible to share with us, through the help of God's grace, in that unity of faith and communion that Christ wanted to be the distinctive mark of His disciples.

A Final Prayer

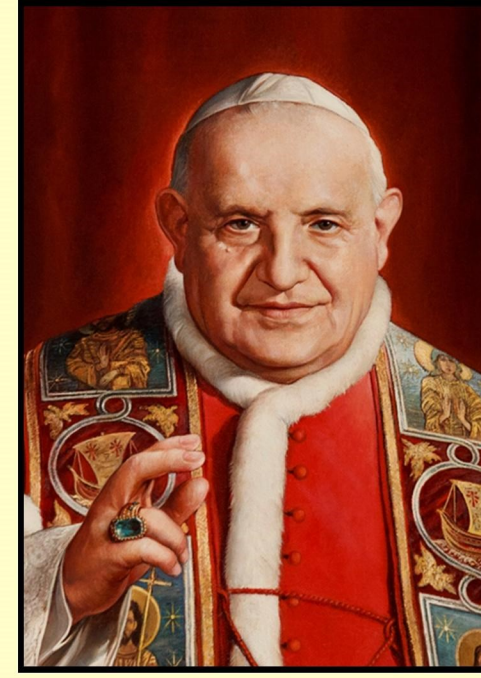
¶75. May the most blessed Virgin Mary, from whom Christ the Lord took the flesh that "is contained, offered, received" in this Sacrament under the appearances of bread and wine, and may all the saints of God and especially those who were more inflamed with ardent devotion toward the divine Eucharist, intercede with the Father of mercies so that this common belief in the Eucharist and devotion to it may give rise among all Christians to a perfect unity of communion that will continue to flourish...



Pope Saint John XXIII
1978 - 2005

Quotes on the Eucharist from the Pope's Autobiography "*Journal of a Soul*"

"Sweet Heart of my Jesus, make me love You more and more."



While Pope John XXIII did not write an Encyclical or Apostolic Letter on the Eucharist, he had a profound love for the Sacrament, the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Mother of God as reflected in his "*Journal of a Soul*"; a couple of entries of which follow:

"O Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, I would like to be filled with love for You; keep me closely united with You, may my heart be near to Yours. I want to be to You like the apostle John. O Mary of the Rosary, keep me recollected when I say these prayers of yours; bind me forever, with your rosary, to Jesus of the Blessed Sacrament. Blessed be Jesus, my love, blessed be the Immaculate Virgin Mary."

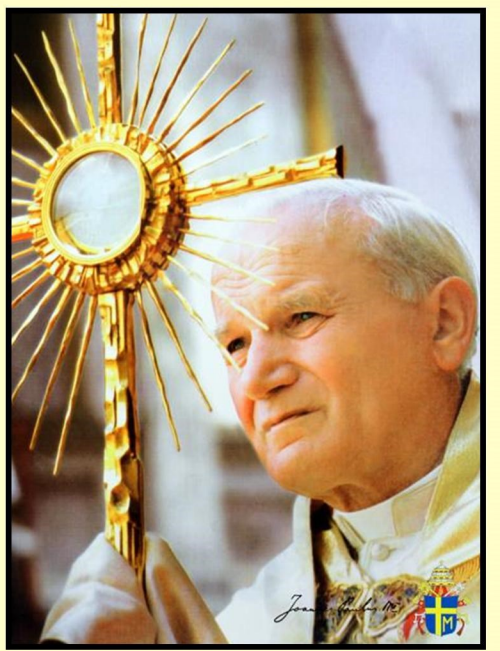
"Every time I hear anyone speak of the Sacred Heart of Jesus or of the Blessed Sacrament I feel an indescribable joy. It is as if a wave of precious memories, sweet affections and joyful hopes swept over my poor person, making me tremble with happiness and filling my soul with tenderness. These are loving appeals from Jesus who wants me wholeheartedly there, at the source of all goodness, his Sacred Heart, throbbing mysteriously behind the Eucharistic veils... I love to repeat today 'Sweet Heart of my Jesus, make me love You more and more.'"

Pope Saint John Paul II
1978 - 2005

From the Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* by John Paul II - Apr. 17, 2003
~ Excerpts from the Encyclical Conclusion ~

"In the Most Holy Eucharist... Here is the Church's treasure, the heart of the world, the pledge of the fulfillment for which each man and woman, even unconsciously, yearns."

¶59. ... Allow me, dear brothers and sisters, to share with deep emotion, as a means of accompanying and strengthening your faith, my own testimony of faith in the Most Holy Eucharist. *Ave verum corpus natum de Maria Virgine, vere passum, immolatum, in cruce pro homine!* Here is the Church's treasure, the heart of the world, the pledge of the fulfillment for which each man and woman, even unconsciously, yearns. A great and transcendent mystery, indeed, and one that taxes our mind's ability to pass beyond appearances. Here our senses fail us: *visus, tactus, gustus in te fallitur*, in the words of the hymn *Adoro Te Devote*; yet faith alone, rooted in the word of Christ handed down to us by the Apostles, is sufficient for us. Allow me, like Peter at the end of the Eucharistic discourse in John's Gospel, to say once more to Christ, in the name of the whole Church and in the name of each of you: "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (*Jn 6:68*).



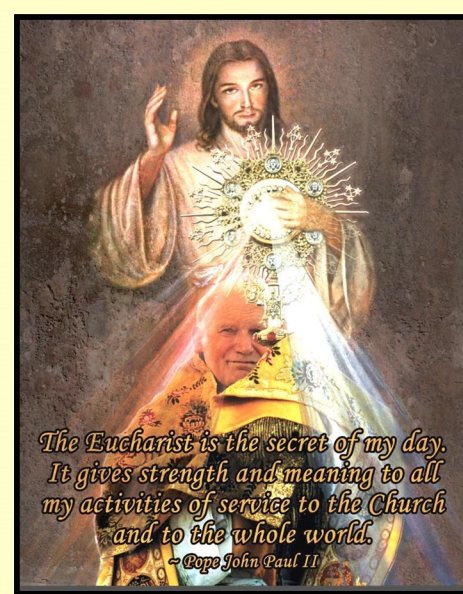
"A renewed impetus in Christian living passes through the Eucharist"

¶60. At the dawn of this third millennium, we, the children of the Church, are called to undertake with renewed enthusiasm the journey of Christian living. As I wrote in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, "it is not a matter of inventing a 'new program'. The program already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition; it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its centre in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfillment in the heavenly Jerusalem". The implementation of this program of a renewed impetus in Christian living passes through the Eucharist. Every commitment to holiness, every activity aimed at carrying out the Church's mission, every work of pastoral planning, must draw the strength it needs from the Eucharistic mystery and in turn be directed to that mystery as its culmination. In the Eucharist we have Jesus, we have his redemptive sacrifice, we have his resurrection, we have the gift of the Holy Spirit, we have adoration, obedience and love of the Father. Were we to disregard the Eucharist, how could we overcome our own deficiency?

¶61. The mystery of the Eucharist—sacrifice, presence, banquet—does not allow for reduction or exploitation; it must be experienced and lived in its integrity, both in its celebration and in the intimate converse with Jesus which takes place after receiving communion or in a prayerful moment of Eucharistic adoration apart from Mass. These are times when the Church is firmly built up and it becomes clear what she truly is: one, holy, catholic and apostolic; the people, temple and

family of God; the body and bride of Christ, enlivened by the Holy Spirit; the universal sacrament of salvation and a hierarchically structured communion.

"The treasure of the Eucharist, which the Lord places before us, impels us towards the goal of full sharing with all our brothers and sisters to whom we are joined by our common Baptism."



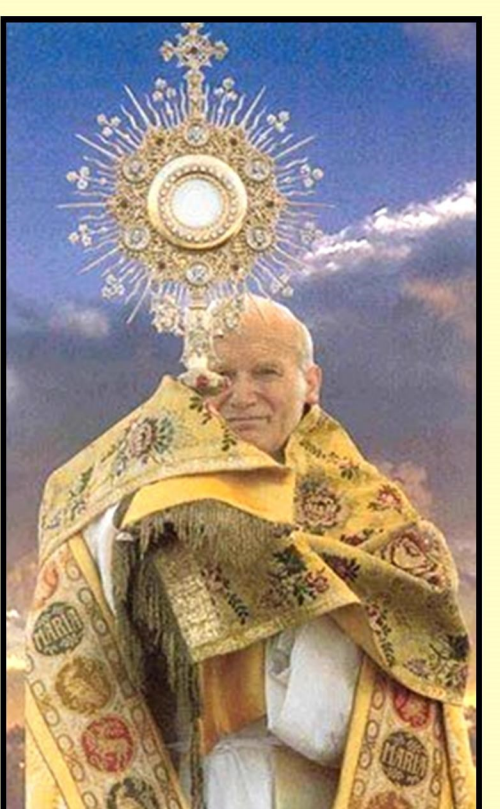
The path taken by the Church in these first years of the third millennium is also a path of renewed ecumenical commitment. The final decades of the second millennium, culminating in the Great Jubilee, have spurred us along this path and called for all the baptized to respond to the prayer of Jesus "*ut unum sint*" (*Jn 17:11*). The path itself is long and strewn with obstacles greater than our human resources alone can overcome, yet we have the Eucharist, and in its presence we can hear in the depths of our hearts, as if they were addressed to us, the same words heard by the Prophet Elijah: "Arise and eat, else the journey will be too great for you" (*1 Kg 19:7*). The treasure of the Eucharist, which the Lord places before us, impels us towards the goal of full sharing with all our brothers and sisters to whom we are joined by our common Baptism. But if this treasure is not to be squandered, we need to respect the demands which derive from its being the sacrament of communion in faith and in apostolic succession.

By giving the Eucharist the prominence it deserves, and by being careful not to diminish any of its dimensions or demands, we show that we are truly conscious of the greatness of this gift. We are urged to do so by an uninterrupted tradition, which from the first centuries on has found the Christian community ever vigilant in guarding this "treasure". Inspired by love, the Church is anxious to hand on to future generations of Christians, without loss, her faith and teaching with regard to the mystery of the Eucharist. There can be no danger of excess in our care for this mystery, for "in this sacrament is recapitulated the whole mystery of our salvation".

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¶62. Let us take our place, dear brothers and sisters, at the school of the saints, who are the great interpreters of true Eucharistic piety. In them the theology of the Eucharist takes on all the splendor of a lived reality; it becomes "contagious" and, in a manner of speaking, it "warms our hearts". Above all, let us listen to Mary Most Holy, in whom the mystery of the Eucharist appears, more than in anyone else, as a mystery of light. Gazing upon Mary, we come to know the transforming power present in the Eucharist. In her we see the world renewed in love. Contemplating her, assumed body and soul into heaven, we see opening up before us those "new heavens" and that "new earth" which will appear at the second coming of Christ. Here below, the Eucharist represents their pledge, and in a certain way, their anticipation: "Veni, Domine Iesu!" (*Rev 22:20*).

In the humble signs of bread and wine, changed into his body and blood, Christ walks beside us as our strength and our food for the journey, and he enables us to become, for everyone, witnesses of hope. If, in the presence of this mystery, reason experiences its limits, the heart, enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, clearly sees the response that is demanded, and bows low in adoration and unbounded love.



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