

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

~ The Teachings of our Holy Fathers ~

Pope Benedict XVI
2005 - 2013

Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* by Benedict XVI - Feb. 22, 2007
~ Excerpts from the Apostolic Exhortation ~

THE EUCHARIST, A MYSTERY TO BE LIVED

"As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me" (Jn 6:57)

¶70. The Lord Jesus, who became for us the food of truth and love, speaks of the gift of his life and assures us that *"if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever"* (Jn 6:51). This "eternal life" begins in us even now, thanks to the transformation effected in us by the gift of the Eucharist: *"He who eats me will live because of me"* (Jn 6:57). These words of Jesus make us realize how the mystery "believed" and "celebrated" contains an innate power making it the principle of new life within us and the form of our Christian existence. By receiving the body and blood of Jesus Christ we become sharers in the divine life in an ever more adult and conscious way. Here too, we can apply Saint Augustine's words, in his Confessions, about the eternal Logos as the food of our souls. Stressing the mysterious nature of this food, Augustine imagines the Lord saying to him: "I am the food of grown men; grow, and you shall feed upon me; nor shall you change me, like the food of your flesh, into yourself, but you shall be changed into me." It is not the Eucharistic food that is changed into us, but rather we who are mysteriously transformed by it. Christ nourishes us by uniting us to himself; "he draws us into himself."...



The all-encompassing effect of Eucharistic worship

¶71. Christianity's new worship includes and transfigures every aspect of life: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31). Christians, in all their actions, are called to offer true worship to God. Here the intrinsically Eucharistic nature of Christian life begins to take shape. The Eucharist, since it embraces the concrete, everyday existence of the believer, makes possible, day by day, the progressive transfiguration of all those called by grace to reflect the image of the Son of God (cf. Rom 8:29ff). There is nothing authentically human — our thoughts and affections, our words and deeds — that does not find in the sacrament of the Eucharist the form it needs to be lived to the full. Here we can see the full human import of the radical newness brought by Christ in the Eucharist: the worship of God in our lives cannot be relegated to something private and individual, but tends by its nature to permeate every aspect of our existence. Worship pleasing to God thus becomes a new way of living our whole life, each particular moment of which is lifted up, since it is lived as part of a relationship with Christ and as an offering to God. The glory of God is the living man (cf. 1 Cor 10:31). And the life of man is the vision of God.

The Eucharist and the lay faithful

¶79. In Christ, Head of his Body, the Church, all Christians are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people he claims for his own, to declare his wonderful deeds" (1 Pet 2:9). The Eucharist, as a mystery to be "lived", meets each of us as we are, and makes our concrete existence the place where we experience daily the radical newness of the Christian life. The Eucharistic sacrifice nourishes and increases within us all that we have already received at Baptism, with its call to holiness, and this must be clearly evident from the way individual Christians live their lives. Day by day we become "a worship pleasing to God" by living our lives as a vocation. Beginning with the liturgical assembly, the sacrament of the Eucharist itself commits us, in our daily lives, to doing everything for God's glory.

And because the world is "the field" (Mt 13:38) in which God plants his children as good seed, the Christian laity, by virtue of their Baptism and Confirmation, and strengthened by the Eucharist, are called to live out the radical newness brought by Christ wherever they find themselves. They should cultivate a desire that the Eucharist have an ever deeper effect on their daily lives, making them convincing witnesses in the workplace and in society at large. I encourage families in particular to draw inspiration and strength from this sacrament. The love between man and woman, openness to life, and the raising of children are privileged spheres in which the Eucharist can reveal its power to transform life and give it its full meaning. The Church's pastors should unfailingly support, guide and encourage the lay faithful to live fully their vocation to holiness within this world which God so loved that he gave his Son to become its salvation (cf. Jn 3:16).

The Eucharist and moral transformation

¶82. In discovering the beauty of the Eucharistic form of the Christian life, we are also led to reflect on the moral energy it provides for sustaining the authentic freedom of the children of God. Here I wish to take up a discussion that took place during the Synod about the connection between the Eucharistic form of life and moral transformation. Pope John Paul II stated that the moral life "has the value of a 'spiritual worship'" (Rom 12:1; cf. Phil 3:3), flowing from and nourished by that inexhaustible source of holiness and glorification of God which is found in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist: by sharing in the sacrifice of the Cross, the Christian partakes of Christ's self-giving love and is equipped and committed to live this same charity in all his thoughts and deeds". In a word, "worship" itself, Eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented"

This appeal to the moral value of spiritual worship should not be interpreted in a merely moralistic way. It is before all else the joy-filled discovery of love at work in the hearts of those who accept the Lord's gift, abandon themselves to him and thus find true freedom. The moral transformation implicit in the new worship instituted by Christ is a heartfelt yearning to respond to the Lord's love with one's whole being, while remaining ever conscious of one's own weakness. This is clearly reflected in the Gospel story of Zacchaeus (cf. Lk 19:1-10). After welcoming Jesus to his home, the tax collector is completely changed: he decides to give half of his possessions to the poor and to repay fourfold those whom he had defrauded. The moral urgency born of welcoming Jesus into our lives is the fruit of gratitude for having experienced the Lord's unmerited closeness.

The social implications of the Eucharistic mystery

¶89. The union with Christ brought about by the Eucharist also brings a newness to our social relations: "this sacramental 'mysticism' is social in character."

Indeed, "union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become, his own." The relationship between the Eucharistic mystery and social commitment must be made explicit. The Eucharist is the sacrament of communion between brothers and sisters who allow

themselves to be reconciled in Christ, who made of Jews and pagans one people, tearing down the wall of hostility which divided them (cf. Eph 2:14). Only this constant impulse towards reconciliation enables us to partake worthily of the Body and Blood of Christ (cf. Mt 5:23-24)...

¶92. Finally, to develop a profound Eucharistic spirituality that is also capable of significantly affecting the fabric of society, the Christian people, in giving thanks to God through the Eucharist, should be conscious that they do so in the name of all creation, aspiring to the sanctification of the world and working intensely to that end. The Eucharist itself powerfully illuminates human history and the whole cosmos. In this sacramental perspective we learn, day by day, that every ecclesial event is a kind of sign by which God makes himself known and challenges us. The Eucharistic form of life can thus help foster a real change in the way we approach history and the world...

CONCLUSION

¶94. Dear brothers and sisters, the Eucharist is at the root of every form of holiness, and each of us is called to the fullness of life in the Holy Spirit. How many saints have advanced along the way of perfection thanks to their Eucharistic devotion!...

This most holy mystery thus needs to be firmly believed, devoutly celebrated and intensely lived in the Church. Jesus' gift of himself in the sacrament which is the memorial of his passion tells us that the success of our lives is found in our participation in the Trinitarian life offered to us truly and definitively in him. The celebration and worship of the Eucharist enable us to draw near to God's love and to persevere in that love until we are united with the Lord whom we love. The offering of our lives, our fellowship with the whole community of believers and our solidarity with all men and women are essential aspects of that logic of love, spiritual worship, holy and pleasing to God (cf. Rom 12:1), which transforms every aspect of our human existence, to the glory of God... I exhort the lay faithful, and families in particular, to find ever anew in the sacrament of Christ's love the energy needed to make their lives an authentic sign of the presence of the risen Lord. I ask all consecrated men and women to show by their Eucharistic lives the splendor and the beauty of belonging totally to the Lord.



Pope Francis
2013 - Present

**Excerpts from Pope's Homily on the Eucharist
on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi – June 19, 2014**

"The Body of Christ is the bread of the last times"

Besides physical hunger, man experiences another hunger, a hunger that cannot be satiated with ordinary food. It's a hunger for life, a hunger for love, a hunger for eternity. And the sign of manna — like the entire experience of Exodus — also contains in itself this dimension: it was the symbol of a food that satisfies this deep human hunger. Jesus gives us this food, rather, He himself is the living bread that gives life to the world (cf. Jn 6:51). His Body is the true food in the form of bread; his Blood is the true drink in the form of wine. It isn't simple nourishment to satisfy the body, like manna; the Body of Christ is the bread of the last times, capable of giving life, eternal life, because this bread is made of love.



The Eucharist communicates the Lord's love for us: a love so great that it nourishes us with Himself; a freely given love, always available to every person who hungers and needs to regenerate his own strength. To live the experience of faith means to allow oneself to be nourished by the Lord and to build one's own existence not with material goods but with the reality that does not perish: the gifts of God, his Word and his Body.

"The food that truly nourishes and satiates us is only that which the Lord gives us!"

If we look around, we realize that there are so many offers of food which do not come from the Lord and which appear to be more satisfying. Some nourish themselves with money, others with success and vanity, others with power and pride. But the food that truly nourishes and satiates us is only that which the Lord gives us! The food the Lord offers us is different from other food, and perhaps it doesn't seem as flavorful to us as certain other dishes the world offers us. So we dream of other dishes, like the Hebrews in the desert, who longed for the meat and onions they ate in Egypt, but forgot that they had eaten those meals at the table of slavery. In those moments of temptation, they had a memory, but a sick memory, a selective memory. A slave memory, not a free one.

We, today, may ask ourselves: what about me? Where do I want to eat? At which table to I want to be nourished? At the Lord's table? Or do I dream about eating flavorful foods, but in slavery? Moreover, we may ask ourselves: what do I recall? The Lord who saves me, or the garlic and onions of slavery? Which recollection satiates my soul?

The Father tells us: "I fed you with manna, which you did not know" (Dt 8:2-3). Let us recover this memory. This is the task, to recover that memory. And let us learn to recognize the false bread that deceives and corrupts, because it comes from selfishness, from self-reliance and from sin.

**Excerpts from Pope's Angelus on the Eucharist
Solemnity of Corpus Christi – June 7, 2015**

"It is not enough to state that Jesus is present in the Eucharist"



The Gospel presents the narrative of the institution of the Eucharist, performed by Jesus during the Last Supper in the Upper Room in Jerusalem. On the eve of his redeeming death on the Cross, He fulfilled what had been foretold: "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... He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him" (Jn 6:51, 56). Jesus takes the bread in his hands and says "Take; this is my body" (Mk 14:22). With this gesture and with these words, He assigns to the bread a function which is no longer simply

that of physical nutrition, but that of making his Person present in the midst of the community of believers.

The Last Supper represents the culmination of Christ's entire life. It is not only the anticipation of his sacrifice which will be rendered on the Cross, but also the synthesis of a life offered for the salvation of the whole of humanity. Therefore, it is not enough to state that Jesus is present in the Eucharist, but one must see in it the presence of a life given and partake in it. When we take and eat that Bread, we are associated into the life of Jesus, we enter into communion with Him, we commit to achieve communion among ourselves, to transform our life into a gift, especially to the poorest.

Today's feast evokes this message of solidarity and urges us to welcome the intimate invitation to conversion and to service, love and forgiveness. It urges us to become, with our life, imitators of that which we celebrate in the Liturgy. The Christ, who nourishes us under the consecrated species of bread and wine, is the same One who comes to us in the everyday happenings; He is in the poor person who holds out his hand, in the suffering one who begs for help, in the brother or sister who asks for our availability and awaits our welcome. He is in the child who knows nothing about Jesus or salvation, who does not have faith. He is in every human being, even the smallest and the defenseless.

The Eucharist, source of love for the life of the Church, is the school of charity and solidarity. Those who are nourished by the Bread of Christ cannot remain indifferent to those who do not have their daily bread. Today, we know it is an ever more serious problem.

**The Pope's Angelus on the Eucharist
Sunday – August 16, 2015**

"That we may become one with Him"

These Sundays the Liturgy is offering us, from the Gospel according to John, Jesus' discourse on the Bread of Life, which He himself is, just as the Sacrament of the Eucharist is. Today's passage (Jn 6:51-58) presents the final part of this discussion, and refers to several of those who were scandalized because Jesus said: "he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn 6:54). The listeners' astonishment is understandable; Jesus in fact uses the typical manner of the prophets to provoke questions in people — and also in us — and, ultimately, to provoke a decision. First of all, regarding the questions: what is meant by "eat the flesh and drink the blood" of Jesus? Is it just an image, a figure of speech, a symbol, or does it indicate something real? In order to answer, one must divine what is happening in Jesus' heart as he breaks the bread for the hungry crowd. Knowing that he will have to die on the cross for us, Jesus identifies himself with that bread broken and shared, and it becomes for him the "sign" of the Sacrifice that awaits him. This process culminates in the Last Supper, where the bread and wine truly become his Body and his Blood. It is the Eucharist, which Jesus leaves us with a specific purpose: that we may become one with Him. Indeed he says: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him" (v. 56). That "abiding": Jesus in us and we in Jesus. Communion is assimilation: partaking of Him, we become as He is. This requires our "yes", our adherence of faith.



"Heaven begins precisely in this communion with Jesus"

Regarding the Holy Mass, one sometimes hears this objection: "Of what use is Mass? I go to Church when I feel like it, and I pray better in solitude". But the Eucharist is not a private prayer or a beautiful spiritual exercise, it is not a simple commemoration of what Jesus did at the Last Supper. We say, in order to fully understand, that the Eucharist is "a remembrance", that is, a gesture which renders real and present the event of Jesus' death and resurrection: the bread really is his Body given up for us, the wine really is his Blood poured out for us.

The Eucharist is Jesus himself who gives himself entirely to us. Nourishing ourselves of Him and abiding in Him through Eucharistic Communion, if we do so with faith, transforms our life, transforms it into a gift to God and to our brothers and sisters. Nourishing ourselves of that "Bread of Life" means entering into harmony with the heart of Christ, assimilating his choices, his thoughts, his behavior. It means entering into a dynamism of love and becoming people of peace, people of forgiveness, of reconciliation, of sharing in solidarity. The very things that Jesus did.

Jesus concludes his discourse with these words: "he who eats this bread will live for ever" (Jn 6:58). Yes, living in real communion with Jesus on this earth lets us pass from death to life. Heaven begins precisely in this communion with Jesus.

In Heaven Mary our Mother is already waiting for us — we celebrated this mystery yesterday. May she obtain for us the grace to nourish ourselves with faith in Jesus, Bread of Life.

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