

Understanding the Eucharist The Greatest Need in the Church Today

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I believe the place to begin this [lecture] is to justify the title. We are using the superlative; the greatest need in the Church today is "Understanding the Eucharist."

How can we justify this superlative? On two grounds:

- On the grounds of the Eucharist; and,
- On the grounds of Understanding.

What are we saying?

- We are saying the most comprehensive mystery of our Catholic faith is in the Holy Eucharist. To believe in the Eucharist is to believe in every other revealed mystery of Christianity.
- We are saying the most important duty we have in life as believing Catholics is to understand what we believe.

Remember the parable Christ gave to His Disciples about the sower who went out to sow his seed. It was all good seed. But it was not all good ground on which the seeds fell. And the first fruitless ground was the pathway. Christ explained what this means. The seeds falling on the pathway are those who receive the Word of God into their hearts but fail to understand it. So what happens? Like the birds of the air that pick up the loose seed from the hard pathway, the devil steals the word of God from the hearts of those who do not understand what God has revealed to them. Not to understand what we are supposed to believe is to invite the evil spirit to rob us of the faith we once possessed.

We return to our subject: "Understanding The Eucharist: The Greatest Need In The Church Today."

My plan for this [lecture] is to cover the following areas of an immense subject.

1. The Catholic Church is undergoing the greatest crisis in its two millennia of existence.
2. It is essentially a crisis of faith. At the root of this crisis of faith is the mystery of the Eucharist.
3. In order to benefit from this crisis, there must be a widespread growth in understanding the Holy Eucharist.
4. This growth in understanding the Eucharist will open the greatest renaissance in the history of Christianity.

GREATEST CRISIS EVER

There is no need to prove - it is enough to illustrate the Catholic Church is going through the greatest crisis of her 2000 years of ecclesiastical existence.

- The exact figures we do not have, but a fair estimate is that some 60,000 priests have left the active priesthood throughout the world since the close of the Second Vatican Council.
- Religious institutes, especially in the Western world, have secularized on a scale unprecedented in any previous century.
- Homicide has been legalized in most of the countries of the world, especially the murder of the unborn. But instead of the strong witness to the sanctity of unborn human life by Catholics, many professed Catholics even in high places - either openly defend abortions or cleverly disguise their homicidal intentions behind legal rhetoric or political jargon.
- When Pope Paul VI, in 1968, published *Humanae Vitae* condemning contraception, the Catholic hierarchy of most the world met in solemn session - only about half of the bishops supported the Bishop of Rome in his teaching on the grave sinfulness of contraception.

ROOT OF THE CRISIS

It is not my business to have to prove the root of this crisis in the Catholic Church is a crisis of faith; or that it is a crisis of faith in the Eucharist.

I will only say two things:

1. In the last analysis, a person is a Catholic because of what he or she believes with the mind. All the other virtues in our lives are only as firm as our faith is strong.
2. The Eucharist is the mystery of our faith. We believe in any revealed truth:
 - only as intelligently,
 - only as entirely,
 - only as clearly,
 - only as firmly,
 - only as constantly,
 - only as courageously,
 - as we believe in the Holy Eucharist.

Faith in the Eucharist is the barometer of our Catholic faith. It is the test of our Catholicism. It is the norm of our commitment to everything else which Christ has revealed.

It is no wonder when, as described by St. John, Christ foretold the Holy Eucharist as His living Body and Blood many of His own Disciples walked away. "This is intolerable language," they declared. "Who can accept it?" Christ then turned to His Apostles and asked them. "Do you want to leave?" To which Peter answered, "Lord to whom shall we go. You have the words of eternal life."

This has been the verdict of the Church's history. Every major break in our unity has been over the meaning of the Eucharist. No wonder, in 1600, St. Robert Bellarmine wrote there were over 200 different Protestant interpretations of Christ's words. "This is my Body ... This is my Blood."

CRISIS OF FAITH TODAY

Most Catholics today know there are some strange notions about the Eucharist in professedly Catholic circles. But I am afraid most of us do not realize how deep and devastating these errors have become. One writer after another is telling the people the Eucharist is not a reality. Books are being published saying just this. Nominally Catholic magazines are claiming the Holy Eucharist, in their vocabulary, is not a thing,

I thought and prayed about whether I should quote at length from just one priest-author to illustrate the rise of this disastrous heresy. What follows are his exact words. The quotation is several paragraphs long but must be exposed:

"The Eucharist is not a thing, and think the only way Catholics can come to appreciate that is by emphasizing some parts of the Eucharist that may have been forgotten. I'm convinced of this because even though lay people participate in the liturgy today, I'm not so sure they've stopped thinking of the Eucharist as a thing.

The gathering is necessary for Eucharist. Eucharist is not a private affair. We Catholics share bread and wine with someone, which is why I believe the ordained priest should always receive bread and wine from another Eucharistic minister. It is in the gathering that we remind one another that one person does not make the Lord present. The Risen Lord is present. We gather and recognize.

Presiders must change the wording of prayers that now keep telling us that the spiritual is separate from us, that God is out there somewhere and needs to be brought in with the right words to make us holy. Presiders should not hold up the bread and wine during the Consecration but wait until it is time to take, break, and share...

To begin to see ourselves as Eucharist means that we must stop saying we "receive" the sacraments. And we must do away with the practice of priests who are not participating in the Mass coming in to help distribute Communion...

Catholics gather on weekends to celebrate the remembering. And to remind ourselves that we are to be Eucharist by becoming bread and wine, broken and poured out. "Do this to remember me." We gather on weekends to remind ourselves that "this" is never a thing out of a church vending machine but what we are to be. We are to be reasons for others to celebrate."

I make no apologies for this long quotation. What we are being told is two thousand years of Catholic teaching has been a myth. These quoted statements are from a nationally circulating, allegedly Catholic, periodical. To accept what we are being told is to deny there is a Catholic Church. Why? Because without the Eucharist as a reality, there is no priesthood instituted by Christ, there is no sacrament of Holy Orders. In a word, there is no visible Church which Christ founded on the Apostles whom He ordained at the Last Supper in order that they might consecrate bread and wine to become the

living Jesus Christ on earth in the Holy Eucharist.

Is it any wonder an estimated seventy-five percent of the Catholic people no longer assist at Sunday Mass. In the diocese to which the priest-author whom we have quoted lives, the drop in Sunday Mass attendance is estimated at about ninety percent.

Our focus in this [lecture] is on "Understanding the Eucharist: the Greatest Need in the Church Today." I am speaking to believing Catholics who know the Eucharist is a thing. Indeed, it is not only something but Someone. It is Jesus Christ. Those of us who still have this faith must protect it from the assaults against divinely revealed truth.

*This great need to understand the Eucharist must begin with understanding the Eucharist is Christ Himself, now on earth, in our midst. **Not to know this is not to be a Catholic.***

ERROR AND EVIL IN THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

As we get closer to the center of our subject we remind ourselves nothing in the world ever merely happens. There is no such thing as chance with God.

In the words of St. Paul, "Where sin has abounded, there grace will even more abound."

What are we saying? We are saying the widespread breakdown of Eucharistic faith in once strong Catholic countries is God's way of telling us there must be a massive, monumental, momentous revival of faith in the Eucharist. This is the necessary prelude to the reformation of the Catholic Church. As we enter the third millennium of Christianity, our focus should be on growing in our understanding of the Holy Eucharist.

What precisely are we to grow in our understanding of the Eucharist?

- *We are to grow in our understanding of who* is present in the Blessed Sacrament; who offers Himself in the Mass and whom we receive in Holy Communion.
- *We are to grow in our understanding of why* the Eucharist is the Presence Sacrament, the Sacrifice Sacrament, and the Communion Sacrament of Jesus Christ.
- *We are to grow in our understanding of how* we are to become apostles of the Eucharist in our day.

UNDERSTANDING OF WHO

- Is present,
- Is offering Himself,
- Is received.

It is Jesus Christ. We do not qualify. It is the selfsame Jesus present in the Holy Eucharist who was conceived at Nazareth, born in Bethlehem, died on Calvary, rose on Easter Sunday, and ascended into Heaven on Ascension Thursday.

Certainly Jesus is in heaven. But He is also on earth. The whole Christ, with His Humanity and Divinity, with His eyes and lips and hands and feet, and Sacred Heart.

Jesus Christ is now offering Himself in every Mass. He is on earth, with His human body and blood, and human will. The essence of sacrifice is in the will.

Jesus Christ is now received in Holy Communion. We now receive Him no less than the Apostles did in the Last Supper. He is now glorified. His body enters our body, [His blood courses through our veins,] His soul enters our soul. This is no mere symbolism or metaphor. It is real, really.

UNDERSTANDING OF WHY

- He is present,
- He offers,
- He comes.

He is present in order to be near us, with us, next to us, present to us. He wants to show us how much He loves us. He wants to teach us:

- Humility,
- Patience,
- Obedience,
- Silence,
- Selfless charity.

He wants us to come to Him . . .

He offers Himself in the Mass in order to give us the graces we need to surrender our wills to His. These are the distinctive graces of the Sacrament of the Mass. They are graces of:

- Self-surrender,
- Self-abandonment,
- Self-immolation

He comes to us in Holy Communion in order to give us the graces of selfless charity. It is not coincidental Christ did two things at the Last Supper.

- He gave us the New Commandment - love one another as He loves us, even unto death;
- He instituted the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

These two go together. We cannot practice selfless charity without receiving Holy Communion.

UNDERSTANDING HOW

We are finally to grow in our understanding of how we are to become apostles of the Eucharist in our day.

1. What is an apostle of the Eucharist?

An apostle of the Eucharist is one who is personally very devoted to the Holy Eucharist:

- as Real Presence,
- as Sacrifice of the Mass,
- as Holy Communion.

2. An apostle of the Eucharist is one who realizes there is no solution to the problems of the world or the problems of the Church except through the Holy Eucharist.
3. An apostle of the Eucharist is one who does everything in his or her power, by word and example, to promote a deeper faith in the Eucharist as Real Presence, Sacrifice of the Mass and Holy Communion.
4. An apostle of the Eucharist prays for a deeper understanding of the Blessed Sacrament, especially among priests.
5. An apostle of the Eucharist lives a life of reparation for those who neglect the Holy Eucharist, or desert the Holy Eucharist, or distort the Holy Eucharist.
6. An apostle of the Eucharist is zealous to convert or re-convert people to the Catholic faith, as the faith which believes Jesus Christ is present on earth, offering Himself in this Holy Sacrifice, and available to us in the Sacrament of Communion.
7. An apostle of the Eucharist is a martyr for the Eucharist. No matter what price has to be paid, an apostle of the Eucharist is ready to pay it as a witness to his faith in Jesus Christ, living in our midst today.
8. An apostle of the Eucharist simply expects the Eucharistic Christ to work whatever miracles need to be performed in our day, especially miracles of conversion:
 - Conversion of unbelievers to believers in Jesus Christ.
9. Conversion of sinners, even of murderers, to followers of Christ.

But an apostle of the Eucharist has no illusions. There will be opposition. "Have confidence," Jesus tells us, "I have overcome the world."

PRAYER

"Lord Jesus, in the Holy Eucharist, we believe You are with us We believe You are inviting us to join with You in conquering the world for Your heavenly Father.

But we are blind. Enlighten our minds. We are weak. Strengthen our hearts. Make us Apostles of the Eucharist in our day; make us Apostles of Life through the Eucharist. Help us to understand the Eucharist now on earth by faith - as a prelude to seeing You, our Incarnate God, face to face, for all eternity. Amen."