

THE HOLY EUCHARIST: OUR STRENGTH

PASTORAL LETTER 2019

INTRODUCTION

JOYFUL THANKS:

1. We offer joyful thanks to God the Almighty through whose grace and innumerable blessings we are able to once again reflect on another very important aspect of our faith as Catholic Christians. Last year we reflected on the *Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary as our Mother*. The preceding years we reflected on some aspects of the beatitudes namely *Blessed are the Peacemakers* and *Blessed are the Merciful*. We remain very grateful for the warm reception my past pastoral letters have enjoyed. May the contents continue to aid our journey through time to God's eternal Kingdom.

2. Whenever we devote some precious time to faith-reflection, one constant is the marvel of God's gift evident in his merciful love and the impulse to praise and thank Him. For us in the Archdiocese of Onitsha, we have so many reasons to join the chorus of angels in praising and thanking God for the past year. We thank Him that our father in the Catholic faith, His Eminence, Francis Cardinal Arinze celebrated the 60th anniversary of his priestly ordination. It was an occasion to express profound gratitude to God for the gift of Cardinal Arinze to our local Church, to our universal Church, and to our Nation. The same year, the Archdiocese was grieved at the death of Rev. Father Charles Ebele, the first priest to die by drowning in our riverine apostolate. We are however consoled that like Christ Jesus, Father Ebele offered his youthful life for the spread of God's Kingdom and the well-being of the children of God in his parish. May he rest in perfect peace in the Lord. We were happy that after days of sorrow, anxiety and profound prayer, we were able to recover his body, and bury him among his brother-priests. We thank God for all the sacrifices that our priests continue to make in evangelizing the riverine and other difficult areas of our diocese; and we live with the assurance that theirs is a sacrifice that is pleasing to God. To Our God be joyful praise.

3. The Archdiocese has also progressed relatively in its preparations to build a University. The proposed *Shanahan University* has succeeded in drawing up all the basic and necessary documents for take-off. It is now about to face the next challenge namely to start the construction of physical structures for the University. We are grateful to those who have been laboring to make this project a reality. We thank all who are giving us their support, especially during the stakeholders' meetings at Abuja, Lagos and Onitsha. We pray God to bless and reward all of them in a way that only He can do.

4. Given her mission from the Lord, the Church cannot play a second fiddle in providing quality education to God's children in our nation. Again, given the general state of education in our country, we have an added challenge to appropriate and show the light. Doing so is an invaluable investment in the future of our nation and especially our young ones. Education is an area in which

any nation that has hope for the future cannot afford to fail. Through the Proposed Shanahan University, the Archdiocese of Onitsha intends to contribute her quota to quality tertiary education in Nigeria. Again, our *St. Charles Borromeo College of Nursing* has taken off and matriculated/capped her first set of students last year. To God be all glory and thanksgiving.

5. As Christians we live in a nation whose continued existence and even any meaningful progress is really owed to the mercy of God. Our country is one which in the past few years has experienced untold and severe hardship, economically, socially and politically. We appear to be a nation constantly on the brink of collapse which somehow manages to trudge on and sometimes registers some positive signs. In the past few weeks, the nation was able to organize yet another democratic election which gradually but surely entrenches our democratic tradition. Imperfect as the election is deemed to be, we should thank God that we were able to organize such a massive action with over 80 million registered voters. Our challenge is to try to improve our democratic system as we progress in time. It is notable that over and over again the nation witnesses huge discontentment among contestants both in the party primaries and the actual elections. But we must keep before our consciousness the challenge of handing over much improved system to our young ones and future generations.

THE HOLY EUCHARIST OUR STRENGTH: MOTIVATION AND CHOICE OF TOPIC

6. Our choice of theme for reflection this year is somewhat out of the track of what was done in the past few years of my episcopate. In the past we chose to reflect on some aspects of our Christian faith that represent Christian values that are very useful to human well-being and progress. We also reflected on aspects of our life as Catholics which the Supreme Pontiff has brought up to the Universal Church for emphasis and deepening. This year we have chosen to cast a view on the sacramental life of the Church. It is therefore most fitting that we start with the sacraments of initiation, and more with what we can call the sacrament of all the sacraments: *The Holy Eucharist*. You are therefore invited to join me in this reflection which explores the greatest of God's gift to humankind, and expresses one of the greatest proofs of God's eternal, fatherly and providential care for his earthly children – the gift of Jesus Christ himself in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist.

7. The topic of our reflection is: The Holy Eucharist Our Strength. The Holy Eucharist, is the gift that Jesus Christ makes of himself, thus revealing to us God's infinite love for every man and woman (Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 1). In the Sacrament of the Eucharist, the Saviour...continues to offer himself to humanity as the source of divine life (cf. John Paul II, *Tertio Millenio Adveniente*, no. 55). The Holy Eucharist gives us life, it sustains the divine life in us, it is our strength.

CHAPTER ONE

8. THE EUCHARIST: A MYSTERY OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

The Eucharist is a “Mystery of Faith” par excellence as Pope Benedict XVI reminds us in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 6. It is the sum and summary of our faith (CCC, no. 1327).

A mystery is a reality or truth revealed by God which surpasses all human understanding.

During the Eucharistic celebration, with the words “the mystery of faith”, spoken by the priest immediately after the words of consecration, the priest proclaims the mystery being celebrated and expresses his wonder before the substantial change of bread and wine into the body and blood of the Lord Jesus, a reality which surpasses all human understanding (*Sacramentum Caritatis* no. 6).

With the above words Pope Benedict introduced his teaching on the Holy Eucharist as a mystery to be believed. However, since God has given the human person the gift of reason which helps him to make sense out of mysteries, we shall attempt some definitions and explanations of the Eucharist to help us appreciate this great gift.

9. DEFINITION AND NOTION OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST

The Eucharist is the very sacrifice of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus which he instituted to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until his return in glory. Thus he entrusted to his Church this memorial of his Death and Resurrection. It is a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet, in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us (cf. CCC 1322 – 1323).

The Holy Eucharist is a Sacrifice and a Sacrament. It is a gift of love from Christ which typifies the salvation mystery which Christ wrought for his own. He expresses his love by endowing the Church with the gift of self. This self-gift, which proves that love is greater than death, constitutes the identity and value of Christ to the Church. He gave himself unreservedly for the good of his bride and this gift came to a definitive point on the cross where he offered himself willingly to the Father in total obedience and filial devotion.

10. The Eucharist encapsulates the whole of salvation history and mystery – precisely because in, and through it, the Church celebrates the saving events from his Incarnation to his Resurrection in glory. It offers the epistemology to Christian life by being the pedagogy for divine love. In the Eucharist, Christ convokes a people, who by offering the sacrifice of praise, live in thanksgiving and celebrate the providence of God.

The Church believes and teaches that the Holy Eucharist is the body and blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ under the appearance of bread and wine. It is the greatest and holiest of all the sacraments instituted by Christ because it does not merely give grace to those who receive it worthily but it contains the Author and Source of all graces, Jesus Christ Himself. The Fathers of the Vatican Council II tell us that the Holy Eucharist, “contains the Church’s entire spiritual wealth: Christ Himself, our Passover and Living Bread” (*Presbyteriorum Ordinis*, no. 5). The Council also teaches that, at the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic

sacrifice of his Body and Blood in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the ages...(cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* no. 47). The 1983 code of Canon Law reminds us that in the Holy Eucharist Christ is offered and received, it is a sacrament by which the Church continually lives and grows, the sacrifice of the cross is perpetuated through the ages, it is the source and summit of all Christian life and worship, indeed all the other sacraments and all the ecclesiastical works of the apostolate are closely connected with and ordered to it (cf. *Canon* 897).

11. Francis Cardinal Arinze explains it this way: “All the sacraments are linked with the Holy Eucharist and are centred on it. Baptism incorporates us into the Church and gives us power to offer Christian worship, especially the Holy Eucharist. Confirmation binds us more intimately to the Church and endows us with the Holy Spirit for greater commitment in Christian life and witness, and therefore regarding the font of the Christian life which is the Holy Eucharist. Penance restores to us lost innocence, purifies us of our sins mortal and venial, and prepares us for participation at the Eucharistic Sacrifice and Sacrament. In the Anointing of the Sick, the Church commends the sick or the dying to the suffering and glorified Lord Jesus and exhorts them to associate themselves in their suffering with the passion and death of Christ. The reception of the Holy Eucharist generally follows this sacrament. Christian spouses in the sacrament of matrimony, receive grace to found Christian families and give to the Church new Eucharistic Worshipers or members of the common priesthood of the faithful. Holy Orders gives to the whole Church the sacred ministers of the Holy Eucharist.”(cf. F.A. Arinze, *The Holy Eucharist Our Life*, 1981, no. 3).

From all the above we can affirm that the Eucharist builds the Church as the Church celebrates the Eucharist. The Church is nourished at the table of the Eucharist. The Eucharist gives life and strength to the Church. It is the source and summit of Ecclesial life.

12. VARIOUS NAMES OF THE SACRAMENT

The richness and depth of the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist are inexhaustible no wonder it can hardly be expressed by just one name. This explains why the sacrament has been called several names by the Church down the ages. These names will help us to understand the many aspects of the Eucharist and appreciate the rich heritage given to the Church in this great mystery.

13.1 THE EUCHARIST

The term Eucharist is derived from Greek word *Eucharistein* which means to give thanks. The background is the Jewish blessings that proclaim God’s good works especially during a meal, thanking God for his works of creation, redemption and sanctification. It was first used to refer to the mystery of the Holy Eucharist in the writings of the apostolic Fathers like Justin and Ignatius. It was used to describe the prayer of thanksgiving pronounced by Jesus for the blessing of bread and wine during the last supper. It was latter literally adopted by Latin language (*Eucharistia*) without any effort to translate it. From Latin, other languages like Italian and English adopted it without translation. This is how the term came to be used in many languages to describe the central action of Jesus at the last supper on the night before his death. Though the name Eucharist was not directly used in the bible to describe the last supper, the name has a clear biblical foundation. All the three synoptic gospel accounts of the last supper together with 1st Cor. 11:24, record that on

the night before his death, Jesus took bread in his hands and having given thanks (*Eucharistein*), he broke it and gave it to his disciples.

However, with the passage of time, the term came to be used to describe the entire celebration of the Mass. Today, the name Eucharist indicates that the entire Holy Mass is an act of thanksgiving and gratitude to God. It invites participants to be animated with the same spirit of gratitude.

13.2 THE LORD'S SUPPER

It is called the Lord's Supper because of its connection with the last supper which the Lord Jesus had with his apostles on the eve of his Passion, in which he instituted the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. It is the supper of the risen Lord in that he is alive, present and gives himself as food to his faithful, and this supper anticipates the wedding feast of the Lamb in the heavenly Jerusalem.

This is the most ancient name of the Eucharist used by St. Paul (I Cor. 11:20) This name was temporarily abandoned by the Catholic Church because of the abuse or misuse by our separated brethren, but due to its strong scriptural roots it was rediscovered by Vatican Council II and introduced into the rite of the Mass. Thus, the priest says before Holy Communion, "Blessed are those invited to the Supper of the Lord".

13.3 BREAKING OF THE BREAD

The Eucharist acquired this name because Jesus used the rite of breaking the bread as part of a Jewish meal, when as master of the table he blessed and distributed bread at the last supper when he instituted the Eucharist. The early Jewish Believers gave it this name to explain what they do when they gathered to celebrate the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ over death and to carry out his mandate, "do this in memory of me" (Lk 22:19). Luke says that the Christian community of Jerusalem were known for their perseverance at the breaking of bread (Act 2:42) and they were breaking the bread from house to house (Acts 2:46). The early Christians used this term to designate their Eucharistic assemblies. It is a celebration of victory and bonding with the Risen Lord. St. Paul teaches that all who take part in the celebration enter into communion with the Lord and with one another (I Cor 10:16). When the risen Lord appeared to the disciples of Emmaus, they recognized him at the breaking of bread (Lk 24:35). This is therefore one of the early names given to the Eucharist.

13.4 THE HOLY MASS

This is the most common name of the Holy Eucharist. The term *Mass* derives from the Latin word *Missa* which means *mission* or *sent*. It was a term used by the Romans in the 3rd and 4th centuries to dismiss an important civil assembly in which the president of the assembly sent the participants to go into the towns and villages to carry out and effect the decisions reached during the assembly.

Thus, when Christianity became the official religion of the empire, the term was adopted by the Christian community and was used to dismiss the Eucharistic assembly. "*Ite missa est*". It became a way of calling on the Christians to go into the cities and villages to announce the marvelous work

the Lord has accomplished in their midst. Hence the celebration ends with a sending forth of the faithful on mission so that they may fulfill God's will in their daily lives.

13.5 HOLY SACRIFICE

It is called the Holy Sacrifice because it makes present the one sacrifice of Christ the Savior and includes the Church's offering. It is also called Holy Communion because by this sacrament we are united to Christ who makes us sharers of his body and blood and forms us into one body – the Church or the new people of God (cf. CCC 1330-1331).

14. In all these it becomes clearer that the Eucharist is a mystery which only faith can comprehend. When Christ was telling his followers about eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of Man, many of them left him. (cf. Jn. 6:66). But Peter professed the faith of the Church when he said "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe..." (Jn. 6:68). Francis Cardinal Arinze has this to say, "The Eucharist is greater and deeper than anything we can say about it. We can speak of it as the supreme act of Christian worship, the Christian sacrifice, the praise and thanksgiving of the Church, the celebration of the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection... But no single statement is the whole of what can be said. In front of this mystery, we often just kneel in silent adoration" (cf. F.A. Arinze, *The Holy Eucharist Our Life*, Pastoral Letter, 1981, no. 10).

This teaches us that the Eucharist being a mystery, can only be accepted and appreciated by faith. Without faith, no eye can perceive the Lord Jesus in the Eucharist.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST

15. THE EUCHARIST AS A FIGURE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament does not contain a direct explicit teaching on the Eucharist but it was present in figures and shadows which later found fulfillment in the New Testament. Here we recall the Passover Supper, The Manna in the desert and the Blood of the Covenant which were clear pointers to the Holy Eucharist.

16. THE PASSOVER SUPPER

The event of Exodus was a foundational event in the life and history of the people of Israel: their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. In this event of the Old Testament, we can see a clear reference and allusion to the Eucharist. The Exodus event began with a Passover Supper (cf. Exodus 12). God demanded a lamb without defect for the supper (Ex 12:5); and its blood should be sprinkled on the lintel of the houses where the families of Israel would gather to eat the supper. The Lord told Moses, the blood will be a sign for you... when I see the blood I shall pass over you, and you will escape the destructive plague... This day must be a day of memorial for you, and you must

keep it as a feast in Yahweh's honour. You must keep it as a feast day for all generations; this is a decree for all time (cf. Ex. 12:13-14). In this passage we have three important keys that would help us see the figure of the Eucharist in the Exodus event.

17. The First is that the movement for the liberation of Israel from Egypt towards the Promised Land began with the Passover Supper in which a lamb was sacrificed to God. In the same manner, the liberation of the new people of God and their journey towards the promised land (heaven) would begin with the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross of Calvary which was sacramentally instituted on the last supper. Thus the Passover Supper is a clear figure in the Old Testament which pointed to the real supper in which Jesus Christ offered himself for the salvation of the world. The real paschal lamb prefigured is Christ.

18. The Second is the Blood of the Lamb. The Lord told the people of Israel that the angel of death will not strike the inhabitants of the house where the blood of the Lamb was sprinkled. Thus the blood of the Lamb became a sign for their liberation and safety. This is a very important key in our understanding of the Eucharist. In the New Testament, the precious blood of Jesus Christ secured the salvation of the new people of God. It is the blood of the New Covenant shed for human salvation (Mt. 26:28; Mk. 14:24; Lk. 22:20).

The Third point is the symbol of the Lamb without defect. God demanded that the lamb for the Passover Supper must be a lamb without defect. In the New Testament John the Baptist described Jesus as the "Lamb of God" (Jn. 1:29). Again, St. Peter notes that this lamb of God has the characteristics demanded of the Passover Lamb, that is, Christ "is a lamb without spot or defect" (I Pet. 1:19). Therefore Christ is the real unblemished lamb being foreshadowed. All these show that the Passover Supper was actually a preparation for the greatest work God will still do among his people in the New Testament.

19. THE MANNA

In the book of Exodus (Ex. Chapter 16), the people of Israel murmured and complained bitterly due to hunger. They were even ready to harm Moses whom they thought had deceived them by bringing them out of Egypt. Moses ran to God in prayer and the Lord answered him. "Look, I shall rain down bread for you from heavens" (Ex. 16:4). The Lord kept his promise and sent "bread or bread-like substance from heaven for their food all through the journey in the desert till they entered the Promised Land. Here God gave the Israelites physical food which satisfied their hunger but which also had a spiritual significance. Thus every morning during the desert experience, the Israelites found fresh bread-like-food which they did not understand. On seeing it their first reaction was to ask "what is this?" for they did not know what it was (Ex. 16:15). The term manna is a Hebrew word which literally means "what is this". This question which later became the name of the food showed the perplexity and wonder of the people who received the manna as the miracle was beyond their comprehension. Though Moses told them it was bread which the Lord has given to them (Ex. 16:15), the real answer to that question came from Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

In the Gospel of St. John chapter 6, Jesus answers the question when he says, "In all truth I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven, it is my Father who gives you the bread from heaven, the true bread, for the bread of God is the bread which comes down from heaven and

gives life to the world... I am the bread of life. Your Fathers ate manna in the desert and they are dead; ... I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world". (Jn. 6:32, 33, 48-51). Thus the Church sees in the manna a clear figure of the Eucharist which is the food for the children of God in the desert of the world today matching on to heaven. The manna was a symbol of Christ.

Another important element of the manna episode which helps us to see the figure of the Eucharist is the instruction given by the Lord to Moses on how to preserve the manna for the generations unborn. "Take a jar and in it put a full homer of manna and store it in Yahweh's presence, to be kept for your descendants... (Ex. 16:33-34). Just as the manna was conserved in the Ark of the Covenant placed in the temple (cf. Heb. 9:4), in the same way, the Eucharist is conserved in the tabernacles inside the Catholic Churches.

It is important to conclude that as soon as the Israelites entered the Promised Land, God stopped sending them manna, because it was meant to be food for those on a journey. In the same way the Eucharist is the food for those on a journey in this world. The Eucharist ceases to serve its purpose when we reach our definitive home in heaven.

20. THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT

The book of Exodus in chapter 24, gives us the details and essential contents of the covenant between God and his people, Israel. When Moses read the book of covenant to the people, they responded, "we shall do everything Yahweh has said, we shall obey. Moses then took the blood and sprinkled it over the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which Yahweh has made with you... (Ex. 24:4-8).

Two important elements in this Old Testament biblical text point to the Eucharist. The first is the structure of the Old Testament covenant and its similarity with the New Testament covenant. Before the ceremony of the blood, Moses first of all read the word of God from the book of the covenant to which the people gave their response. Similarly, today in our Eucharistic celebration, the liturgy of the Eucharist is preceded by the liturgy of the word of God. Just as God prepared his people through his word in the Old Testament before entering a blood covenant with them, so He prepares His new people with His word before entering the New Covenant sealed in the blood of his son Jesus Christ.

Secondly, after the reading of the word of God and the people's response, Moses took the blood, sprinkled over them and said, this is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has concluded with you (Ex. 24:8). The words of Moses are similar to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ at the Upper Room during the institution of the Eucharist when he said, "This is my blood, the blood of the covenant poured out for many" (Mk. 14:24).

In all we can say that the Holy Eucharist has strong foundations in the Old Testament as the OT was a good preparation in symbols and shadows pointing to the real event to be accomplished by God in the New Testament.

CHAPTER THREE

21. THE EUCHARIST AS AN EVENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The letter to the Hebrews states that “In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets, but in these last days, he spoke to us through a son... through whom he created the universe (Heb. 1:1-2). The New Testament is the fullness of time to which St. Paul alluded saying, “When the fullness of time had come, God sent his son, born of a woman...” (cf. Gal. 4:4). It is the last days and time referred to in the letter to the Hebrews. No wonder, in the New Testament the Eucharist is no longer present simply as a figure but has become a reality, a real event which took place in space and time. It did not however destroy the ancient figures of the Old Testament but it fulfilled and confirmed them. We shall discuss only three of the major New Testament events which will help us to appreciate the nature and biblical foundation of the Holy Eucharist.

22. THE MULTIFICATION OF LOAVES

The multiplication of loaves is one of the special miracles recorded in all the four Gospels. (Mk. 6:30-44; 8:1-10; Mt. 14:13-21; 15:32-39; Lk 9:10-17; Jn. 6: 1-15). Not only do these miracles of Jesus which involve the multiplication of the loaves resonate with certain Old Testament events, such as the provision of manna in the desert as we have already discussed (Ex. 16), or the multiplication of loaves by the Prophet Elisha (2 Kgs. 4:1-7; 42-44), but they were also a preparation for the Last Supper and the institution of the Holy Eucharist.

Within the context of the multiplication of loaves and feeding the crowds, Jesus gave a strong teaching on the Eucharist. He prepared their minds, taught them and promised them the Holy Eucharist. When after feeding the crowds by multiplying the loaves and fishes, he says to those who had followed him to the Synagogue of Capernaum: “My Father gives you the true bread from heaven and gives life to the world” (Jn. 6: 32-33), and even identifies himself, his own flesh and blood, with that bread: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh (Jn. 6:51). Thus Jesus used the multiplication of loaves to show that he is the bread of life which the eternal Father gives to mankind. (cf. Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 7).

23. It is interesting to note that there is a great similarity in the structure of the multiplication of loaves and the institution of the Eucharist. This could be to prepare them for the miracle and mystery of the Eucharist. With respect to time, Jesus multiplied the loaves when it was already late. Mark the Evangelist simply says, the “hour is late” (Mk. 6:35). In the same way Jesus instituted the Eucharist when it was late precisely at the time of supper. This could suggest that while performing the miracle of the loaves Jesus was also thinking of the Eucharist which he was to institute at the late hour, when the time comes.

24. Again, in the four Gospel accounts of this miracle, we find the same verbs used in describing Jesus’ action at the miracle of the loaves being used in the account of the institution of the Eucharist

at the last supper. The actions are: He took the loaves; he blessed them, he gave thanks, and gave (or distributed) them. These are the very actions which the priest, (*alter Christus*), repeats during every Eucharistic celebration.

Also during the Eucharistic celebration the ordained ministers, the successors of the apostles distribute the Bread of Life to the people, just as the apostles distributed to the crowds the bread and fish which Jesus had multiplied (Mk 6:41). The leftovers are collected (Mk. 6:43).

25. THE LAST SUPPER: THE INSTITUTION

Christ Jesus did not stop with teaching that he is the true bread of life which came down from heaven and promising to give his followers that same bread which he identified with his flesh and blood, he went on at the last supper to institute The Holy Eucharist: the sacrifice and sacrament of his body and blood.

26. The three synoptic Gospels have passed on the account of the institution. (cf. Mt. 26: 17-30; Mk. 14: 12-26; Lk. 22: 7-20). Here we give a synthesis. The summary of how Christ instituted the Eucharist is as follows: After he had gathered with his apostles in the Cenacle, Jesus took bread in his hands. He broke it and gave it to them saying, “Take this all of you, and eat of it, for this is my Body, which will be given up for you”. Then, he took the cup of wine in his hands and said, “Take this all of you, and drink from it, for this is the chalice of my Blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in memory of me” (*Roman Missal*, EP 1, 89-90; CCC. 1337-1340).

27. By this act according to Francis Cardinal Arinze, Jesus did two things. He changed bread and wine into his Body and Blood and gave to the Apostles to eat and drink. Also, he told his Apostles to do this in his memory, that is, to consecrate bread and wine into his body and blood and distribute to his followers. He was telling them to celebrate the Eucharistic sacrifice. He was ordaining them priests of the new covenant. (Arinze, *The Holy Eucharist*, Sunday Visitor, 2001, p. 23).

28. St. John records that at the course of this Passover meal – the last supper, Christ washed the feet of his apostles and gave them the commandment of love. (cf. Jn. 13:1-7). The Lord Jesus, in order never to depart from his own whom he loved to the end, and knowing that the hour had come for him to leave this world and return to the Father, he left them a pledge of his love, made them sharers in his Passover as he instituted the Eucharist as the memorial of his death and resurrection and constituted his apostles the priests of the New Covenant. (cf. CCC 1337).

29. Given that Jesus instituted the Eucharist within the context of the Jewish Passover and gave it as a parting gift of love to his Church, it may be necessary to reflect on the significance.

The paschal meal of the Jews commemorated their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. It was a remembrance of the past which was at the same time a prophetic proclamation of a deliverance yet to come. This memorial of the past has expanded to include prayer and expectation of a yet more profound, radical, universal and definitive salvation. (cf. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 10). The

memorial (*Zikkaron* in Hebrew) was not a mere remembrance of the past, it included future expectations of salvation from God as they praised and remembered his wonders of the past.

30. As Jesus celebrated the great memorial at the last supper with his disciples something completely new happened. The center was no longer the lamb of the Old Testament, but rather Christ himself, the true lamb who gave his Body and Blood for the salvation of mankind and forgiveness of sins (Mt. 26:28). Thus, Christ, rather than celebrate the Old Passover, introduced a new Passover by ritually and sacramentally anticipating his death and resurrection. He instituted the Eucharist. By so doing Jesus anticipates and makes present the sacrifice of the cross and the victory of the resurrection (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 10). Through the institution of the Eucharist within this context Jesus tends to show the salvific meaning of his death and resurrection and the definitive deliverance from evil which comes from him.

31. THE EMMAUS ENCOUNTER

The Gospel account of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (cf. Lk. 24:13^{ff}), has a lot to teach us about the real presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist. As soon as the two disciples recognized Christ “in the breaking of bread”, he vanished from their earthly eyes. Yet on the strength of their encounter with him they travelled back to Jerusalem that night without fear and without being exhausted. In effect Christ teaches them the truth of his real presence in the Eucharist. He teaches them that they will no longer see him in an earthly way but now can see him with the eyes of faith in the Eucharist and the Liturgy.

It is good to note that the Emmaus encounter corresponds to the structure of the Holy Mass today: Going from the introductory rite where we gather for the spiritual journey of the Mass with Jesus in our midst (sometimes without being recognized as happened to the disciples), we go to the penitential rite where with humility we acknowledge our sins; like those disciples with their faces downcast discussed their worries with the Lord (Lk. 24:17). Then follows the liturgy of the word and prayer of the faithful which correspond to Jesus beginning with Moses and the prophets, interpreting the Scriptures to them (Lk. 24:27) and their request stay with us Lord (Lk. 24:29).

The climax is the liturgy of the Eucharist which corresponds to the breaking of the bread where their eyes were opened and they recognized the Lord. After that, comes the dismissal rite when we go forth to proclaim the gospel, like the disciples who went back to Jerusalem after the encounter to share the goodnews of their experience.

The Emmaus encounter teaches us about the real presence of Jesus among us especially at the Eucharist, the breaking of bread if only we have faith to recognize him.

CHAPTER FOUR

32. THE EUCHARIST AS A SACRAMENT AND SACRIFICE

A sacrament is described as an “outward sign of inward grace, ordained by Jesus Christ, by which grace is given to our souls” (*Catechism of Christian Doctrine*, 1971, no. 249). The more recent Catechism of the Catholic Church, defined Sacraments as “efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us” (CCC, no. 1131). A sacrament is also presented as “outward signs of the salvation that Jesus Christ has given to the Church. They are pledges or proofs that he actually exists – in and with the Church” (*I Believe: A Little Catholic Catechism*, 2009, p. 120).

33. While these presentations are made in different words, it is clear that there are fundamental elements that unite all of them. In the first place the element of sign indicates that there is a mediation, that is, that there are things which are perceptible by the senses but which are not necessarily in themselves the reality that is in question. In the sacrament of baptism for example, there is the representation of the cleansing from original sin. But this is done by normal water which is blessed as baptismal water. The signal effect is that just as water cleanses our physical stains or dirt, baptism cleanses our soul of original sin and other sins while making us children of God. Thus the action of pouring of baptismal water is a sign of the invisible event that takes effect at baptism. The sign is described as efficacious because of the certainty of what is signaled. Another common element is the question of grace. The outward signal of a sacrament is a pointer to what is invisible and owed to God’s salvific intervention in favour of human beings. This is the grace of mystery of salvation since it is by far not out of our capacity. That it is grace also at once indicates a giver. Christ himself ordained the sacraments. He is the giver. Sacraments are gifts to the Church by its head and master, and for the benefit of all its members for their salvation.

34. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Church has over the centuries discerned that among liturgical celebrations, there are seven that are, in the strict sense of the term, sacraments instituted by the Lord. (cf. CCC 1117). The Holy Eucharist is not just one of them, it is the greatest of them all. All the sacraments are linked to the Eucharist, because Christ is the end of all other sacraments and the Holy Eucharist is an embodiment of Christ.

35. The Eucharist is the very sacrifice of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus which he instituted to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until his return in glory.

It is a sacrament in which the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ is really present to be offered to God in sacrifice and to be received by humans in sacramental communion.

36. At the Eucharistic celebration, as the priest acts “in persona Christi” after the invocation of the Holy Spirit (the Epiclesis), followed by the institution narrative, the power of the words and action of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit, make sacramentally present under the species of bread and wine, Christ’s body and blood, his sacrifice offered on the cross once for all (CCC, 1353). This change is called **transubstantiation**. The efficacious words of Christ which are God’s, but pronounced by the priest celebrant, makes Jesus Christ truly, really and substantially present in the Eucharist. He is present in Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity. The Church calls this “real” presence by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be “real” too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present (cf. *Mysterium Fidei*, no. 39; CCC, no. 1374-1376).

37. It is indeed a mystery of faith. The Catholic Church believes, teaches and gives the highest adoration and worship (latria) to God in this sacrament.

The Eucharist is the sacrament of the sacraments and is at the core of the Church's sacramental mystery. It is the source and summit of the Christian life and as such enjoys a pre-eminence in the sacramental structure of the Church. It completes the process of Christian initiation, in which the faithful is incorporated into Christ, by being incorporated into the Church. With the other two sacraments of initiation namely, Baptism and Confirmation, the faithful is united with Christ in communion through sharing in his life-giving Body and Blood in the Eucharist (cf. Francis Selman, *The Sacraments and the Mystery of Christ*, 113).

38. All the sacraments are mysteries of salvation and they are instruments for our sanctification. They are powers that come forth from the body of Christ which is ever-living and ever-giving (cf. Lk. 5:17; 6:19; 8:46; *Vatican II*, P.O, no. 5; CCC 1116).

They are channels of grace and through them the faithful participate in the supernatural life of God (cf. Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*, 3). Through the sacraments the faithful become active participants in the mystery of the passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ (cf. Vat. II, *Lumen Gentium*, 7).

The Eucharist re-presents this mystery and celebrates Christ's victory and through it we enter into communion with God and with men. It renews the work of salvation that has the Father as the point of origin and point of culmination.

39. THE EUCHARIST AS SACRIFICE

At the last supper, within the context of the Passover meal, a ritual meal suffused with sacrificial motifs, Christ instituted the Eucharist. Christ assumed the suffering servant motif of Isaiah, reinterpreted and appropriated it as his. He assumed the suffering servant and became the sacrifice. As a consequence, he appropriated the real meaning of sacrifice in his person so that all ritual sacrifices lost their significance and efficacy, and the power of conveying salvation was taken off them. Christ became the true paschal lamb that became the Paschal Bread shared ritually in the Paschal Supper.

According to Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, this sacrifice which Christ carried out in sacramental form was then shortly thereafter offered as an oblation on the cross: that is to say, Christ immolated Himself in a bloody fashion and rose on the third day (cf. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas est*, no. 13). When Christ took up the chalice according to Jewish rite, He established it as the chalice of his blood to be poured out on the cross. Hence with his blood Jesus consecrated the new covenant succeeding and substituting for that blood by which Moses had ratified the old covenant (Ex 24: 1-8).

Therefore the last Supper or the Eucharist (instituted within it) is sacrificial. The sacrificial character of the Holy Eucharist is manifested in the very words of the institution, "This is my body which is given for you" and "This cup is the New Covenant in my Blood, that will be shed for you" (Lk. 22: 19-20).

Consequently, the sacrifice of the cross and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one and the same sacrifice. The priest and the victim are the same; only the manner of offering is different: in a bloody manner on the cross, in an unbloody manner in the Eucharist (cf. CCC 1362).

40. “Do This in Memory of Me” (Lk. 22:19). Christ did not end with a ritual or sacramental sacrifice of his Body and Blood which was to be consummated on the cross but he also empowered and commanded his apostles to do the same in his memory.

The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is therefore a sacrifice and a memorial. It makes present and actual the sacrifice which Christ offered to His heavenly Father on the cross. It is a memorial of his death and resurrection, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord, until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26).

41. The Church teaches us that in the Eucharist, the Sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his body. The praise, prayers, joys, needs and sufferings of the faithful are united with the sacrifice of Christ giving thanks and glory to God, asking for his forgiveness and obtaining his blessings. The Church in heaven unites with the Church on earth in this holy sacrifice (cf. CCC 1368-1372). It is indeed a mystery of faith.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE EUCHARIST AND CHRISTIAN VOCATIONS

42. The encounter with Christ in the Eucharist impacts and transforms the faithful. Through the Eucharist we become a communion of creation in God. However, “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 in Baptism, with its call to holiness” (Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 79). It follows that each individual Christian is invited or called by God, to give a personal response to the love of God made manifest in the Holy Eucharist. This we have to do according to our specific vocations in life. Thus the Eucharist has a special invitation to the lay faithful, the ordained priests, those in the consecrated life, the youth and the family and each is expected to give a unique and personal response.

THE EUCHARIST AND THE LAY FAITHFUL

43. As Christians we are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people God claims for his own, to declare his wonderful deeds” (I Pet 2:9). Given that God plants his children as good seeds in the world, it is the vocation of Christian laity who by virtue of their baptism and confirmation and strengthened by the Eucharist, to live out the radical newness brought by Christ wherever they find themselves. (cf. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 79, Quoting *Christifideles Laici*).

Based on the strength which they draw from the Eucharist, the laity should develop a life style which shows that the Eucharist has an ever deeper effect on their lives, making them convincing

witnesses of love in the workplace, in politics, in the formation of children and in the society at large. It is the duty of the Church's Pastors to give their support unfailingly, give their guidance and encouragement to 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, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 79). Thus, Christian charity is the clearest expression of Eucharistic faith.

44. THE EUCHARIST AND THE PRIESTHOOD

All the sacraments are related to the Eucharist, they flow into and flow from it. But the priesthood has a unique and special relationship. Christ instituted the Eucharist and the priesthood at the same time in the context of paschal sacrifice. Christ made the Eucharist the sacrifice of the new covenant of his body and blood and made the priesthood priests of the sacrifice of this new covenant who will make present the sacrifice where the priest (Jesus Christ) is both priest and victim. Therefore, the priest through his sacred ordination is called to live a Eucharistic life, a spirituality of sacrifice and love.

Only the ordained priest can offer the sacrifice of the mass, the sacrament of the Eucharist. No other person is allowed to do so. By virtue of our baptism all the faithful of Christ enjoy the dignity of common priesthood. This enables them to participate in the Church's prayer, sacrifice of praise and liturgical worship. But ordained priesthood has an indispensable role. The ordination confers the rank of ministerial priesthood on the recipient. This creates a difference not of degree but of kind.

By sacred ordination the priest presides at the Eucharistic celebrations in which he receives the Eucharist and distributes same to the faithful. Through regular celebration of the Eucharist, the priest is all the more closer to Christ who increases the life of God in him, nourishes and strengthens his faith, preserves him from mortal sin, lessens his inclination to sin and helps him persevere in virtues.

Thus the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, teaches that "the Eucharistic form of Christian life is seen in a very special way in the priesthood. Priestly spirituality is intrinsically Eucharistic. The seeds of this spirituality are already found in the words spoken by the Bishop during the ordination liturgy: "Receive the oblation of the Holy people to be offered to God. Understand what you do, imitate what you celebrate and conform your life to the mystery of Lord's cross". In order to give an ever greater Eucharistic form to his existence, the priest, beginning with his years in the seminary, should make his spiritual life his highest priority... An intense spiritual life will enable him to enter more deeply into communion with the Lord... bearing witness to God's love at all times, even the darkest and most difficult. To this end, I join the synod Fathers in recommending "the daily celebration of mass, even when the faithful are not present" (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 80).

45. Moreover, like the Eucharist, the priesthood is a sacrifice. In the Liturgy of priestly ordination, during the interrogation, the candidate is asked, "Are you resolved to sacrifice your life with Christ, for the salvation of your brothers and sisters", and he responds I do, with the grace of God. Thus the Catholic priest is one who willingly joins Christ to offer his life (with Christ) for

the salvation of his brothers and sisters. He is one who freely and joyfully conforms his life to the mystery of the Lord's Cross.

From all these, one can rightly conclude that a priest is a privileged participant in the sacrifice of Christ. According to St. John Paul II, "Repeating Christ's venerable words in the recollected silence of the liturgical assembly, we priests become privileged heralds of this mystery of salvation" (*Holy Thursday Letter*, 2005, no. 4). This calls for more conviction, more confidence and above all faith in the Eucharistic Lord. When the people of God, the Church offers liturgical worship, the liturgical actions and sacramental sacrifice require a ministerial priest. The ordained priest is configured into Christ, thus equipped to act in the person of Christ-the-head of the Church. The Bishop is invested with the fullness of the sacrament of orders. So the priest, and strictly speaking, the Bishop acts ("in persona Christi capitis et nomine ecclesiae") in the person of Christ and the name of the Church. This is done above all in the Eucharist. The priest celebrates the Eucharist in the power of Christ and not his own power, intelligence or holiness. He should always project Christ.

46. THE EUCHARIST AND THE CONSECRATED LIFE

The consecrated life has been described by the Church as a form of radical discipleship. One needs special grace and strength to adequately respond to this call. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, the relationship of the Eucharist to the various ecclesial vocations is seen in a particularly vivid way in "the prophetic witness of consecrated men and women, who find in the celebration of the Eucharist and the Eucharistic adoration the strength necessary for the radical following of Christ, obedient, poor, and chaste" (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 81). In the Eucharist the consecrated life finds nourishment and strength – to be like Christ. Irrespective of any other apostolate which the consecrated may be engaged, like care of the poor, education, and health care, the consecrated strives to achieve the principal purpose which is union with God through prayer, contemplation and life style. In this way the consecrated remains a true witness to Christ and an objective sign of the world to come. The Eucharist gives strength and inspiration to priestly celibacy and consecrated virginity. The Eucharist is the strength of the consecrated.

47. THE EUCHARIST AND THE YOUTH

In response to the question, "what shall we do to the youths today? Mother Theresa of Calcutta simply said, "Bring them to the Eucharist". This response sounds simplistic. However, if we really want to retain our youth in the Catholic Church, we must lead them to a deeper understanding of what the Eucharist is and what it means for their lives.

In our parishes, the centre of the youth ministry should be the Eucharist. Pastors of souls should devote time in catechesis on the Eucharist and be committed to developing a dynamic youth-focused Eucharistic celebration. A youth-focused Mass should include a vibrant liturgy which speaks to young people, addresses their problems and challenges them to live as worthy disciples of Christ. In that mass, the music, homilies and environment should be set to favour the youth. They should be encouraged to serve in various liturgical functions. They should be given a sense of belonging and made to know that they are not only the Church of the future but also the Church of today. Pope Benedict has this advice to give; "My dear young friends, if you take part frequently

in the Eucharistic celebration, if you dedicate some of your time to adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, the source of love which is the Eucharist, you will acquire that joyful determination to dedicate your lives to following the Gospel. At the same time it will be your experience that whenever our strength is not enough, it is the Holy Spirit who transforms us, filling us with his strength...” (Benedict XVI, *Letter to the young People*, World Youth Day, 2008). The Pope teaches the young people to see a source of strength in the Holy Eucharist.

48. THE EUCHARIST AND FAMILY

Francis Cardinal Arinze teaches that, “the Christian Family is the ideal place where Eucharistic piety should begin. The parents have to show their children by example and by word that it is the Mass that matters and that Holy Communion should be received often; after due preparation. Many children have learned to love daily Mass from their parents. It is beautiful when all the members of the family go to Mass and Holy Communion together...” (*The Holy Eucharist, Our Life*, Pastoral Letter, 1981, p. 69).

49. The Church teaches that the Holy Eucharist is a Sacrament of *Sacrifice, Presence and Communion*. These three aspects are very useful in the family. We learn from the Eucharist. The mass is a true sacrifice in which Christ offers himself for others. In the same way there can never be a peaceful and joyful family without the virtue of sacrifice. Each member of the family is called to sacrifice his ego and selfishness for the good and happiness of others.

50. The advice of St. Paul comes to mind. “Love is patient and kind...it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered...it does not rejoice over wrongdoing” (I Cor. 13: 4-6). The Sacrament of love teaches us love. Again, the Eucharist is a sacrament of presence. Christ is truly, really and substantially present to us in the Eucharist; His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. In the same way a husband should be present to his wife; wife to her husband and both of them always present to their children. This is what makes a family lively and creates a communion. The reverence we show to Christ in the Church and the Eucharist should be brought home in the family as we recognize and respect the value of each member of our family.

51. The Eucharist is also the sacrament of communion. What is the family without communion? when marriage is supposed to be a communion of life and love. The Eucharist unites us with our Lord in Holy Communion. Thus the Eucharist teaches us communion and forms the same within us. As a family, you should endeavour to receive the Eucharist together and worship our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament together. Allow Our Lord to use his grace to transform you into the mystery you worship. Pope Benedict gives encouragement to families as he says, “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” (Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 79).

Consequently, the family can draw a lot of strength from the Holy Eucharist if only they worship with faith.

CHAPTER SIX

THE EUCHARISTIC WORSHIP, ADORATION AND MISSION.

The Holy Eucharist is a mystery to be celebrated, worshipped, adored and proclaimed.

52. The Church appreciates that since the Eucharist is the sacrament of the totality of Christ, it has to be adored. It is a sacrament that is Christ. In adoring the Blessed Sacrament, one adores not only Christ but the entirety of the Godhead. The adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is as well the adoration of the Most Blessed Trinity. This is precisely because when one adores Christ, one at the same time co-adores the God head of which essence Christ essentially shares. This is particularly because, Christ who shares human nature with us humans, is fully God and He is divine. And all God's work ad extra is indivisible, so God is adored when Christ is adored. We know that adoration is due to God alone, because he alone is worthy of veneration as the source and destiny of our being. Since God became man in the person of Jesus Christ, our adoration of Jesus is really the adoration of God in human form. Also, since Christ in the Blessed Sacrament is here on earth in the fullness of His Divinity united with the humanity he received from Mary, we are to adore Him in the Holy Eucharist.

53. Given that the Eucharistic Mystery was instituted out of love, and makes Christ sacramentally present, it is worthy of adoration, thanksgiving, and worship both during and after the Holy Mass. According to Robert Cabie, the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament has been a great treasure of the Western liturgical tradition, based on a datum of faith that is as old as the Christian Church (cf. Robert Cabie, *The Eucharist*, Collegeville Mn: The Liturgical Press, 1986. P. 246). Here we shall discuss some of the major ways of practicing worthy reverence and adoration to the Holy Eucharist.

54. THE OBLIGATION OF SUNDAY MASS

Participating actively in the Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation gives each faithful the opportunity to express his love and reverence to the Eucharistic Jesus. Sunday is our weekly Easter. It is a celebration of Christ's victory, his death, resurrection and our redemption or liberation in Christ. Sunday Eucharist celebrates in a special way the new covenant which includes the past, the present and an anticipation of future glory. No one can claim true devotion or love to the Eucharist when he is not committed to the obligation of Sunday Mass.

Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that "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" (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 73)

55. In the Eucharist, the Church offers Christ to the Father and in a most appreciable way. Christ offers the Church to the Father. The Church acclaims that the entire creation offers glory and

worship to God through Christ. Through him, in Him and with Him in the unity of the Holy Spirit all glory to the Father forever and ever.

Through our Sunday Eucharist or Sunday obligation, each faithful expresses his worship and adoration to the Most Holy Eucharist.

56. WORTHY RECEPTION OF HOLY COMMUNION

We worship Christ as we reverently receive him in Holy Communion. He unites us with Himself and with one another.

Christ who has redeemed the world and has become the centre of the universe and of history, gives us a share in his divine life as we worthily receive him in Holy Communion. In faith and thanksgiving, we approach the Holy sacrifice of the Mass by our remote preparation. This includes, regular sincere recollection, prayer and reading of scripture, the faithful and loving fulfillment of the daily responsibilities of our state in life, and regular participation in the sacrament of Penance, including daily repentance from our sins. The warning of St. Paul is of great help. He urges us “whenever you eat this bread, then, and drink this cup, you are proclaiming the Lord’s death until he comes. Therefore, anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily is answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone is to examine himself.... Because a person who eats and drinks without recognizing the body is eating and drinking his own condemnation (1 Cor 11:26-30). Proximate preparation includes dressing appropriately and modestly for the Mass and fasting from food and drink for at least one hour prior to receiving Holy Communion as our health and age permit. Canon Law notes in Can. 919 that water and medicine are exceptions to the fast, again that the elderly, the infirm and those who care for them can receive Holy communion even if they have eaten something within the previous hour. These ways of preparing culminate in our prayerful and active participation throughout the Eucharistic celebration, as we join with the body of Christ.

57. Finally, we must rediscover the act of thanksgiving after reception of the Holy Eucharist. It is not proper to rush out of the Church immediately after Mass and communion. We should spend some time on personal thanksgiving. The moments after communion are the most intimate moments we can have with the savior in personal adoration on this side of life. The pastors of souls and priests who preside at the Eucharistic sacrifice should help to create moments of prayerful silence during Mass especially after communion. They should not fill every available space with music, noise, announcements or even financial donations or collections.

58. HOLY HOUR ADORATION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT.

Nearness to some objects like fire and electricity make us feel their impact even without touching them. When we place ourselves in the presence of the sun, it gives us a glow or even sunburn. When the rays of the sun touch us they change the appearance of our skin. They even penetrate our being. Though we cannot see these rays, they still exist and our skin can attest to it. More so, the Eucharistic species also have divine rays which bring conversions, grace, healing and holiness into our life and into the lives of others. These rays penetrate to the very core of our being which is our soul. There, Jesus who is mystery will perform some of his greatest miracles for us. He will

reveal Himself to us in a most special and personal way. He will lift for us the veil of mystery surrounding Him in a manner he desires to do for the individual in a personal and profound way.

59. The Eucharist can be adored whether exposed or in the tabernacle. However, the Holy hour adoration is usually done through exposing the Blessed Sacrament in a Monstrance, or in a Ciborium, over a short or long period of time. This devotion is recommended by the Church to pastors and the faithful as it is highly expressive of the link that exists between the celebration of the sacrifice of the Holy Mass – (the Church's greatest act of adoration) and his permanent presence in the consecrated Host.

60. Some of the Values of the Holy Hour Adoration include:

- i. It is a sign of our faith in the mystery of the Eucharist.
- ii. It is an act of thanksgiving to the Lord for this exceptional and wonderful gift.
- iii. It is a way of making reparation for the many offenses that are perpetrated in the world
- iv. It deepens our union with him and helps us to become holy.
- v. It increases our sense of awe and wonder at the great gift of the Real Presence of Christ.
- vi. It prepares us for a fruitful celebration of the Eucharist.
- vii. It helps us to have a greater sense of devotion, and to reflect on this increasingly in our lives.

61. OTHER MEANS OF ADORATION

There are many other traditional forms of reverence and adoration to the Eucharist which include: Eucharistic Benediction, Eucharistic Procession, Eucharistic Congress, Personal Visit to the Blessed Sacrament and Authentic Participation in the Eucharistic celebration.

62. Eucharistic benediction is usually the way in which Eucharistic adoration is concluded. It is done by a priest or deacon. Since the blessing itself is not a devotion it should be preceded by a period of exposition which allows for prayer and silence.

Eucharistic processions help the people to deepen their sense of being God's people called to journey with their Lord and proclaim their faith in God who is Emmanuel. They manifest their faith in the real presence of the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. This procession is usually done at the solemnity of Corpus Christi or Christ the King as it is the case in our local custom in Nigeria.

Eucharistic congresses are large assemblies of either international, national regional or local of the clergy, religious and laity for the purpose of deepening understanding and devotion to the Holy Eucharist. It is usually organized around a particular theme and it aims at strengthening dedication and worship to the Blessed Sacrament.

63. Personal visit to the Blessed sacrament for a few minutes or a reasonable time affords us the opportunity for personal intimacy with Jesus, it deepens our friendship with him and gives us the opportunity to listen to the Lord and grow in holiness.

64. AUTHENTIC PARTICIPATION IN THE EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION.

One of the best ways to manifest our adoration and devotion to the Blessed Eucharist is through active and authentic participation in the Eucharistic Celebration. In addition to remote and proximate preparations which we have explained, the worshipper should be active and lively from the sign of the cross which signals our belongingness to the Trinity – *Deus Trinitas*, to the periodic Amen, a sign of and a solemn earnest affirmation to God’s saving love; From Alleluia praising God who does wonderful works, to liturgy of the word where we listen and learn from divine wisdom; From Liturgy of the Eucharist, the climax of divine encounter during the celebration, to sacred silence in thanksgiving.

65. Finally, the sign of peace and dismissal rite remind us of the missionary dimension of the Eucharistic worship. The Eucharist sends us on mission as it urges us to go and announce the Gospel of the Lord glorifying God with our lives. “A Eucharist which does not Passover into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented” (Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 14). Thus, authentic participation shows itself in practical love for others.

CHAPTER SEVEN

OUR FAITH IN THE HOLY EUCHARIST

Christ’s Promise of Presence: I am with you always!

66. In the Gospel of Matthew, the Lord assured his disciples before his ascension: “know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time” (Mt 28: 20). It goes without saying that there are many ways in which Christ is present to his people and to his Church. Christ is true God and true man. As God he is omnipresent, he is thus everywhere including in heaven. But there are many other mystical ways in which Christ remains with his Church and fulfills his promise. Pope Paul VI outlines a few of these in his encyclical letter *Mysterium Fidei*. Christ is present in his Church when she prays and more when this prayer is communal since he promised to be where two or three are gathered in his name (Mt 18:20). He is also present when the Church performs works of mercy, when in charity a member of the family of God is helped in various ways. The Lord affirms that he is the recipient of such acts of charity (Mt 25:40). But also in a way he is the giver since all positive acts ultimately come from him. He is also present in his Church when she preaches the Goodnews and when she governs the people of God, and administers the sacraments (*Mysterium Fidei*, 1965, no 34 – 38).

67. In addition to and over and above all these is the special presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist. This presence is made possible by the re-enactment of the sacrifice of the cross at the celebration of Holy Mass.

The Church has always held to the conviction that bread and wine remain the body and blood of Christ both during the Eucharistic celebration and after it. This is supported by the faith of the Early Fathers. For example, Justin The Martyr who wrote an outline of the celebration of the Eucharist around 150 AD reveals that the Holy Communion was taken by the deacon at the end of the Celebration to those who were absent. Faith in the continued presence of Christ in the sacrament at the end of the liturgy is very ancient. (cf Justin *Apologia*, 1, 65 – 67).

68. A SYMBOL OF UNITY:

The Eucharist can be called the symbol of Christian unity, not just in the sense of uniting Christians but in a much broader sense of being a Christian reality that has very strong potency for many kinds of unity. The Eucharist unites Christians with themselves: unites separated Churches, unites families, unites the dead and the living, unites the living, the dead with God and also unites heaven and earth.

The Church is the body of Christ (Eph 5: 22). It is the branch of Christ who is the tree (John 15:5). As Christ is the second person of the Blessed Trinity, the Eucharistic sacrifice is very Trinitarian. The union of the Christian in Christ brings him into union with the Trinity, therefore in deep union with God his creator and redeemer.

69. THE EUCHARISTIC COMMUNION:

The Eucharist is a heavenly and Godly gift of Christ to his Church. It is his love for her and the desire to be with her forever that made such a gift possible. The sacrifice of the cross which is a crucial aspect of the Paschal Mystery must continue in the Church and so the priesthood of Christ must be present in order to perpetuate his sacrifice. This necessitated the participation of earthly and unworthy human beings in the priesthood of Christ – the ministerial Priesthood. One huge privilege from this sacrifice is that we become partakers of Christ's body and blood. We become one with him, with one another and with God. Taking part in the banquet is rightly called the Holy Communion. We eat of the fruit of sacrifice of Christ when we receive Holy Communion. Reception of the Holy Communion is like the consummation of our individual and communal Christian life.

70. The Holy Communion has many fruits which include that; It brings us closer and nearer to Christ by augmenting our union with him; It increases the life of grace within us. We become more and more like the one we receive; It separates us from sin and reduces the tendency to gravitate towards sin; finally, it gives us the assurance or pledge of eternal life (cf. CCC no. 1405).

71. EUCHARISTIC WORSHIP AMONG NIGERIAN CATHOLICS:

The early missionaries to our country brought along with the Good News some very important and useful Catholic practices- which the Catholic faithful in Nigeria have continued to uphold, propagate and internalize. This is a clear sign of growth for which we remain grateful to God for his grace. Among these is faith in the Holy Eucharist. Our Catholics accepted this mystery of faith such that today attendance at Mass especially Sunday Mass, visit to the Blessed Sacrament,

Eucharistic Adoration and Building of Chapels of Eucharistic Adoration have continued to increase.

72. It is however necessary to avoid some aberrations and abuses in relation to Eucharistic Worship. For example, the Eucharist should not be used as a magical object. There are reported cases of some priests who carry the Blessed Eucharist exposed in a Monstrance to private homes for prayer and exorcism. This is wrong. It should be realized that the Eucharist is a gift to the Church and not to specific individuals, and the Church has the right and duty to regulate its worship to preserve respect. There are guidelines laid down by the Church which should be respected and followed.

73. Also, the Church has universal laws and particular laws. At the level of the local Church, the (CBCN) Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria not long ago issued a directive with respect to the length of time for the celebration of Mass, stating that Sunday Masses should not exceed two hours in normal circumstances or three hours on special occasions. This regulation is given with the interest of the worshippers in view and should be respected. Also, in some Catholic parishes there is a recent practice of doing fund-raising during the homily. This is wrong. Moreover, any second collection should be after post communion and must not make the Mass look like an opportunity to raise funds.

74. In the words of the Holy Father, JohnPaul II, “I consider it my duty therefore to appeal urgently that the Liturgical norms for the celebration of the Eucharist be observed with great fidelity. These norms are concrete expression of the authentically ecclesial nature of the Eucharist” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 52).

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE EUCHARIST OUR STRENGTH

75. On account of all we have seen in the preceding chapters we can say without much contradiction that the Holy Eucharist is our strength. It is rightly so because of the engrafting into Christ of the Church which is mystically described as his body. If Christ is the head and we all form one body, his body, what a wonderful opportunity to commune with him in such an imponderable manner in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist? By Baptism we are consigned to his destiny traced by the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection. “when we were baptized, we went into the tomb with him and joined him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father’s glory, we too might live a new life” (Rom 6: 4). This new life entails dying to sin and living in Christ: “you too must consider yourselves to be dead to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus”. (Rom 6:11). Dying with Christ and living a new life is not possible without the grace of Christ himself. “without me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:15).

76. It is on account of our oneness with Christ that we depend absolutely on him. Christ’s love for us makes it impossible that he would leave his own in their helplessness. “He had always loved those who were his in the world, but now he showed how perfect his love was” (John 13: 1). He

bestows them with all the endowments for their wellbeing. Above all, he gave them his very self as a perfect offering. At the Eucharist, we avail ourselves of this marvelous gift for our temporal and eternal good.

77. In the Eucharist, Christ provides his Church with all imaginable endowments for her pilgrimage through time. Pope Leo XIII says: “Mystery of faith, it contains within it all supernatural realities in a remarkable richness and variety of miracles (*Mirae Caritatis*, no. 122). St. JohnPaul II affirms this wealth of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist in even stronger terms; “the Eucharist as Christ’s saving presence in the community of the faithful and its spiritual food, is the most precious possession which the Church can have in her journey through history” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 9).

78. St. Cyril of Jerusalem views this reality as a pool and encourages his listeners to draw strength from the Eucharistic nourishment. At the end of a sermon on the mysteries of faith he writes,

“Instructed as you are in these matters and filled with an unshakeable faith that what seems to be bread is not bread- though it tastes like it- but rather the body of Christ; and that what seems to be wine is not wine – even though it tastes like it- but rather the blood of Christ... draw strength from receiving this bread as spiritual food and your soul will rejoice” (Emphasis is mine).

Thus, St. Cyril sees this abundance of strength as something that nourishes the spiritual life and gives joy to the soul.

79. We are all encouraged by the marvel of the gift of Christ’s real and complete presence in the Eucharist to be assured that we have a sure source of strength in our fight against evil and against all the incalculable and unforeseeable circumstance that may bedevil our match towards eternity. Let us join the Church in drawing strength from the pool of the Eucharist since “from it the Church draws her life. From this living bread, she draws her nourishment” let us be rest assured that the strength of the Eucharist is insurmountable by any negative force and inexhaustible as a source of support through our sojourn in this earthly life.

CHAPTER NINE

MARY: MOTHER OF THE EUCHARIST

80. Mary is the mother of Jesus who is our Eucharist. The pivotal and consistent role of Mary, our Blessed Mother in the history of salvation elevates her as our exemplary model in our relation to the Most Holy Eucharist; be it in terms of faith in the real presence, trust in God’s word and the offering of herself as a vessel for the fulfillment of Gods will and plan. It was on account of Mary’s **Fiat** that the history of salvation is what we know it to be today. And, as her cousin Elizabeth says, “Blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord will be fulfilled” (Lk 1:45). Her faith in God - and faith which is our link to the Eucharistic presence – is therefore most inspiring.

81. Mary had such physical proximity with her divine son as no one may ever have or hope to experience. She watched her child grow from infancy to adulthood but still believed in his divinity. Her mind penetrated beyond the veils of what human eyes, ears and hands could experience. Faith penetrates. Faith sees the invisible. Faith knows what the senses cannot perceive and even the human reason cannot comprehend. We need to learn faith in the school of Mary in our veneration of the Holy Eucharist.

82. The Magnificat represents Mary's Eucharistia, her thanksgiving to the Lord for the marvels he did, having looked at his lowly handmaid, "Behold all generations shall call me Blessed" (Lk 1: 48). The thanksgiving and praise of God's marvelous work is the same sense that led the Church to name her celebration of the Lord's real presence in the last supper as Eucharistia.

83. But specifically, Mary's Eucharistic faith is not limited to mere similarities. In a certain sense Mary lived her Eucharistic faith even before the institution of the Eucharist, by the very fact that she offered her virginal womb for the incarnation of God's word. (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 55). The Blessed virgin Mary is thus described as the first tabernacle in history, having carried Christ in her womb for so long and thus relating in a direct manner to her son to whom we are related by virtue of the sacrament of the Eucharist. Mary's steadfastness at the foot of the cross when the disciples had disappeared makes her a firsthand witness to that sacrifice of the cross the reality of which we are today re-enacting in the Eucharistic Banquet.

She was with the disciples of Christ in the Acts of the Apostles where they devoted themselves to the teaching of the Apostles, to the breaking of bread and to prayers. (Acts 2:42).

84. The relation of Mary with her Eucharistic Son serves as our model in faith and thanksgiving and encourages us to seek her intercession for the grace to be able to make the Eucharist our strength. Her unfailing intercession ensures that she will most certainly obtain for us the necessary assistance if we genuinely seek her maternal help.

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION

85. The Eucharist is the heart of the mystery of the Church. In a way it encompasses all other sacraments. The Eucharist is the veritable mystery of faith. It represents the greatest gift of Christ to the Church. In it we proclaim the death of Christ and confess his resurrection. The Eucharist hence encompasses in some way all the fundamental aspects of our faith. It is a marvelous expression of Christ's love for his Church: "greater love than this no man has". Having offered himself as an oblation for our salvation, the Lord went further to provide for us a very special means of accessing this unique or singular sacrifice. While not repeating it, it is mysteriously made present, we gain whole and entire the benefits which Christ purveyed for us in this sacrifice of love.

86. It is therefore of utmost benefit for our life as Christians that we harness this strength which the Lord provides for us by giving us the wonderful gift of his Eucharistic presence. It is a gift that we cannot afford to neglect since there is nothing better that can be given to us.

87. PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ,

You gave us the Eucharist as the memorial of your suffering and death. May our worship of this sacrament of your body and blood help us to experience the salvation you won for us, and the peace of the kingdom where you live with the Father and Holy spirit, one God, forever and ever.
Amen

(From the Collect of the Solemnity of Corpus Christi).

**Given in Onitsha, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity, on 6th March, Ash
Wednesday, in the year of our Lord 2019.**

MOST REV. VALERIAN M. OKEKE

Archbishop of Onitsha