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the Eucharist in Mass is eucharistic adoration. St Augustine writes: “No one eats that flesh without first adoring it; we should sin were we not to adore it.” (*Ennarationes in Psalmos* 98:9; n. 66) The Pope strongly encourages eucharistic adoration: “I heartily recommend to the Church’s pastors and to the People of God the practice of eucharistic adoration, both individually and in community”. He specifically recommends that “children be taught the meaning and the beauty of spending time with Jesus, and helped to cultivate a sense of awe before his presence in the Eucharist.” (n. 67)

To foster Eucharistic devotion, the tabernacle should be readily visible on entering the church and, if there is no separate Blessed Sacrament chapel, the tabernacle should be preferably in the sanctuary, in the centre or in another equally conspicuous place. (n. 69)

A MYSTERY TO BE LIVED

In the third and final part of the Apostolic Exhortation, the Pope suggests numerous ways in which the mystery of the Eucharist can be lived out in the daily life of Christians, becoming “the form of our Christian existence.” Indeed “the Eucharist makes our whole life a spiritual worship pleasing to God.” (n. 70) Following St Ignatius of Antioch’s description of Christians as “living in accordance with the Lord’s Day,” we are to make of our lives “a constant self-offering to God.” (*Ad Magnes.* 9, 1; n. 72)

The importance of Sunday, the Lord’s Day, is emphasised. When properly lived, it “gives rise to the Christian meaning of life and a new way of experiencing time, relationships, work, life and death.” Even though the faithful may attend Mass on Saturday evening, Sunday should still be kept holy, “lest it end up as a day ‘empty of God.’” (n. 73) It is also important to observe Sunday as a day of rest from work. This “relativises work and directs it to the person: work is for man and not man for work.” (n. 74)

In places where there is no Mass on a Sunday, “the Synod recommended first that the faithful should go to one of the churches in their Diocese where the presence of a priest is assured, even when this demands a certain sacrifice.” If this is not possible, it is good that the parish community have a liturgy of the word, including the distribution of holy communion

with the bishop’s permission, but this must never “obscure the indispensable ministry of priests for the life of the Church.” Priests are asked to visit as often as possible the communities entrusted to their care, “lest they remain too long without the sacrament of love.” (n. 75)

Participation in the Sunday Mass and communion unites us both with God and with each other, giving a sense of belonging to the Church. (n. 76) At the same time, “Eucharistic spirituality is not just participation in Mass and devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. It embraces the whole of life” and changes “our whole way of living and thinking”. (n. 77)

Individual Christians should live the radical newness of the Eucharist by seeking holiness in their daily lives, doing everything for God’s glory and being “convincing witnesses in the workplace and in society at large.” (n. 79)

The priest should live out the eucharistic form of Christian life by making “his spiritual life his highest priority”, a spiritual life centred on the “daily celebration of the Mass, even when the faithful are not present.” (n. 80)

For *consecrated men and women*, the eucharistic form of life is seen especially in their virginity, “an expression of the Church’s exclusive devotion to Christ, whom she accepts as her Bridegroom with a radical and fruitful fidelity.” (n. 81)

The eucharistic form of life will show itself too in the *moral transformation* of all who participate in it. Just as Zacchaeus was completely changed by his encounter with Jesus, giving half of his possessions to the poor and repaying fourfold those he had defrauded, (cf. Lk 19:1-10) so a Christian’s life should be filled with love. “A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented.” (n. 82)

A MYSTERY TO BE PROCLAIMED AND OFFERED TO THE WORLD

The eucharistic form of life has implications for the Church’s whole *mission*. “The love that we celebrate in the sacrament is not something we can keep to ourselves. By its very nature it demands to be shared with all. What the world needs is God’s love; it needs to encounter Christ

and to believe in him.” Indeed, “an authentically eucharistic Church is a missionary Church.” (n. 84)

The Church reaffirms her solidarity with all those Christians who do not enjoy freedom of worship. “In not a few parts of the world, simply going to church represents a heroic witness that can result in marginalisation and violence.” (n. 87)

Just as Jesus gave his life “for the life of the world” (Jn 6:51), so Christians are called to witness to Christ’s love by working “for the building of a more just and fraternal world.” (n. 88) “Only this constant impulse towards reconciliation enables us to partake worthily of the Body and Blood of Christ.” (n. 89) From the beginning, Christians were concerned to share their goods and to help the poor, and we should do the same. (n. 90)

The Holy Father accepts the proposal of the Synod fathers to publish a *Eucharistic Compendium*, with texts from the Catechism, prayers, explanations of the Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Missal, etc., to assist in a correct understanding, celebration and adoration of the Eucharist. (n. 93)

CONCLUSION

Many saints have advanced along the way of perfection thanks to their eucharistic devotion, and “holiness has always found its centre in the sacrament of the Eucharist.” The Pope therefore asks “all pastors to spare no effort in promoting an authentically eucharistic Christian spirituality.” (n. 94) We “wish to live every day in that newness of life which Christ has brought us in the mystery of the Eucharist.” (n. 95)

From Mary, “Woman of the Eucharist”, as Pope John Paul II called her, “we must learn to become men and women of the Eucharist and

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What did you find especially important for you in the Pope’s Apostolic Exhortation?
2. In what ways is the Eucharist a “sacrament of love”?
3. What aspects of the Eucharist as a “mystery to be lived” did you find that you would like to make an effort to put into practice?
4. What is the importance of eucharistic adoration? How can it be encouraged?

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The Eucharist Sacrament of Love

Summary and highlights of the Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist *The Sacrament of Love* by Pope Benedict XVI

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“In the Eucharist Jesus does not give us a ‘thing’ but himself.”

“The sacrament of charity, 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.” So Pope Benedict begins his Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist.

The document, signed on the 22nd February 2007, feast of the Chair of Peter, is a summary of the reflections and proposals that emerged from the Synod of Bishops Ordinary General Assembly, which met in Rome in October 2005. Such Synods, attended by bishops from all over the world, are held every three years. This one came at the end of the Year of the Eucharist, which had been declared by Pope John Paul II in the last year of his life.

The Pope indicates that the purpose of the Apostolic Exhortation is “to offer some basic directions aimed at a renewed commitment to eucharistic enthusiasm and fervour in the Church” (n. 5) He sets it alongside his Encyclical “God is love”, in which he stressed the relationship between the Eucharist and Christian love. Indeed, the theme of love recurs frequently throughout the document.

After an introduction, the document is divided into three parts with titles that highlight three roles of the Eucharist in the life of the faithful: “a mystery to be believed”, “a mystery to be celebrated” and “a mystery to be lived”.

A MYSTERY TO BE BELIEVED

In this first section the Pope emphasises the centrality of eucharistic faith in the life of the Church: “The more lively the eucharistic faith of the People of God, the deeper is its sharing in ecclesial life in steadfast commitment to the mission entrusted by Christ to his disciples.” (n. 6)

THE EUCHARIST AND THE BLESSED TRINITY

The Eucharist is very much bound up with the mystery of the Blessed Trinity. “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (Jn 3:16-17) and we have the divine Son present in the Eucharist. “In the Eucharist Jesus does not give us a ‘thing’, but himself; he offers his own body and pours out his own blood.” (n. 7) Thus the “mystery of faith” is also “a mystery of Trinitarian love.” (n. 8)

Quoting his own Encyclical, the Pope draws

out the aspect of love in the sacrifice of Christ, which is made present in the Eucharist: “Christ’s death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form.” (n. 9; *God is Love*, n. 12)

We are all called to enter into this mystery of love. In the Eucharist “Jesus draws us into himself”. “More than just statically receiving the incarnate *Logos*, we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving”. (n. 11)

The Eucharist is not only the presence of the Son, who was sent by the Father. It is very much related to the Holy Spirit, who was present in Jesus’ life from his conception to his sending of the Holy Spirit on the apostles at Pentecost. In the Mass, in the prayer of *epiclesis*, the priest calls down the Holy Spirit to transform the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. The Spirit also “gathers the faithful ‘into one body’ and makes of them a spiritual offering pleasing to the Father.” (n. 13)

THE EUCHARIST, THE CHURCH AND THE SACRAMENTS

The Eucharist is also very much bound up with the mystery of the Church. “The Eucharist is Christ who gives himself to us and continually builds us up as his body.” (n. 14) The Eucharist brings about the Church’s very being and activity and for this reason the words *Corpus Christi*, Body of Christ, are applied equally to the physical body of Christ born of the Virgin Mary, his body present in the Eucharist, and his ecclesial body, the Church. “The Eucharist is thus found at the root of the Church as a mystery of communion.” (n. 15)

This has implications for the oneness, the unity, and the communion of the Church. It also has implications for the ecumenical movement. The Eucharist “objectively creates a powerful bond of unity between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches, which have preserved the authentic and integral nature of the eucharistic mystery.” And it “can become an important element of the dialogue with the Communities of the Reformed tradition.” (n. 15)

Moreover, as the Second Vatican Council taught, “all the sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the

apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are directed towards it. For in the most blessed Eucharist is contained the entire spiritual wealth of the Church, namely Christ himself our Pasch and our living bread...” (*Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 5)

The Pope goes on to show how each of the sacraments is related to the Eucharist.

The *Eucharist*, as the source and summit of the Church’s life and mission, is the fullness of Christian initiation. In *Baptism* we are made members of the Body of Christ, and in *Confirmation* we receive the gifts of the Spirit for the building up of Christ’s body and for greater witness to the Gospel in the world. “The Holy Eucharist, then, brings Christian initiation to completion and represents the centre and goal of all sacramental life.” (n. 17)

The Pope calls upon the bishops to study whether the order of receiving the three sacraments of Christian initiation in their diocese adequately helps the faithful to put the sacrament of the Eucharist at the centre, as the goal of the whole process of initiation, and he mentions especially the importance of parents being involved in the process of initiation of their children. (cf. nn. 18-19)

As regards the sacrament of *Reconciliation*, the Pope speaks of the faithful being “surrounded by a culture that tends to eliminate the sense of sin and to promote a superficial approach that overlooks the need to be in a state of grace in order to approach sacramental communion worthily.” This “entails a certain superficiality in the understanding of God’s love.” (n. 20) The Synod recalled the duty of bishops of promoting “a reinvigorated catechesis on the conversion born of the Eucharist, and of encouraging frequent confession among the faithful.” (n. 21)

The *Anointing of the Sick* is related to the Eucharist in that it unites the sick with Christ’s self-offering, made present in the Eucharist. This is especially clear in the case of serious illness, when the anointing is followed by the reception of Communion as Viaticum, “the seed of eternal life”, which prepares the person for the journey to the Father. (n. 22)

The relationship between the Eucharist and *Holy Orders* is seen in Christ’s institution of the priesthood in the Last Supper when he told the apostles to “do this in memory of me.” There can be no valid celebration of the Eucharist without

a priest. Moreover, priests “should be conscious of the fact that in their ministry they must never put themselves or their personal opinions in first place, but Jesus Christ. Any attempt to make themselves the centre of the liturgical action contradicts their very identity as priests. The priest is above all a servant of others, and he must continually work at being a sign pointing to Christ, a docile instrument in the Lord’s hands.” (n. 23)

Reaffirming the “priceless treasure” of priestly celibacy and its nuptial meaning as a “profound identification with the heart of Christ the Bridegroom who gives his life for his Bride”, the Pope confirms that celibacy “remains obligatory in the Latin tradition.” (n. 24)

The Eucharist has a special relationship with the sacrament of *Matrimony*. In the theology of Saint Paul, “conjugal love is a sacramental sign of Christ’s love for his Church, a love culminating in the Cross” which is “the origin and heart of the Eucharist.” (n. 27) Among the pastoral problems dealt with by the Synod was the care of couples who have been divorced and remarried outside the Church. While they cannot be admitted to the sacraments, they continue to belong to the Church, “which accompanies them with special concern.” (n. 29)

THE EUCHARIST AND THE NEXT LIFE

The sacraments not only strengthen us in our pilgrimage through history, they give us a foretaste of our ultimate fulfilment in heaven. This is especially the case with the Eucharist, which is “a real foretaste of the final banquet foretold by the prophets and described in the New Testament as ‘the marriage-feast of the Lamb’ to be celebrated in the joy of the communion of saints.” (n. 31; Rev 19:7-9) The Mass is “a pledge of the future glory in which our bodies too will be glorified” and it strengthens our hope of meeting once again those “who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith”. (n. 32)

A MYSTERY TO BE CELEBRATED

In the second part of the Apostolic Exhortation, Pope Benedict deals with how the mystery of faith, a mystery to be believed, is lived out in the actual celebration of the Eucharist. The Pope calls for the liturgy to be celebrated in such a way that it manifests the beauty of God and his work. Beauty, he says, “is not a mere

decoration, but rather an essential element of the liturgical action, since it is an attribute of God himself and his revelation.” (n. 35) The Pope calls especially on the bishops to watch over the liturgical life of their dioceses, ensuring that the “sense of the sacred” is fostered. (cf. nn. 39-40)

The beauty of the liturgy includes careful attention to the structure of the church building itself and its furnishings, as well as sacred art, especially paintings and sculptures within the church. (cf. n. 41) Another important aspect of the liturgy is music, which “ought to correspond to the meaning of the mystery being celebrated.” The 2000-year heritage of liturgical music must not be lost and, in keeping with the request of the bishops of the Synod, the Pope desires “that Gregorian chant be suitably esteemed and employed”. (n. 42)

THE STRUCTURE OF THE EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

The Pope now turns to the structure of the eucharistic celebration and certain aspects “which require special attention at the present time, if we are to remain faithful to the underlying intention of the liturgical renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council.” (n. 43) He begins by emphasising the unity of the Mass, with the liturgy of the word and liturgy of the Eucharist forming “one single act of worship.” (n. 44)

The Pope urges that the *proclamation of the Word* be entrusted to well-prepared readers since it is God himself who speaks to the people through it. (n. 45) In order to make the word of God enter into the lives of the faithful, the *homily* should be carefully prepared. “Thematic” homilies dealing with the great themes of the Christian faith found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* are encouraged. (n. 46)

In the *presentation of the gifts* “all creation is taken up by Christ the Redeemer to be transformed and presented to the Father”, including all the pain and suffering of the world. (n. 47) The faithful should be enabled to appreciate the richness of the *Eucharistic Prayer*, with all its basic elements. (n. 48) The *Sign of Peace* is expressive of the desire for peace in times of fear and conflict, but it needs to be expressed with “greater restraint” so as not to cause a distraction just before Communion. (n. 49)

In the *distribution of holy Communion* the Pope emphasises respect for the norms regarding the reception of Communion only by Catholics, especially in weddings and funerals, and he mentions the importance of observing a time of silence after Communion. (cf. n. 50) He draws

attention to the *final dismissal* as a “mission”, a sending out of Christians into the world. (n. 51)

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION, BOTH EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL

One of the principles of the Second Vatican Council was the call for the “active, full and fruitful participation” of the faithful in the liturgy. The Pope stresses that this does not mean “mere external activity” but rather “a greater awareness of the mystery being celebrated and its relationship to daily life.” (n. 52) This requires “the spirit of constant conversion”, fostered by a few moments of recollection before the beginning of the liturgy, by fasting and by making use of sacramental confession, all of which help to bring about “a heart reconciled to God.” (n. 55)

As for Christians who are not Catholic, “the respect we owe to the sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood prevents us from making it a mere ‘means’ to be used indiscriminately in order to attain that unity” that we all pray for. The reception of the Eucharist implies full communion with the Church, and so the norms under which non-Catholics can be admitted to the sacraments in some exceptional circumstances must be faithfully observed. (n. 56)

The use of Latin and of Gregorian chant is encouraged, and seminarians should be properly prepared to celebrate Mass in Latin. (n. 62)

As regards the formation of the faithful to enable them to enter personally into the mysteries of the liturgy, the Bishops in the Synod stated that “the best catechesis on the Eucharist is the Eucharist itself, celebrated well.” Moreover, Christian formation should be experiential, leading to “a vital and convincing encounter with Christ, as proclaimed by authentic witnesses.” This encounter “gains depth through catechesis and finds its source and summit in the celebration of the Eucharist.” The process of formation should respect three elements:

- It interprets the rites in the light of the events of our salvation.
- It presents the meaning of the signs contained in the rites.
- It brings out the significance of the rites for the Christian life in all its dimensions, including the missionary responsibility of the faithful. (n. 64)

Intimately connected with the celebration of