

In Communion with Christ

4. Thanksgiving

'*Mysterium fidei!* – The Mystery of Faith!'. When the priest recites or chants these words, all present acclaim: 'We announce your death, O Lord, and we proclaim your resurrection, until you come in glory'.

In these or similar words the Church, while pointing to Christ in the mystery of his passion, also reveals her own mystery: *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. By the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the Church was born and set out upon the pathways of the world, yet a decisive moment in her taking shape was certainly the institution of the Eucharist in the Upper Room. Her foundation and wellspring is the whole *Triduum paschale*, but this is as it were gathered up, foreshadowed and 'concentrated' for ever in the gift of the Eucharist. In this gift Jesus Christ entrusted to his Church the perennial making present of the paschal mystery. With it he brought about a mysterious 'oneness in time' between that *Triduum* and the passage of the centuries.

The thought of this leads us to profound amazement and gratitude. In the paschal event and the Eucharist which makes it present throughout the centuries, there is a truly enormous 'capacity' which embraces all of history as the recipient of the grace of the redemption. This amazement should always fill the Church assembled for the celebration of the Eucharist. But in a special way it should fill the minister of the Eucharist. For it is he who, by the authority given him in the sacrament of priestly ordination, effects the consecration. It is he who says with the power coming to him from Christ in the Upper Room: 'This is my body which will be given up for you This is the cup of my blood, poured out for you...'. The priest says these words, or rather he puts his voice at the disposal of the One who spoke these words in the Upper Room and who desires that they should be repeated in every generation by all those who in the Church ministerially share in his priesthood.

I would like to rekindle this Eucharistic 'amazement' by the present Encyclical Letter, in continuity with the Jubilee heritage which I have left to the Church in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* and its Marian crowning, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*. To contemplate the face of Christ, and to contemplate it with Mary, is the 'programme' which I have set before the Church at the dawn of the third millennium, summoning her to put out into the deep on the sea of history with the enthusiasm of the new evangelization. To contemplate Christ involves being able to recognize him wherever he manifests himself, in his many forms of presence, but above all in the living sacrament of his body and his blood. The Church draws her life from Christ

Over the years I have assigned theological students the task of finding a piece of art for a Good Friday bulletin cover. They were to bring the picture to class along with a brief meditation on the artist's work that would be appropriate for typing on the back of the bulletin cover.

One student wrote a meditation on the peace and courage we could see in the face of the Saviour as he bore the cross to Calvary. But when we looked closely at the face of Christ in the picture, we noticed that the eyes were dilated, like those of a trapped animal, and the fine muscles at the corners of the mouth and eyes were drawn tense by pain so that the face looked about to crack under the strain. The student's preconceived verbal ideas distorted his ability to see what the artists had actually drawn. The result was a subjective projection that blocked the accurate use of the imagination.

The first task for this student as a preacher was to learn to see the world more accurately until he was able as Rudolph Arnheim has said, 'to understand through the eyes.'

Thomas H. Troeger. *Imagining a Sermon*.
Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990.

Key Texts

General Instruction of the Roman Missal

72-79, 139-151

Mass with Deacon: 178-180

Concelebrated Mass 214 – 236

Celebrating the Mass

93-126, 174-199

in the Eucharist; by him she is fed and by him she is enlightened. The Eucharist is both a mystery of faith and a 'mystery of light'. Whenever the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the faithful can in some way relive the experience of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: 'their eyes were opened and they recognized him' (Lk 24:31).

John Paul II *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 5-6.

A joyful celebration in song

Given the nature of Sunday Mass and its importance in the lives of the faithful, it must be prepared with special care. In ways dictated by pastoral experience and local custom in keeping with liturgical norms, efforts must be made to ensure that the celebration has the festive character appropriate to the day commemorating the Lord's Resurrection. To this end, it is important to devote attention to the songs used by the assembly, since singing is a particularly apt way to express a joyful heart, accentuating the solemnity of the celebration and fostering the sense of a common faith and a shared love. Care must be taken to ensure the quality, both of the texts and of the melodies, so that what is proposed today as new and creative will conform to liturgical requirements and be worthy of the Church's tradition which, in the field of sacred music, boasts a priceless heritage.

At the Lamb's high feast we sing
Praise to our victorious King,
Who hath washed us in the tide
flowing from his piercéd side;
Praise we him, whose love divine
Gives his sacred Blood for wine,
Gives his Body for the feast,
Christ the victim, Christ the Priest.

Anonymous, 7th Century,
tr. Robert Campbell

A celebration involving all

There is a need too to ensure that all those present, children and adults, take an active interest, by encouraging their involvement at those points where the liturgy suggests and recommends it. Of course, it falls only to those who exercise the priestly ministry to effect the Eucharistic Sacrifice and to offer it to God in the name of the whole people. This is the basis of the distinction, which is much more than a matter of discipline, between the task proper to the celebrant and that which belongs to deacons and the non-ordained faithful. Yet the faithful must realize that, because of the common priesthood received in Baptism, 'they participate in the offering of the Eucharist'. Although there is a distinction of roles, they still 'offer to God the divine victim and themselves with him. Offering the sacrifice and receiving Holy Communion, they take part actively in the liturgy', finding in it light and strength to live their baptismal priesthood and the witness of a holy life.

John Paul II. *Dies Domini*, 50,51

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Thanksgiving Starting points

What particular points struck you from your reading of GIRM and/or CTM; from the People's leaflets; or from the other reading material?

In what ways do these particular points challenge or affirm your present practice?

If you regularly have to distribute Holy Communion during Mass using the reserved Sacrament how might things be managed better?

What, if anything, stops the singing of the Eucharistic Acclamations?

How is the whole assembly helped to experience the Eucharistic Prayer as being the prayer of the gathered Church, not only of the presider?

What are the main points you wish to continue to explore?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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Thanksgiving Homily notes

How is the action of thanksgiving represented or described in

- today's readings and psalm?
- the Mass propers?
- the preface and Eucharistic Prayer?
- the Ordinary of the Mass?
- the music and songs chosen for use in the Mass?

Where does this action of 'thanksgiving' take place in the daily life of your community? What is there to learn from this?

What are the major events in your parish/town at present?

What stories/experiences connect with the theme of listening and responding?

Main points to be carried forward into homily

1.

2.

3.

What are the major national/international events at present?

And what songs, plays, films, paintings etc.?