

**The Eucharist:
Sacrament of Communion, of Unity and Diversity
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Every Christian looks up to the Eucharist as the miracle of an unspeakable, inconceivable love of God for us human beings, the love of God who desires to unite Himself to us in the closest possible manner.¹

To merge us in unity with God and among ourselves, although we have each a distinct personality, the only Son devised a wonderful means: through one only body, his own, he sanctifies his faithful in mystic communion, making them one body with him and among themselves.²

Introduction

The title of my presentation today is “The Eucharist: Sacrament of Communion, of Unity and Diversity.” Given that title, I want to begin with some well known verses from St. Paul’s First Letter to the Church at Corinth.

This is the Word of God: “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a communion in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a communion in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

The two outstanding themes of these verses are, one, Eucharistic participation in the Paschal mystery, and two, the Eucharist, sacrament of unity and diversity. In what follows, I will address the question of how the Eucharist makes possible our participation in the Paschal mystery. Put differently, how does the Eucharist bring about our sharing in the saving activity of Jesus Christ’s passion, death and resurrection? Furthermore, I will also consider the sense in which participating in the one Eucharistic body of Christ

brings about sharing in the one ecclesial body of Christ, which is the new and reborn humanity in Christ.

Moreover, given that the Eucharist is the sacrament of unity and the bond of love, as St. Augustine said, I will also consider how this ecclesial communion unites Christians from diverse cultural communities as the one people of God and as the one family of God.³ In this context, I will offer some reflections rooted in the Scriptures on how the Eucharist as the sacrament of unity and the bond of love illumines the experience of migrants and refugees. In other words, what difference does or should this sacrament make in their lives as “people on the move”? More briefly, what challenges as well as gifts do they as “strangers in a new land” offer the Church?⁴ I shall conclude my presentation by drawing out the implications of the Eucharist as the mystery of faith to be lived, proclaimed, and offered to the world.⁵

1 The Mystery of Salvation is Concentrated in the Gift of the Eucharist

What is the Eucharist? The Eucharist makes present in a sacramental manner the redeeming acts of God in Jesus Christ, namely, his passion, death and resurrection. St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that the whole mystery of our salvation is recapitulated in the sacrament of the Eucharist.⁶ The Second Vatican Council reiterates Aquinas’ point. “For in the most blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church.”⁷ The late Holy Father, John Paul II echoes this truth in his 2003 Encyclical letter, *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*: the Church’s foundation, indeed, the beating heart of the Church’s mystery is the “whole *Triduum paschale*,” that is, the passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, and this is “concentrated forever in the gift of the Eucharist.”⁸ Now, since the whole

mystery of salvation finds its synthesis in the Eucharist, we can easily grasp why the Church teaches that it is the “sacrament of sacraments” (*sacramentum sacramentorum*)⁹, and hence, as Vatican II repeatedly proclaims, the source, center, and summit of the life of the Church.¹⁰

What is the whole spiritual good of the Church that finds its synthesis in the sacrament of the Eucharist? In short, what is the gift of the Eucharist to the Church? The gift or spiritual good manifested in the Eucharist is Jesus Christ giving himself to us in and through the gift of his saving work (cf. *EE*, no. 11). Christ offered himself for us in the saving actions of his passion, death and resurrection. He who freely gave himself in sacrifice for us on the cross and thus brought about the new and eternal covenant with the Father, in the Son, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, is the fulfilled sign of the abiding love of God (*SC*, no. 9). “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn. 3:16). Seen in this light, the Eucharist is the sacrament of charity¹¹, as Benedict XVI recently proclaimed, because it reveals to us the infinite love of God for all humans. This gift of salvation, this sacrament of charity, which is the bond of perfection (Col. 3:14), is offered to us again and again in the sacramental celebration of the Eucharist because the Lord’s death and resurrection, indeed, the whole Christ is truly, really and substantially present, and “the work of our redemption is carried out.”¹²

Furthermore, “in this gift,” John Paul II adds, “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”

(*EE*, no. 5). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* expands upon this last point of John Paul II:

In the liturgy of the Church, it is principally his own Paschal mystery that Christ signifies and makes present. . . . His Paschal mystery is a real event that occurred in our history, but it is unique: all other historical events happen once, and then they pass away, swallowed up in the past. The Paschal mystery of Christ, by contrast, cannot remain only in the past, because by his death he destroyed death, and all that Christ is—all that he did and suffered for all men—participates in the divine eternity, and so transcends all times while being made present in them all. The event of the Cross and the Resurrection *abides* and draws everything toward life.¹³

In order to see how Christ's atoning death, made once and for all time, eternally abides and yet can be sacramentally enacted in different times and places, we must understand the work of Jesus Christ as the true high priest. Christ's finished work, a full and perfect sacrifice for sin on our behalf (Heb. 10:14) in his own atoning death, endures as an eternal offering made to the Father in heaven (Heb. 8:1-2, 9:23-26). "For Christ did not enter into a man-made sanctuary; . . . he entered heaven itself, now appearing before God on our behalf" (Hebrews 9:24). This sacrificial offering brings about the forgiveness of sins, and hence believers may approach God with confidence. Yet there is more to Christ's high priestly service on our behalf. The sacrifice of Christ is eternally present to the Father. Having offered for all time the one sacrifice for sins, Christ sits down at the right hand of the Father (Heb. 10:12) and continues to intercede for believers. "But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 Jn. 2:1-2).

So then how does the Eucharistic sacrifice, here and now, sacramentally enact Christ's atoning death on the cross, the full and perfect sacrifice for sin on our behalf?

The brief answer to this question here must be: “The Eucharist can reenact an event from the past because it joins with that event in the eternal present of God,”¹⁴ namely, in the action of the incarnate Son, as our Eternal High Priest, before the Eternal Father who is directly involved and invoked in the Eucharist.¹⁵

It is evident from the words the priest says when inviting us to approach the altar—“This is *the Lamb of God* who takes away the sins of the world. Happy are those who are called to his supper.”—that the Eucharist is a genuine and specific expiatory sacrifice, as the Council of Trent maintains, and not merely an act of praise and thanksgiving. “In the Eucharist Christ gives us the very body which he gave up for us on the cross, the very blood which he ‘poured out for the many for the forgiveness of sins.’” Indeed, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* adds, “The Eucharist is thus a sacrifice because it *re-presents* (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross, because it is its *memorial* and because it *applies* its fruit.” Most importantly, “the sacrifice of the Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice*” (CCC, no. 1365-1367). The Eucharistic sacrifice is not a new sacrifice of Christ’s sacrifice as if the latter was insufficient. Rather, nothing need be added, nothing can be added to the sufficiency of Christ’s atoning work. “It is finished,” says Jesus (Jn. 19:30). Our redemption is accomplished once for all by the Son of God, who in an act of love freely accepts his death on our behalf, delivering us from sin, evil and death (cf. Heb. 7:27; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10). “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

2 **The Eucharist and the Church: Visible and Invisible, Vertical and Horizontal**

“The Eucharist is the sum and summary of our faith,” and hence the enacted Eucharist proclaims the Gospel of salvation. Of course this sacrament is enacted in the context of the liturgy of the revealed Word of God. This revealed Word “must be listened to and accepted in a spirit of communion with the Church and with a clear awareness of its unity with the sacrament of the Eucharist. . . . In this sacramental context of Christian revelation, knowledge and study of the Word of God enable us better to appreciate, celebrate, and live the Eucharist” (SC, no. 45). Most important for our purpose now, the sacramental celebration of the Eucharist, which makes present Jesus Christ, his person and his saving work, calls us to respond in faith to the Gospel, initiating or renewing that faith, the fruit of grace, in the life of the Church, in the life of the disciple of Christ.

Furthermore, the Eucharistic sacrifice “gives rise to a continuing need for conversion, for a personal response to the appeal made by Saint Paul to the Christians of Corinth: ‘We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God’ (2 Cor. 5:20)” (EE, no. 37). By receiving in faith the person and work of Christ communicated to me by the Church in the enacted Eucharist, my union with the Church, which is the reborn humanity in Christ, and hence my union with Christ himself, is deepened. “The principal fruit of receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion is an intimate union with Christ Jesus” (CCC, no. 1391). For as the Holy Scripture puts it: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him” (Jn. 6:56).

Moreover, union with Christ brings about the fellowship of believers, the unity of ecclesial communion, in the new and reborn humanity in Christ that is the Church. This ecclesial communion is a fruit of sharing in the body and blood of Christ (cf. Eucharistic Prayer II). “Because there is *one bread*, we who are many are *one body*, for we all

partake of the one bread” (1 Cor. 10:17). The Eucharistic Christ unites me in social communion with every other person receiving him, with the person next to me, but also with those people who are from diverse cultural communities.¹⁶ “Becoming one with them, I must learn to open myself toward them and to involve myself in their situations. This is the proof of the authenticity of my love for Christ. If I am united with Christ, I am together with my neighbor, and this unity is not limited to the moment of communion, but only begins here. It becomes life, becomes flesh and blood, in the everyday experience of sharing life with my neighbor. Thus, the individual realities of my communicating and being part of the life of the Church are inseparably linked to one another. . . . Precisely when the Eucharist is understood in the intimacy of the union of each person with the Lord, it becomes also a social sacrament to the highest degree.”¹⁷

To receive, then, the gift of the Eucharist presupposes that we already exist in living communion in a twofold sense: ecclesial communion is at once invisible and visible, vertical and horizontal. The invisible reality of ecclesial communion, which is our belonging to the Mystical Body of Christ, is the living communion of the faithful Christian not only with the Trinity, communion with the Father, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, but also with other fellow believers who share in the benefits of Christ’s saving work. The visible reality of ecclesial communion is the temporal manifestation of that Mystical Body, the Church on earth, in which the faithful are in communion with the Church’s hierarchical order, the sacraments, and the teachings of the Apostles (cf. *EE*, no. 35).¹⁸ As Pope Benedict XVI puts it, “The Eucharistic mystery helps us to understand the profound meaning of the *communio sanctorum*. Communion always and inseparably has both a vertical and a horizontal sense: it is communion with God and communion

with our brothers and sisters. Both dimensions mysteriously converge in the gift of the Eucharist.” ““Whenever communion with God’,” the pope adds, ““which is communion with the Father, with the Son, and with the Holy Spirit, is destroyed, the root and source of our communion with one another is destroyed. And whenever we do not live [in] communion among ourselves, communion with the Triune God is not alive and true either’” (SC, no. 76).

These two dimensions of communion converge in the gift of the Eucharist because the Eucharist is the bond of perfection (cf. Col. 3:14): the Eucharistic Christ unites himself to us in such a way as to become one body with us and at the same time a union of all, one with another. Hence, rather than being the starting point for communion, the Eucharist presupposes that the invisible and visible reality of communion already exists and communion with the Eucharistic Christ is the bond of perfection that brings to fulfillment these two dimensions.

3 The Sacrament of Unity and Diversity and the Phenomenon of Displaced Persons

How can our reflections on the Eucharist as the sacrament of our unity and diversity illumine the growing global phenomenon of displaced persons, that is, migrants and refugees? Two specific questions spring to mind for our consideration in this context: How is the Body of Christ enriched by the cultural and spiritual heritage of migrants and refugees? In turn, and more importantly, how is the culture of migrants and refugees transformed by the Church’s action through the power of the Eucharist? Thus, our thoughts will focus on the connection between the Eucharist and charitable social action

in the challenge of ministering to those who find themselves displaced, “strangers in a foreign land.”

Exploring this connection seems fitting in a world where everywhere the “other,” the outcast, and the oppressed often find themselves without the advocates they need to safeguard their lives and possessions – indeed where they are often rejected and despised precisely because they are “different” – in looks, in culture, in customs. These persons present a direct challenge for a Church that makes the claim to unite all persons in the one Body of Christ and which offers the Bread of Life as “food” for the world.

Of course, the topic of “people on the move” is one too large and complex to explore in all its facets here. But anyway we need not do so. Many Church documents and directives, especially those of the popes, bishops’ conferences, and the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Travelers, have given this issue of the rights and responsibilities of migrants the treatment it deserves, showing too that the Church has always involved herself in the pastoral care of persons who either leave their homeland – freely or by force – or flee their homes without crossing an international border (i.e. the internally displaced).¹⁹

But how could this be otherwise? How could the Catholic Church refuse those who seek the comfort of her maternal embrace?²⁰ As the document *The Love of Christ Toward Migrants* reminds us, even the Holy Family found themselves as migrants on the run fleeing danger into Egypt (see no. 15; cf. Mt. 2:13-15). And so the Church herself, as is abundantly clear from many examples in salvation history, has the “migrant experience” at the very root of her origins.²¹ Therefore she must be ever mindful of and compassionate towards those who settle in a new country in hope of finding asylum or

hope for a better life, assuring these persons that the Church is there for them with her Eucharistic and maternal presence providing safety, shelter, sustenance, and spiritual aid.

Throughout Sacred Scripture we find many instances where refugees and migrants are affirmed as persons who must be treated with love, respect, and dignity. Leviticus 19:36, to cite the first of but two examples from the Old Testament, calls on the Israelites to love the alien among them with the same love that they have for themselves and their countrymen, reminding them that they too “were once aliens in the land of Egypt.” Deuteronomy echoes this exhortation and its rationale when it speaks of “befriend[ing] the alien, feeding and clothing him” (Dt. 10:18). Here it is the Lord God, however, who executes these deeds and we in turn who are to imitate his actions.

This concern to treat the refugee as a brother or sister is carried over into the New Testament but now with a different basis – one might even say a Eucharistic one: one’s membership in the one Body of Christ provides a fresh incentive to reach out to the foreigner, to the stranger that we meet. All men, regardless of place of origin, nationality, or race are members of the human family, children of God. For those who have been “baptized into Christ,” however, all are one in Christ Jesus, members of his divine family. As St. Paul tells us in Galatians, through faith, we “are all children of God in Christ Jesus...There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for [we] are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 5:26, 28; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13).

St. Luke’s story of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:29-37) illustrates in a profoundly radical way the attitude we are to have towards the foreigner in our midst. This parable of the robbery victim and his Samaritan helper is Jesus’ answer to the question: who is my neighbor? (cf. Lk. 10:29). Jesus makes it abundantly clear that any one and every one

is my neighbor without restrictions or preconceived notions that would block a merciful response. So, Peter's answer, "I do not know the man" (see Mt. 26:72, 74 and par.) will not do. Each man and woman is a potential neighbor – the one who Jesus tells us we must love "as ourselves" (cf. Lk. 10:27).

Perhaps, it could be argued, that no biblical story illumines better the kind of attitude and actions that Christians are called to perform for those in extreme distress, such as refugees, than the "parable" of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46 – the so-called "judgment of the nations" discourse. Nor could one find a better bridge to my remarks on the role of the Eucharist in the Church's response to migrants and refugees.

As you know, Jesus minces no words in this passage when he identifies himself as "one of the least ones" (Mt. 25:45). Each time we have given food to the hungry, provided drink for the thirsty, offered clothing to the naked, or visited the prisoner, we have done it *for Jesus*. And each time we have chosen to neglect doing these corporal works of mercy, we have not done them *for Jesus*. Significantly, for our purpose, Jesus includes among these works of mercy that we have chosen either to do or not do, "welcoming the stranger" (see Mt. 25:35, 43, 44).

When we welcome the migrant, the refugee, we welcome Jesus. The identification is truly that intimate. On the basis of this welcoming, this feeding, this clothing, we shall be judged worthy or not worthy of his Kingdom. Probably no passage in the Bible describes the nature of Catholic social doctrine better than this one. It shows that this identification between the poor and the needy and the person of Jesus himself is not a mere metaphor, but real. It shows too that our social activism must be informed by charity and not simply a philanthropic spirit. Christ is the reason for our hope and our

help. In the face of the refugee, then, we should see the face of the Christ, just as through faith we see him in the Eucharist.

With the eyes of faith, moreover, we know that this identification between Christ and the needy is grounded in the Eucharist itself. Union with Christ, as we noted in the previous section, brings about the fellowship of believers. And, to repeat, this ecclesial communion is a fruit of sharing in the body and blood of Christ. This is why we could say earlier that in giving us his body, Christ becomes one body with us and all become united with one another in the Eucharistic Christ. This union is so complete that not even the one-flesh union that married couples experience in the conjugal act can approximate it.

These brief reflections on the Scriptures hopefully make plain to us how it is that we can speak of the Eucharist as the “bond of perfection” (cf. Col. 3:14), as the sacrament of unity and diversity, and as the sacrament of communion and love. For despite the difficulties that “diversity” poses to “unity,” that “pluralism” poses to “oneness,” and that “confrontation” poses to “communion,” the sacrament of the Eucharist provides us with a “way out.” No matter what nationality or cultural community I may come from, ultimately the union I experience in and with Christ’s body – both Eucharistic and ecclesial – is deeper than any differences of culture or race that may divide me from my fellow believer. These differences, important and valuable in themselves remain on the “surface” level when we contemplate the spiritual ties that bind us together as believers.

At the same time, we can also see how these cultural differences can be not only respected but find their deepest meaning and justification. In the Body of Christ, unity

does not mean uniformity; far from it. Communion in Christ does not lead to conformity because it is rooted in charity. As St Thomas Aquinas says, charity is the good of friendship and friends desire only each other's truest good in a spirit of mutual love,²² not the dull "cookie-cutter" sameness of uniformity. What better way, then, to create what the document, *The Love of Christ towards Migrants* calls "a culture of solidarity"²³ – which "offers a providential opportunity for the fulfillment of God's plans for a universal communion" (no. 9) – then by the celebration of the Eucharist, the "social sacrament" of love?

In this regard, John Paul II insists that "the immigrant members of the Church, while freely exercising their rights and duties and being in full ecclesial communion in the particular churches, feeling themselves Christians and brothers towards all, must be able to remain completely themselves as far as language, culture, liturgy and spirituality, and particular traditions are concerned."²⁴ Nevertheless, as the U.S. Bishops note, "the Church's norms for the pastoral care of immigrants attempt to balance the legitimate rights of immigrants with their duty to look to the common good of both their communities of origin and their host community."²⁵

The U.S. Bishops express theologically the idea of respect for the diverse gifts of various cultural communities when they write: "The eucharistic celebration is central to church life and to our communion as Catholics with one another in the one Lord. Whenever the diverse cultures of parish and diocese are able to share the Eucharist in special celebrations that reflect the cultural riches of the participants, the Church demonstrates in the sacrament of our unity the multicultural face of the Church, proclaiming 'with joy and firm faith that God is communion, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

unity in distinction, and that he calls all people to share in that same Trinitarian communion’.”²⁶

The new immigration of the third millennium, continue the U.S. Bishops, is “a reminder of the pilgrim state of the Church, made up of all those, regardless of race or class or national origin, who have been called to the wedding banquet and have responded (Lk.14:23). As a pilgrim, the Church encompasses in itself all the reality of human suffering and all the glory of the human spirit infused with the grace of Christ... In the one baptism, the Church acknowledges God’s call to conversion, while in the sacrament of the Eucharist, she enjoys prefigured the glorious communion of Father and Son in the Holy Spirit. At the Eucharist the Church prefigures the revelation of ‘a great multitude . . . from every nation, race, people, and tongue’ (Rev. 7:9).”²⁷

But of course this view implies concrete pastoral steps on the part of the Church to implement this respect for cultural diversity. As John Paul II says in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* with respect to migrant families, migrants “should be able to find a homeland in the Church.” This, he reminds us, in harmony with our reflections above, is “a task stemming from the nature of the Church, as being the sign of unity and diversity.”²⁸ For the Church, as the Vatican document on migrants observes, “is the mystery of God among men, the mystery of love shown by the Only-Begotten Son, especially in His death and resurrection, so that all ‘may have life, and have it to the full’ (Jn. 10:10), so that all may find strength to overcome every division and act in such a way that differences do not lead to rifts but communion by welcoming others in their legitimate diversity.”²⁹

This task is an especially urgent one, I might add, when we take into account the pressures many families face today in “the area of reproductive health that includes their being forced to fall back on abortion, sterilization, or ‘emergency’ contraception.”³⁰ The Church is called to both meet the needs and defend the rights of these families wherever they are threatened in law or in practice.

Fr. Peter Lynch has outlined a helpful pastoral approach for how the Church can minister to the needs of migrants and refugees.³¹ A pastoral response to the plight of migrants and asylum seekers first finds it necessary, he notes, to offer practical assistance to help resettle these people. All levels of a diocese can be engaged in the task of providing such basics as housing, language skills, education, and employment opportunities. A second component of sound pastoral care involves, he says, securing the necessary governmental permissions to visit people in detention centers and to provide religious services and care for them. A third element comprises advocacy and legal assistance for particular individuals or groups required to process their claims for residence. And fourth, Lynch argues, public campaigns and education must be put in place to raise awareness about the need to protect the rights, including the humane treatment, of refugees and asylum seekers. As Fr. Lynch observes, “The Church has a role to share these tasks with others in the broader society, so helping to shape a society that is more tolerant, inclusive and welcoming.”³²

But what is the basic motive toward the formation of this culture of solidarity? Pope Benedict XVI has described the power (*dunamis*) of the Eucharist using “the image well known to us today,” namely, this power is like “nuclear fission in the very heart of being – the victory of love over hatred, the victory of love over death.” Only this intimate

explosion of good conquering evil,” Benedict adds, “can then trigger off the series of transformations that little by little will change the world.” He continues:

All other changes remain superficial and cannot save. For this reason we speak of redemption: what had to happen at the most intimate level has indeed happened, and we can enter into its dynamic. Jesus can distribute his Body, because he truly gives himself. This first fundamental transformation of violence into love, of death into life, brings other changes in its wake. Bread and wine become his Body and Blood. But it must not stop there; on the contrary, the process of transformation must now gather momentum. The Body and Blood of Christ are given to us so that we ourselves will be transformed in our turn. We are to become the Body of Christ, his own Flesh and Blood. We all eat the one bread, and this means that we ourselves become one. In this way, adoration, as we said earlier, becomes union. God no longer simply stands before us as the One who is totally Other. He is within us, and we are in him. His dynamic enters into us and then seeks to spread outwards to others until it fills the world, so that his love can truly become the dominant measure of the world.³³

4 The Eucharist: Basic Motive of Our Existence

Of course the celebration of the Eucharist as a sacramental sacrifice is an act of thanksgiving and praise, but this act is a response to the salvation that has already been accomplished, once for all, in God’s saving action in the passion, cross and resurrection of his Incarnate Son. Indeed, as Pope Benedict XVI says, “The Church is able to celebrate and adore the mystery of Christ present in the Eucharist precisely because Christ first gave himself to her in the sacrifice of the Cross. The Church’s ability to ‘make’ [read: enact] the Eucharist is completely rooted in Christ’s self-gift to her. Here we can see more clearly the meaning of Saint John’s words: ‘He first loved us’ (1 Jn. 4:19)” (SC, no. 14). How then do we respond to the sacrament of charity in order to bring the victory of Christ’s atoning death to human life? Put differently, what is the relationship between the reality of the Eucharist and everyday Christian life?

Benedict XVI urges us to go forward with Christ and to live our lives as true worshippers of God. Indeed, the Lord Jesus himself calls the whole Church to reveal fully to all humanity his victory over sin, death and evil through a profoundly renewed existence. What then is the goal of this renewed existence? The goal is to proclaim the Gospel, namely, the communion of mankind with Christ and in him with the Father and the Holy Spirit. “By its union with Christ, the People of the New Covenant, far from closing in upon itself, becomes a ‘sacrament’ for humanity, a sign and instrument of the salvation achieved by Christ, the light of the world and the salt of the earth (cf. Mt. 5:13-16), for the redemption of all. The Church’s mission stands in continuity with the mission of Christ: ‘As the Father has sent me, even so I send you’ (Jn. 20:21)” (*EE*, no. 22). Hence, we respond wholeheartedly, lifting our lives up to the Lord, making our whole life a spiritual worship, a reasonable service (*logiké latreía*) pleasing to the Lord (cf. Rom. 12:1). This spiritual worship is an offering of our whole life, made in union with the whole Church, and hence it has an all-encompassing effect. This spiritual worship encompasses and transfigures every aspect of life. “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col. 3:17; cf. 1 Cor. 10:31).

Since this is the fruit of Eucharistic worship, this makes the Eucharist itself the basic motive shaping and determining our entire existence. “Proclaiming the death of the Lord ‘until he comes’ (1 Cor. 11:26) entails that all who take part in the Eucharist be committed to changing their lives and making them in a certain way completely ‘Eucharistic’. It is this fruit of a transfigured existence and a commitment to transforming the world in accordance with the Gospel” (*EE*, no. 20) that is the dynamism of the

Church's mission of evangelization. "An authentically Eucharistic Church is a missionary Church" (SC, no. 84). Most important, an understanding of the inherent link between the Eucharist and the Church's mission will help us to rediscover the goal of all missionary proclamation, namely, "*to bring Christ to others*" (SC, no. 86). "It follows that we must be committed to promoting the evangelization of cultures, conscious that Christ himself is the truth for every man and woman and for all human history" (SC, no. 78). Since the Eucharist makes present and is the concentration point of the whole mystery of salvation, of the person and saving work of Christ, we are inescapably reminded of "the unicity [singular uniqueness] of Christ and the salvation that he won for us by his blood. The mystery of the Eucharist, believed in and celebrated, demands a constant catechesis on the need for all to engage in a missionary effort on the proclamation of Jesus as the one Savior" (SC, no. 86).

In sum, our transfigured existence with the Father, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit must reveal itself in the whole of our temporal life because the cosmic drama of the liturgy—creation, fall into sin, and redemption by Jesus Christ—embraces everything in existence, the whole of reality. John Paul II speaks about the cosmic character of the liturgy, words that echo the penetrating thought of Romano Guardini who held that the whole creation is embraced in the relation with God established by the liturgy.³⁴

The Eucharist is always in some way celebrated *on the altar of the world*. It unites heaven and earth. It embraces and permeates all creation. The Son of God became man in order to restore all [fallen] creation, in one supreme act of praise, to the One who made it from nothing. He, the Eternal High Priest who by the blood of his Cross entered the eternal sanctuary, thus gives back to the Creator and Father all [fallen] creation [now] redeemed. He does so through the priestly ministry of the Church, to the glory of the Most Holy Trinity. Truly this is the *mysterium fidei* which is accomplished in the Eucharist: the world which came forth from the hands of God the Creator [was fallen but] now returns to him redeemed by Christ (EE, no. 8).

We see here the full import of the radical newness brought about by Christ and recapitulated in the Eucharist: the redemption in Christ becomes a vision of cosmic redemption for the whole fallen creation (cf. *SC*, no. 92). Indeed, God's grace in Christ *restores all life to its fullness, penetrating and perfecting and transforming the fallen creation from within its own order*, bringing creation into conformity with His will and purpose. The significance of this cosmic redemption is simply that "the worship of God in our lives cannot be relegated to something private and individual, but tends by its nature to permeate every aspect of our existence. Worship pleasing to God thus becomes a new way of living our whole life, each particular moment of which is lifted up, since it is lived as part of a relationship with [the Father, in] Christ and [through the Holy Spirit,] and as an offering to God" (*SC*, no. 71; cf. no. 79).

Yet, there is more. A reasonable worship (*logiké latreía*) that is pleasing to the Lord involves a turnabout, indeed, a conversion, in our way of living and thinking: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2). Jesus Christ is the central point of reference for a Christian understanding of human existence, the created world and God himself. But as a result of this "turn-about" in understanding we need self-consciously to develop and justify the life-orienting beliefs that we hold to be true and that are at the core of a Catholic world-view. By 'world-view' then I mean a conception and perspective of reality as a whole, that is, a way of viewing ourselves and the world and God, and exploring its bearing on the rest of what we think and do.

An important implication follows from having an integral Catholic world-view. The Catholic faith rejects as a pernicious error the compartmentalizing of faith and life. Our lives are called to embody a “*Eucharistic consistency*,” that is, our whole life should be a spiritual worship to the Lord and hence I am called to be a public witness to the Catholic faith. This is true not only for all the baptized-confirmed- and –Eucharistic Christian, but also, in particular, for those who “by virtue of their social or political position, must make decisions regarding fundamental values, such as respect for human life, its defense from conception to natural death, the family built upon marriage between a man and a woman, the freedom to educate one’s children, and the promotion of the common good in all its forms” (*SC*, no. 83).

Conclusion

In the Old Testament we see instances where God empowers his people or individuals by giving them – in a prefiguration of the Eucharistic Bread – food for the journey, for the trip. For example, the prophet Elijah is a refugee of sorts – one forced to flee from Queen Jezebel’s plan to murder him. In his despair of living “life on the run,” he prays that the Lord would take his life (1 Kings 19:4). But God has other plans and sends Elijah an angel who tells him: “Get up and eat, else the journey will be too long for you!” (1 Kings 19:7). The prophet follows these instructions exactly and the meal God provides strengthens him to make a long and dangerous journey into the desert to find safety. This journey ends on Mount Horeb with Elijah’s encounter with God not in “shock and awe” but in “a tiny whispering sound” (1 Kings 19:12).

For the disciples/travelers on the road to Emmaus, on the other hand, God is found not in a voice or a bush, but in the “breaking of the bread” (Lk 24:35). And that is how it has been for us his followers ever since the night Christ commanded us to, “Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:24-25): Christ is found now sacramentally in the breaking of the bread.

Therefore, as his body on earth, the Church must realize the dominical mandate to “do this in memory of him” so that all men, especially those who long to worship him in spirit and in truth but are unable to do so, can encounter him in the breaking of the bread – his chosen means par excellence in this life for giving us the gift of himself for our salvation. After all, the Second Vatican Council describes the Church, in Christ, as “the universal sacrament of salvation” of the “communion with God and of unity among all men,” so close is her identification with the Lord.³⁵ Furthermore, “Because men’s communion with one another is rooted in that union with God,” the Church is also, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, “the sacrament of the unity of the human race,” gathering men “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues” (Rev 7:9) (CCC, n. 776).

In their reflections on such needy persons as migrants and refugees, *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us*, the U.S. Bishops pointed to John Paul II’s June 2, 2000 celebration of the Eucharist on a sunlit Jubilee Day of Migrants and Refugees in St. Peter’s Square, where he summed up, as they said, “the challenge and hope for the Church in the United States as it welcomes the immigrants of the new millennium in a very simple but profound image.” The Holy Father wrote: “Like the disciples of Emmaus, believers, supported by the living presence of the risen Christ, become in turn the traveling

companions of their brothers and sisters in trouble, offering them the word which rekindles hope in their hearts. With them they break the bread of friendship, brotherhood and mutual help. This is how to build the civilization of love. This is how to proclaim the hoped-for coming of the new heavens and the new earth to which we are heading.”³⁶

May we who attend this Eucharistic Congress avail ourselves of the gift of Christ’s body in the sacrament of the “breaking of the bread of life.” May we be willing to let Christ feed us with this transformed bread and wine, now his body and blood. This Holy Communion will give us the spiritual strength and nourishment we need to go forth on the journey “to love and serve the Lord” (The Order of Mass, Concluding Rite), especially in those least of our brothers and sisters.

¹ Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *The Mysteries of Christianity*, Translated by Cyril Vollert, S.J. (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1946 [1865]), p. 479.

² St. Cyril of Alexandria as cited by Henri De Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, Translated by Lancelot C. Sheppard and Sister Elizabeth Englund, OCD (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988 [1947]), p. 91

³ Walter Cardinal Kasper, *Sacrament of Unity: The Eucharist and the Church* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2004), pp. 136-137.

⁴ Cf. Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* [“The Love of Christ towards Migrants”], Vatican City, 2004.

⁵ Valuable here in understanding the implications of the Eucharist is Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, February 22, 2007, Part III, nos. 70-93. Subsequent references to this exhortation will be cited parenthetically in the text as *SC*.

⁶ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 83, a. 4c.

⁷ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 5.

⁸ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Encyclical Letter, April 17, Holy Thursday, 2003, no. 8. Subsequent references to this encyclical will be cited parenthetically in the text as *EE*.

⁹ As cited in Henri De Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, pp. 88-89: “The sacrament in the highest sense of the word—*sacramentum sacramentorum, quasi consummation spiritualis vitae et omnium sacramentum finis* [Sacrament of sacraments, the consummation, as it were, of the spiritual life and the goal of all the sacraments]—the sacrament ‘which contains the whole mystery of our salvation’, the Eucharist, is also especially the sacrament of unity: *sacramentum unitatis ecclesiasticae* [the sacrament of Church unity].”

¹⁰ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11, *Christus Dominus*, no. 30, and *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 5.

¹¹ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 73, a. 3.

- ¹² Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 3.
- ¹³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1085. Subsequent references to the catechism will be cited parenthetically in the text as CCC.
- ¹⁴ Sokolowski, "Phenomenology and the Eucharist," *Theology Digest* 49:4 (Winter 2002): 347-358, and for this quote, p. 355.
- ¹⁵ On this, see Robert Sokolowski, *Eucharistic Presence* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), p. 106f.
- ¹⁶ "Eucharist, Communion and Solidarity," Lecture by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger at the Bishops Conference of the Region of Campania in Benevento, Italy, Sunday, June 2, 2002, no. 2, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020602_ratzinger-eucharistic-congress_en.html.
- ¹⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, "Eucharist, Communion and Solidarity," no. 2.
- ¹⁸ *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communio*, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, May 28, 1992, no. 4.
- ¹⁹ We have already cited the document *Erga migrantes caritas Christi (The Love of Christ Towards Migrants)* in note 4 above. In no. 27 of the document, the Pontifical Council notes that "not only the canonical norms, but also a careful study of the documents and directives on migration so far issued by the Church clearly brings to light certain important theological and pastoral findings that have been acquired. These are: the central position of the human person and the defense of the rights of migrants, both men and women, and their children; the ecclesial and missionary dimension of migration; the reappraisal of the apostolate of the laity; the value of cultures in the work of evangelization; the protection and appreciation of minority groups in the Church; the importance of dialogue both inside and outside the Church; and the specific contribution of emigration to world peace." See also USCCB, *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity* (2004) and the annual papal statements on migrants.
- ²⁰ Cf. Pope Paul VI, Encyclical letter *Ecclesiam suam*, no. 94.
- ²¹ See *The Love of Christ Towards Migrants*, nos. 14-18.
- ²² See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 23, a. 1.
- ²³ See also Pontifical Council "Cor Unum," Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992).
- ²⁴ John Paul II, "Address for World Migrants' Day," July 16, 1985.
- ²⁵ *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us*; cf. Pope Paul VI, *Instruction on the Pastoral Care of People Who Migrate*, nos. 5-11
- ²⁶ *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us*. The quote within the quote is from Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, no. 34.
- ²⁷ *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us*.
- ²⁸ *Familiaris consortio*, no. 77.
- ²⁹ *The Love of Christ Towards Immigrants*, no. 27.
- ³⁰ See "Conclusions of the Theological-Pastoral Congress on the 'Twentieth Anniversary of *Familiaris Consortio*: Anthropological and Pastoral Dimension," no. 10. See also Pontifical Councils for Health Pastoral Care, for Migrants and Itinerant People, and for the Family, *The Reproductive Health of Refugees. A Note for the Bishops' Conferences* (Vatican City, Sept. 14, 2001).
- ³¹ See Peter Lynch, *The Church's Story: A History of Pastoral Care and Vision* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2005), pp. 295-296. I freely adapt these four elements from Lynch.
- ³² Lynch, *The Church's Story*, p. 296.
- ³³ Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Journey to Cologne on the Occasion of the XX World Youth Day, Eucharistic Celebration, Homily, Cologne, Marienfeld, Sunday, August 21, 2005.
- ³⁴ Romano Guardini, *The Church and The Catholic and The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Translated by Ada Lane (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1935), pp. 29-31.
- ³⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 9 and 1, respectively.
- ³⁶ John Paul II, "Message on World Migration Day," no. 4.