

Eucharistic consistency

83. Here it is important to consider what the Synod Fathers described as eucharistic consistency, a quality which our lives are objectively called to embody. Worship pleasing to God can never be a purely private matter, without consequences for our relationships with others: it demands a public witness to our faith. Evidently, this is true for all the baptized, yet it is especially incumbent upon those who, by virtue of their social or political position, must make decisions regarding fundamental values, such as respect for human life, its defence 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 (230). These values are not negotiable. Consequently, Catholic politicians and legislators, conscious of their grave responsibility before society, must feel particularly bound, on the basis of a properly formed conscience, to introduce and support laws inspired by values grounded in human nature (231). There is an objective connection here with the Eucharist (cf. 1 Cor 11:27-29). Bishops are bound to reaffirm constantly these values as part of their responsibility to the flock entrusted to them (232).

The Eucharist and mission

84. In my homily at the eucharistic celebration solemnly inaugurating my Petrine ministry, I said that "there is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know him and to speak to others of our friendship with him." (233) These words are all the more significant if we think of the mystery of the Eucharist. 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. The Eucharist is thus the source and summit not only of the Church's life, but also of her mission: "an authentically eucharistic Church is a missionary Church." (234) We too must be able to tell our brothers and sisters with conviction: "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us" (1 Jn 1:3). Truly, nothing is more beautiful than to know Christ and to make him known to others. The institution of the Eucharist, for that matter, anticipates the very heart of Jesus' mission: he is the one sent by the Father for the redemption of the world (cf. Jn 3:16-17; Rom 8:32). At the Last Supper, Jesus entrusts to his disciples the sacrament which makes present his self-sacrifice for the salvation of us all, in obedience to the Father's will. We cannot approach the eucharistic table without being drawn into the mission which, beginning in the very heart of God, is meant to reach all people. Missionary outreach is thus an essential part of the eucharistic form of the Christian life.

The Eucharist and witness

85. The first and fundamental mission that we receive from the sacred mysteries we celebrate is that of bearing witness by our lives. The wonder we experience at the gift God has made to us in Christ gives new impulse to our lives and commits us to becoming witnesses of his love. We become witnesses when, through our actions, words and way of being, Another makes himself present. Witness could be described as the means by which the truth of God's love comes to men and women in history, inviting them to accept freely this radical newness. Through witness, God lays himself open, one might say, to the risk of human freedom. Jesus himself is the faithful and true witness (cf. Rev 1:5; 3:14), the one who came to testify to the truth (cf. Jn 18:37). Here I would like to reflect on a notion dear to the early Christians, which also speaks eloquently to us today: namely, witness even to the offering of one's own life, to the point of martyrdom. Throughout the history of the Church, this has always been seen as the culmination of the new spiritual worship: "Offer your bodies" (Rom 12:1). One thinks, for example, of the account of the martyrdom of Saint Polycarp of Smyrna, a disciple of Saint John: the entire drama is described as a liturgy, with the martyr himself becoming Eucharist. (235) We might also recall the eucharistic imagery with which Saint Ignatius of Antioch describes his own imminent martyrdom: he sees himself as "God's wheat" and desires to become in martyrdom "Christ's pure bread." (236) The Christian who offers his life in martyrdom enters into full communion with the Pasch of Jesus Christ and thus becomes Eucharist with him. Today too, the Church does not lack martyrs who offer the supreme witness to God's love. Even if the test of martyrdom is not asked of us, we know that worship pleasing to God demands that we should be inwardly prepared for it. (237) Such worship

culminates in the joyful and convincing testimony of a consistent Christian life, wherever the Lord calls us to be his witnesses.

Christ Jesus, the one Saviour

86. Emphasis on the intrinsic relationship between the Eucharist and mission also leads to a rediscovery of the ultimate content of our proclamation. The more ardent the love for the Eucharist in the hearts of the Christian people, the more clearly will they recognize the goal of all mission: to bring Christ to others. Not just a theory or a way of life inspired by Christ, but the gift of his very person. Anyone who has not shared the truth of love with his brothers and sisters has not yet given enough. The Eucharist, as the sacrament of our salvation, inevitably reminds us of the unicity 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 centred on the proclamation of Jesus as the one Saviour. (238) This will help to avoid a reductive and purely sociological understanding of the vital work of human promotion present in every authentic process of evangelization.

Freedom of worship

87. In this context, I wish to reiterate the concern expressed by the Synod Fathers about the grave difficulties affecting the mission of those Christian communities in areas where Christians are a minority or where they are denied religious freedom. (239) We should surely give thanks to the Lord for all those Bishops, priests, consecrated persons and laity who devote themselves generously to the preaching of the Gospel and practise their faith at the risk of their lives. In not a few parts of the world, simply going to church represents a heroic witness that can result in marginalization and violence. Here too, I would like to reaffirm the solidarity of the whole Church with those who are denied freedom of worship. As we know, wherever religious freedom is lacking, people lack the most meaningful freedom of all, since it is through faith that men and women express their deepest decision about the ultimate meaning of their lives. Let us pray, therefore, for greater religious freedom in every nation, so that Christians, as well as the followers of other religions, can freely express their convictions, both as individuals and as communities.

The Eucharist, a mystery to be offered to the world The Eucharist, bread broken for the life of the world

88. "The bread I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world" (Jn 6:51). In these words the Lord reveals the true meaning of the gift of his life for all people. These words also reveal his deep compassion for every man and woman. The Gospels frequently speak of Jesus' feelings towards others, especially the suffering and sinners (cf. Mt 20:34; Mk 6:34; Lk 19:41). Through a profoundly human sensibility he expresses God's saving will for all people – that they may have true life. Each celebration of the Eucharist makes sacramentally present the gift that the crucified Lord made of his life, for us and for the whole world. In the Eucharist Jesus also makes us witnesses of God's compassion towards all our brothers and sisters. The eucharistic mystery thus gives rise to a service of charity towards neighbour, which "consists in the very fact that, in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know. This can only take place on the basis of an intimate encounter with God, an encounter which has become a communion of will, affecting even my feelings. Then I learn to look on this other person not simply with my eyes and my feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ." (240) In all those I meet, I recognize brothers or sisters for whom the Lord gave his life, loving them "to the end" (Jn 13:1). Our communities, when they celebrate the Eucharist, must become ever more conscious that the sacrifice of Christ is for all, and that the Eucharist thus compels all who believe in him to become "bread that is broken" for others, and to work for the building of a more just and fraternal world. Keeping in mind the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, we need to realize that Christ continues today to exhort his disciples to become personally engaged: "You yourselves, give them something to eat" (Mt 14:16). Each of us is truly called, together with Jesus, to be bread broken for the life of the world.

The social implications of the eucharistic mystery

89. The union with Christ brought about by the Eucharist also brings a newness to our social relations: "this sacramental 'mysticism' is social in character." Indeed, "union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become, his own." (241) The relationship between the eucharistic mystery and social commitment must be made explicit. The Eucharist is the sacrament of communion between brothers and sisters who allow themselves to be reconciled in Christ, who made of Jews and pagans one people, tearing down the wall of hostility which divided them (cf. Eph 2:14). Only this constant impulse towards reconciliation enables us to partake worthily of the Body and Blood of Christ (cf. Mt 5:23-24). (242) In the memorial of his sacrifice, the Lord strengthens our fraternal communion and, in a particular way, urges those in conflict to hasten their reconciliation by opening themselves to dialogue and a commitment to justice. Certainly, the restoration of justice, reconciliation and forgiveness are the conditions for building true peace. (243) The recognition of this fact leads to a determination to transform unjust structures and to restore respect for the dignity of all men and women, created in God's image and likeness. Through the concrete fulfilment of this responsibility, the Eucharist becomes in life what it signifies in its celebration. As I have had occasion to say, it is not the proper task of the Church to engage in the political work of bringing about the most just society possible; nonetheless she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the struggle for justice. The Church "has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper." (244)

In discussing the social responsibility of all Christians, the Synod Fathers noted that the sacrifice of Christ is a mystery of liberation that constantly and insistently challenges us. I therefore urge all the faithful to be true promoters of peace and justice: "All who partake of the Eucharist must commit themselves to peacemaking in our world scarred by violence and war, and today in particular, by terrorism, economic corruption and sexual exploitation." (245) All these problems give rise in turn to others no less troubling and disheartening. We know that there can be no superficial solutions to these issues. Precisely because of the mystery we celebrate, we must denounce situations contrary to human dignity, since Christ shed his blood for all, and at the same time affirm the inestimable value of each individual person.

The food of truth and human need

90. We cannot remain passive before certain processes of globalization which not infrequently increase the gap between the rich and the poor worldwide. We must denounce those who squander the earth's riches, provoking inequalities that cry out to heaven (cf. Jas 5:4). For example, it is impossible to remain silent before the "distressing images of huge camps throughout the world of displaced persons and refugees, who are living in makeshift conditions in order to escape a worse fate, yet are still in dire need. Are these human beings not our brothers and sisters? Do their children not come into the world with the same legitimate expectations of happiness as other children?" (246) The Lord Jesus, the bread of eternal life, spurs us to be mindful of the situations of extreme poverty in which a great part of humanity still lives: these are situations for which human beings bear a clear and disquieting responsibility. Indeed, "on the basis of available statistical data, it can be said that less than half of the huge sums spent worldwide on armaments would be more than sufficient to liberate the immense masses of the poor from destitution. This challenges humanity's conscience. To peoples living below the poverty line, more as a result of situations to do with international political, commercial and cultural relations than as a result of circumstances beyond anyone's control, our common commitment to truth can and must give new hope" (247).

The food of truth demands that we denounce inhumane situations in which people starve to death because of injustice and exploitation, and it gives us renewed strength and courage to work tirelessly in the service of the civilization of love. From the beginning, Christians were concerned to share their goods (cf. Acts 4:32) and to help the poor (cf. Rom 15:26). The alms collected in our liturgical assemblies are an eloquent reminder of this, and they are also necessary for meeting today's needs. The Church's charitable institutions, especially Caritas, carry out at various levels the important work of assisting the needy, especially the poorest. Inspired by the Eucharist, the sacrament of charity, they become a concrete expression of that charity; they are to be praised and encouraged for their commitment to solidarity in our world.

The Church's social teaching

91. The mystery of the Eucharist inspires and impels us to work courageously within our world to bring about that renewal of relationships which has its inexhaustible source in God's gift. The prayer which we repeat at every Mass: "Give us this day our daily bread," obliges us to do everything possible, in cooperation with international, state and private institutions, to end or at least reduce the scandal of hunger and malnutrition afflicting so many millions of people in our world, especially in developing countries. In a particular way, the Christian laity, formed at the school of the Eucharist, are called to assume their specific political and social responsibilities. To do so, they need to be adequately prepared through practical education in charity and justice. To this end, the Synod considered it necessary for Dioceses and Christian communities to teach and promote the Church's social doctrine. (248) In this precious legacy handed down from the earliest ecclesial tradition, we find elements of great wisdom that guide Christians in their involvement in today's burning social issues. This teaching, the fruit of the Church's whole history, is distinguished by realism and moderation; it can help to avoid misguided compromises or false utopias.

The sanctification of the world and the protection of creation

92. Finally, to develop a profound eucharistic spirituality that is also capable of significantly affecting the fabric of society, the Christian people, in giving thanks to God through the Eucharist, should be conscious that they do so in the name of all creation, aspiring to the sanctification of the world and working intensely to that end. (249) The Eucharist itself powerfully illuminates human history and the whole cosmos. In this sacramental perspective we learn, day by day, that every ecclesial event is a kind of sign by which God makes himself known and challenges us. The eucharistic form of life can thus help foster a real change in the way we approach history and the world. The liturgy itself teaches us this, when, during the presentation of the gifts, the priest raises to God a prayer of blessing and petition over the bread and wine, "fruit of the earth," "fruit of the vine" and "work of human hands." With these words, the rite not only includes in our offering to God all human efforts and activity, but also leads us to see the world as God's creation, which brings forth everything we need for our sustenance. The world is not something indifferent, raw material to be utilized simply as we see fit. Rather, it is part of God's good plan, in which all of us are called to be sons and daughters in the one Son of God, Jesus Christ (cf. Eph 1:4-12). The justified concern about threats to the environment present in so many parts of the world is reinforced by Christian hope, which commits us to working responsibly for the protection of creation. (250) The relationship between the Eucharist and the cosmos helps us to see the unity of God's plan and to grasp the profound relationship between creation and the "new creation" inaugurated in the resurrection of Christ, the new Adam. Even now we take part in that new creation by virtue of our Baptism (cf. Col 2:12ff.). Our Christian life, nourished by the Eucharist, gives us a glimpse of that new world – new heavens and a new earth – where the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven, from God, "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev 21:2).

The usefulness of a Eucharistic Compendium

93. At the conclusion of these reflections, in which I have taken up a number of themes raised at the Synod, I also wish to accept the proposal which the Synod Fathers advanced as a means of helping the Christian people to believe, celebrate and live ever more fully the mystery of the Eucharist. The competent offices of the Roman Curia will publish a Compendium which will assemble texts from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, prayers, explanations of the Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Missal and other useful aids for a correct understanding, celebration and adoration of the Sacrament of the Altar (251). It is my hope that this book will help make the memorial of the Passover of the Lord increasingly the source and summit of the Church's life and mission. This will encourage each member of the faithful to make his or her life a true act of spiritual worship.

CONCLUSION

94. Dear brothers and sisters, the Eucharist is at the root of every form of holiness, and each of us is called to the fullness of life in the Holy Spirit. How many saints have advanced along the way of perfection thanks to their eucharistic devotion! From Saint Ignatius of Antioch to Saint Augustine, from Saint Anthony Abbot to Saint Benedict, from Saint Francis of Assisi to Saint Thomas Aquinas, from Saint Clare of Assisi to Saint Catherine of Siena, from Saint Paschal Baylon to Saint Peter Julian Eymard, from Saint Alphonsus Liguori to Blessed Charles de

Foucauld, from Saint John Mary Vianney to Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, from Saint Pius of Pietrelcina to Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, from Blessed Piergiorgio Frassati to Blessed Ivan Merz, to name only a few, holiness has always found its centre in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

This most holy mystery thus needs to be firmly believed, devoutly celebrated and intensely lived in the Church. Jesus' gift of himself in the sacrament which is the memorial of his passion tells us that the success of our lives is found in our participation in the trinitarian life offered to us truly and definitively in him. The celebration and worship of the Eucharist enable us to draw near to God's love and to persevere in that love until we are united with the Lord whom we love. The offering of our lives, our fellowship with the whole community of believers and our solidarity with all men and women are essential aspects of that *logiké latreía*, spiritual worship, holy and pleasing to God (cf. Rom 12:1), which transforms every aspect of our human existence, to the glory of God. I therefore ask all pastors to spare no effort in promoting an authentically eucharistic Christian spirituality. Priests, deacons and all those who carry out a eucharistic ministry should always be able to find in this service, exercised with care and constant preparation, the strength and inspiration needed for their personal and communal path of sanctification. I exhort the lay faithful, and families in particular, to find ever anew in the sacrament of Christ's love the energy needed to make their lives an authentic sign of the presence of the risen Lord. I ask all consecrated men and women to show by their eucharistic lives the splendour and the beauty of belonging totally to the Lord.

95. At the beginning of the fourth century, Christian worship was still forbidden by the imperial authorities. Some Christians in North Africa, who felt bound to celebrate the Lord's Day, defied the prohibition. They were martyred after declaring that it was not possible for them to live without the Eucharist, the food of the Lord: *sine dominico non possumus*. (252) May these martyrs of Abitinae, in union with all those saints and *beati* who made the Eucharist the centre of their lives, intercede for us and teach us to be faithful to our encounter with the risen Christ. We too cannot live without partaking of the sacrament of our salvation; we too desire to be *iuxta dominicam viventes*, to reflect in our lives what we celebrate on the Lord's Day. That day is the day of our definitive deliverance. Is it surprising, then, that we should wish to live every day in that newness of life which Christ has brought us in the mystery of the Eucharist?

96. May Mary Most Holy, the Immaculate Virgin, ark of the new and eternal covenant, accompany us on our way to meet the Lord who comes. In her we find realized most perfectly the essence of the Church. The Church sees in Mary – "Woman of the Eucharist," as she was called by the Servant of God John Paul II (253) – her finest icon, and she contemplates Mary as a singular model of the eucharistic life. For this reason, as the priest prepares to receive on the altar the *verum Corpus natum de Maria Virgine*, speaking on behalf of the liturgical assembly, he says in the words of the canon: "We honour Mary, the ever-virgin mother of Jesus Christ our Lord and God" (254). Her holy name is also invoked and venerated in the canons of the Eastern Christian traditions. The faithful, for their part, "commend to Mary, Mother of the Church, their lives and the work of their hands. Striving to have the same sentiments as Mary, they help the whole community to become a living offering pleasing to the Father" (255). She is the *tota pulchra*, the all-beautiful, for in her the radiance of God's glory shines forth. The beauty of the heavenly liturgy, which must be reflected in our own assemblies, is faithfully mirrored in her. From Mary we must learn to become men and women of the Eucharist and of the Church, and thus to present ourselves, in the words of Saint Paul, "holy and blameless" before the Lord, even as he wished us to be from the beginning (cf. Col 1:22; Eph 1:4) (256).

97. Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, may the Holy Spirit kindle within us the same ardour experienced by the disciples on the way to Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:13-35) and renew our "eucharistic wonder" through the splendour and beauty radiating from the liturgical rite, the efficacious sign of the infinite beauty of the holy mystery of God. Those disciples arose and returned in haste to Jerusalem in order to share their joy with their brothers and sisters in the faith. True joy is found in recognizing that the Lord is still with us, our faithful companion along the way. The Eucharist makes us discover that Christ, risen from the dead, is our contemporary in the mystery of the Church, his body. Of this mystery of love we have become witnesses. Let us encourage one another to walk joyfully, our hearts filled with wonder, towards our encounter with the Holy Eucharist, so that we may experience and proclaim to others the truth of the words with which Jesus took leave of his disciples: "Lo, I am with you always, until the end of the world" (Mt 28:20).