

Ecclesia de Eucharistia

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud)

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, your presence and power at the Eucharist brings joy to all those who share in the bread and wine which becomes your body and blood. Fill us with a respect for the great gift you give us at the Eucharist. Help us to listen with our hearts and be attentive to the mystery that unfolds before our eyes. We pray with you and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Scripture

“Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. The Jewish feast of Passover was near.

When Jesus raised his eyes and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, he said to Philip, "Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?" He said this to test him, because he himself knew what he was going to do.

Philip answered him, "Two hundred days' wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little (bit)." One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people recline." Now there was a great deal of grass in that place. So the men reclined, about five thousand in number. Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were reclining, and also as much of the fish as they wanted.

When they had had their fill, he said to his disciples, "Gather the fragments left over, so that nothing will be wasted." So they collected them, and filled twelve wicker baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves that had been more than they could eat.' (*John 6:3-13*)

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

On Holy Thursday, April 17, 2003 Pope John Paul II issued his fourteenth encyclical. It was on the Eucharist and its relationship to the church. “Ecclesia de Eucharistia” addresses the beauty and the mystery of the Eucharistic celebration as the source and summit of the Christian life just as the second Vatican Council proclaimed. The purpose of this program is to provide Serrans the opportunity to grow in their appreciation of the Eucharist by reflecting on the words of the Holy Father.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Reflection

In what church-watchers are calling the declining years of John Paul the II’s Pontificate, he has written an encyclical to invite us to embrace a renewed enthusiasm for living the Christian life. At this moment in history, he has seized the opportunity to remind us of the teaching of Jesus on the most precious gift of the Eucharist. Pope John Paul begins by drawing from what the Second Vatican Council has said, that the Eucharist is the “source and summit of the Christian life” (*Lumen Gentium*) and then points out how the Church is a Eucharistic Community and reminds us that when we participate in mass, we do so as a community of faith that has its roots in the Church of the Apostles.

While much of this document can be found in previous papal statements and Church documents, John Paul II weaves together a beautiful reflection of what the Eucharist means to him and presents a Church that can only exist by drawing its life from the Eucharist. Together as community, celebrant

and assembly share in the sacrifice of Christ where through the sacramental nature of the Eucharist, we realize that “in some way [it is] celebrated on the altar of the world.” This connection between heaven and earth offers the Church an insight into the relationship between God and humanity. God truly shares in creation by feeding and nourishing those who take part in this celebration.

The Second Vatican Council proclaimed that the Eucharist is the “source and summit of the Christian life.” Since the Eucharist contains the Church’s entire spiritual heritage, the Pope stresses that the encounter increases our responsibility for making a difference in the world in which we live, and challenges us to recommit ourselves to change our lives so as to experience true conversion and become even more Christ like.

The Encyclical unfolds, reminding the Church that through liturgical reform, the assembly is to be full participants. The vantage points of full participation contributes to the chapters which include: The Mystery of Faith, The Eucharist Builds the Church, The Apostolicity of the Eucharist and the Church, The Eucharist and Ecclesial Communion, The Dignity of the Eucharistic Celebration, and The Role of Mary as the Woman of the Eucharist. Each chapter builds on the Holy Father’s understanding that the Eucharist is a gift given to the Church by Jesus. The Church in turn is able to draw her life from it, to fully feed the demands of the Christian journey.

To summarize the wealth of each chapter the Pope identifies the Eucharist as “the church’s treasure, the heart of the world, the pledge of the fulfillment for which each man and woman, even unconsciously, yearns.

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. What does the Eucharist mean to you?
2. How is the Eucharist a gift to you? The Church?
3. How does the Eucharist increase Serra’s sense of responsibility for the world today?

(If time permits invite the small groups to share with the large group any insights that they gain from the group discussion, then read the Closing Reflection.)

Closing Reflection

Let us close with the words of the Holy Father. “ Let us take our place, dear brothers and sisters, at the school of the saints, who are the great interpreters of true Eucharistic piety. In them the theology of the Eucharist takes on all the splendor of a lived reality; it becomes “contagious”, and, in a manner of speaking, it “warms our hearts.” Above all, let us listen to Mary Most Holy, in whom the mystery of the Eucharist appears, more than in anyone else, as a mystery of light.” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, # 62)

Bibliography

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