

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.
Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ
19 June 2022



In her late sixties the cancer victim could no longer speak and yet her eyes followed the gilded chalice containing the Precious Blood and held in the hands of the young priest, who, in the past, so often brought her Holy Communion on First Fridays. This time was different, however. He had anointed her again and said the prayers for Viaticum. Her smile as she sipped the Precious Blood through a straw would remain impressed on that young priest's memory for the rest of his life. Christ allowed him to assure the ultimate gifts for the last minutes of one who had been faithful for a lifetime.

This celebration of the Body and Blood of the Lord marks an important beginning in our Country. We begin today the diocesan phase of the Eucharistic revival, a time to deepen our appreciation of this sacrament of unity, our food for the journey to the Kingdom of God and our participation in the moment of our salvation. We are “converted, formed, and unified by an encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist.” We want to live this communion with Christ and our sisters and brothers so as to share all that we have received “for the life of the world”.¹ We want to savor our reception of Holy Communion, because we never know when it might be our last.

First of all, we are here as disciples, followers of the Lord Jesus. Paul in the oldest account of the institution of the Eucharist, which we have just heard, tells us that Jesus complements the Law and Prophets and brings to its fullness the ancient rite by means of His sacrifice of love. The rite is new and so also the conduct of the Christian is new: each time he eats of this Bread and drinks of this Chalice, the extraordinary richness of the Passover of Christ is engraved on his existence. We give witness to it until He comes again in glory.

We also remember that for the first fifteen hundred years of the Church's existence, all Christians put this celebration at the center of their worship. It is a celebration that draws all believers in Christ into communion with Him. Only at the Protestant Reformation was this

¹ USCCB Secretariat of Evangelization and Catechesis, Vision statement for the Eucharistic Revival.

center displaced by the Sacred Scriptures. Consequently, when we gather for Mass we always pray that the day when all who invoke the Name of Christ will be one again.

As Pope Benedict XVI reminded us: “Giving thanks and praise, Jesus transforms the bread, He no longer gives earthly bread, but communion with Himself. This transformation, though, seeks to be the start of the transformation of the world – into a world of resurrection, a world of God. Yes, it is about transformation – of the new man and the new world that find their origin in the bread that is consecrated, transformed, transubstantiated.”²

The Eucharist is the food, which satiates completely the deepest aspirations of the human person. It is the Bread of Eternal Life, that is, the food which sustains us as we make our journey. It will give us strength to cross the threshold of death into eternal life. Indeed this celebration is what characterizes us as Catholics.

Nothing replaces our full and active participation in this source and summit of our lives of faith. The pandemic often deprived the faithful of the opportunity to come and worship with the Lord of the Universe, be nourished by His heavenly food, and join with our brothers and sisters in praise. We eagerly return to that full, active participation and, while we serve those who cannot leave their homes, we recognize that no live-stream, no filming, and no recorded celebration can replace our gathering for Mass or fulfill that obligation.

At the end of Mass we will carry the Eucharistic Lord in procession, a good reminder that He walks with us on the pilgrimage of life and sends us forth to carry Him to others. “This is the literal, actual, Real Presence of Christ Himself. It is to be adored. Nothing else is.”³

It is good to pause on this Solemnity and give thanks, because we can gather and be nourished with Word and Sacrament. We are permitted to assist at the one sacrifice which gives us life and fills us with hope for eternal life. There are countless examples of situations where it was not possible or extremely dangerous to be united with Christ in this sacrifice. Cardinal Van Thuan recounted in his reflections on hope the story of his struggle to celebrate the Eucharist in a Vietnamese prison with a fraction of a host and a drop of wine. Never was our Lord more nobly received than on that living altar of a witness to the truth. In Saudi Arabia today priests celebrate the Eucharist clandestinely to nourish hundreds of Catholic faithful denied the freedom to practice their faith. They do so in danger and run the risk of expulsion.

As Cardinal Vanhoye once wrote: “the Eucharist is a powerful and marvelous food, which communicates love and gives the courage to face all difficulties, transforming them into occasions of growth and progress in love.”⁴ Peter Kreeft sums it up well. “The Eucharist makes the Church, because it is Christ Himself. It is not just a symbol, a ceremony, a liturgy, a thing the Church does. The Church does not do Christ, Christ does the Church.”⁵

² Pope Benedict XVI, Homily for Holy Thursday, 9.IV.09.

³ Peter Kreeft, *Food for the Soul*, p. 661.

⁴ Albert Vanhoye, *Il Pane quotidiano della Parola*.

⁵ Kreeft, *op. cit.*, p. 663.

Indeed it was not enough for the Lord to give us His Body in communion, but He put it in our hands to nourish all. Those nourished by Christ cannot fail to give and give of themselves to feed others. The link to charity is unmistakable. Our celebration is never in a vacuum, isolated from the reality of our contemporary world.

Rather we must give witness to this truth, because we live in a world hungering to receive the truth, just as those 5,000 who ate the bread multiplied by Jesus. It is here that we look for the strength to construct a better world as we begin with our communities, then the state and nation and finally the whole world. We have something to offer to this world and it is the truth of faith and also the hope that the world need not dwell in this weakened condition: full of hate, division, war, poverty, discrimination and racism—of which we are so aware this weekend on the anniversary of the publication of Emancipation in Texas. The Eucharist is the banquet of the future world and the food which gives strength to fill our world with the signs of the longed-for Paradise. With Dante we recognize that in His will is our peace.

Motivated by our faith we also respond to the hunger and thirst of the poor, the needs of migrants and refugees, the pain of the sick, the ignorance of the illiterate, the isolation of the lonely, and the cries of those subject to unjust aggression in Ukraine and elsewhere. None of these concerns are absent from our prayer and action as followers of Jesus Christ. In the Gospel passages about the multiplication of the loaves and fish, Jesus tells the Apostles to meet the needs of the hungry crowds. So it is that, illuminated by His Word and filled with the gift of the Spirit, we reach out in countless ways to those in need.

As Pope Francis put it succinctly at the Angelus today: “We find this in the Eucharistic Bread: the attention of Christ to our necessities, and the invitation to do likewise for the one next to me. We must eat and provide so that others may eat, as well.”⁶

We are always a people of hope and so we must offer signs of that hope to all we meet. Our ultimate hope is, of course, eternal life, but we never tire of offering that foretaste of the Lord’s Real Presence in our midst.

Therefore, there is a strict tie between celebrating the Eucharist and announcing the message of Christ. At the same time, entering into communion with Him in the memorial of Easter, His Passion, Death, and Resurrection, also means becoming missionaries of the event which that rite actualizes; in a certain sense, “it means *making it contemporary* with every epoch, until the Lord comes again.”⁷

As I mentioned, we, your bishops, have discerned that it is necessary to reawaken, renew, and reinvigorate this essential faith of the Church. We will spend the next three years in a project to stimulate that faith. We are committed to “renewing the Church by enkindling a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist.” Quite simply, because

⁶ Pope Francis, Angelus, 19.VI.22.

⁷ Vanhoye, *op. cit.*,.

nothing else is fully life-giving. Nothing else empowers us to fulfill the mission we have received.

We want to be certain that at the end of our pilgrimage, like the cancer victim, we recognize Christ who comes to us, that there is a priest to bring us the consolation of the sacraments, and that, like St. Paul, we have passed on what we received. No one is exempt from a specific role in the task. We walk together on the same pilgrimage to the fullness of life.