

# In Communion with Christ

## 6. Mission

### *The Eucharist, Principle and Plan of 'Mission'*

The two disciples of Emmaus, upon recognizing the Lord, 'set out immediately' (cf. *Lk* 24:33), in order to report what they had seen and heard. Once we have truly met the Risen One by partaking of his body and blood, we cannot keep to ourselves the joy we have experienced. The encounter with Christ, constantly intensified and deepened in the Eucharist, issues in the Church and in every Christian an urgent summons to testimony and evangelization. I wished to emphasize this in my homily announcing the *Year of the Eucharist*, based on the words of Saint Paul: 'As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes' (*1 Cor* 11:26). The Apostle closely relates meal and proclamation: entering into communion with Christ in the memorial of his Pasch also means sensing the duty to be a missionary of the event made present in that rite. The dismissal at the end of each Mass is a charge given to Christians, inviting them to work for the spread of the Gospel and the imbuing of society with Christian values.

The Eucharist not only provides the interior strength needed for this mission, but is also — in some sense — its plan. For the Eucharist is a mode of being, which passes from Jesus into each Christian, through whose testimony it is meant to spread throughout society and culture. For this to happen, each member of the faithful must assimilate, through personal and communal meditation, the values which the Eucharist expresses, the attitudes it inspires, the resolutions to which it gives rise. Can we not see here a special charge which could emerge from this *Year of the Eucharist*?

### *Giving thanks*

One fundamental element of this plan is found in the very meaning of the word 'Eucharist': thanksgiving. In Jesus, in his sacrifice, in his unconditional 'yes' to the will of the Father, is contained the 'yes', the 'thank you' and the 'amen' of all humanity. The Church is called to remind men and women of this great truth. This is especially urgent in the context of our secularized culture, characterized as it is by a forgetfulness of God and a vain pursuit of human self-sufficiency. Incarnating the Eucharistic 'plan' in daily life, wherever people live and work—in families, schools, the workplace, in all of life's settings—means bearing witness that human reality cannot be justified without reference to the Creator: 'Without the Creator the creature would disappear' This transcendent point of reference, which commits us constantly to give thanks for all that we have and are—in other words, to a 'Eucharistic' attitude—in no way detracts from the legitimate autonomy of earthly realities, but grounds that autonomy more firmly by setting it within its proper limits.

In approaching the Scriptures, whether during Mass or in personal reading and prayer, it is helpful to remember that they give us the definitive answer to the question 'What happens when the love of God takes flesh in our world?' The Scriptures answer that question in the history of the Chosen People, and above all, in the words and action of Jesus himself. The Scriptures also unfold the meaning and implications of that answer, announcing its radical consequences, inviting all to share in its truth. They lay bare the meaning and implication of that answer, announcing its radical consequences, inviting all to share in its truth. They lay bare the dynamic of the 'work of God', the patterns which occur in the lives of all who are caught up in it. Over and over again we see that the sick are healed, the broken-hearted are restored, the arrogant are challenged, the comfortable disturbed, the repentant sinners are forgiven and promises are fulfilled.

Vincent Nichols

*Promise of Future Glory: Reflections on the Mass*  
London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1997, p27f

### **Key Texts**

#### **General Instruction of the Roman Missal**

90, 166-170

*Mass with Deacon*: 184-185

*Concelebrated Mass* 250-251

#### **Celebrating the Mass**

1-17, 217-225

In this *Year of the Eucharist* Christians ought to be committed to bearing more forceful witness to God's presence in the world. We should not be afraid to speak about God and to bear proud witness to our faith. The 'culture of the Eucharist' promotes a culture of dialogue, which here finds strength and nourishment. It is a mistake to think that any public reference to faith will somehow undermine the rightful autonomy of the State and civil institutions, or that it can even encourage attitudes of intolerance. If history demonstrates that mistakes have also been made in this area by believers, as I acknowledged on the occasion of the Jubilee, this must be attributed not to 'Christian roots', but to the failure of Christians to be faithful to those roots. One who learns to say 'thank you' in the manner of the crucified Christ might end up as a martyr, but never as a persecutor.

### *The way of solidarity*

The Eucharist is not merely an expression of communion in the Church's life; it is also a project of solidarity for all of humanity. In the celebration of the Eucharist the Church constantly renews her awareness of being a 'sign and instrument' not only of intimate union with God but also of the unity of the whole human race. Each Mass, even when celebrated in obscurity or in isolation, always has a universal character. The Christian who takes part in the Eucharist learns to become a promoter of communion, peace and solidarity in every situation. More than ever, our troubled world, which began the new Millennium with the spectre of terrorism and the tragedy of war, demands that Christians learn to experience the Eucharist as a great school of peace, forming men and women who, at various levels of responsibility in social, cultural and political life, can become promoters of dialogue and communion.

I've just come from the fountain,  
I've just come from the fountain,  
Lord, I've just come from the fountain,  
His name's so sweet.

O brothers, I love Jesus,  
O brothers, I love Jesus,  
O brothers, I love Jesus,  
His name's so sweet.

O sisters, I love Jesus,  
O sisters, I love Jesus,  
O sisters, I love Jesus,  
His name's so sweet.

Been drinking from the fountain,  
Been drinking from the fountain,  
Been drinking from the fountain,  
His name's so sweet.

From the African-American Spiritual,  
*'I've just come from the fountain'*  
Lead Me, Guide Me. Chicago: GIA, 1987

### *At the service of the least*

There is one other point which I would like to emphasize, since it significantly affects the authenticity of our communal sharing in the Eucharist. It is the impulse which the Eucharist gives to the community for a practical commitment to building a more just and fraternal society. In the Eucharist our God has shown love in the extreme, overturning all those criteria of power which too often govern human relations and radically affirming the criterion of service: 'If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all' (*Mk* 9:35). It is not by chance that the Gospel of John contains no account of the institution of the Eucharist, but instead relates the 'washing of feet' (cf. *Jn* 13:1-20): by bending down to wash the feet of his disciples, Jesus explains the meaning of the Eucharist unequivocally. Saint Paul vigorously reaffirms the impropriety of a Eucharistic celebration lacking charity expressed by practical sharing with the poor (cf. *1Cor* 11:17-22, 27-34).

Can we not make this *Year of the Eucharist* an occasion for diocesan and parish communities to commit themselves in a particular way to responding with fraternal solicitude to one of the many forms of poverty present in our world? I think for example of the tragedy of hunger which plagues hundreds of millions of human beings, the diseases which afflict developing countries, the loneliness of the elderly, the hardships faced by the unemployed, the struggles of immigrants. These are evils which are present—albeit to a different degree—even in areas of immense wealth. We cannot delude ourselves: by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognized as true followers of Christ (cf. *Jn* 13:35; *Mt* 25:31-46). This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged.

John Paul II *Mane Nobiscum Domine* 24-28

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# In Communion with Christ

## *Mission*

## 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?

What is done to strengthen the unity of the gathered assembly with the sick and the housebound of the parish?

What formation is given to assist commissioned Ministers of Holy Communion in their ministry with the sick and housebound?

What is your policy about parish notices during the concluding rites? How regularly would other members of the parish speak at this time?

Do you commonly dismiss the assembly and then expect them to stay in their places to sing a final hymn?

How strong is the sense of 'Sunday' continuing to be kept by the parish after they have been at Sunday Mass?

What might be done to deepen awareness of the special character of the Lord's Day?

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

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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## *Mission*

## Homily notes

How is the action of mission 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 'mission' 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 are the major national/international events at present?

What stories/experiences connect with the theme of mission?

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

Main points to be carried forward into homily

1.

2.

3.