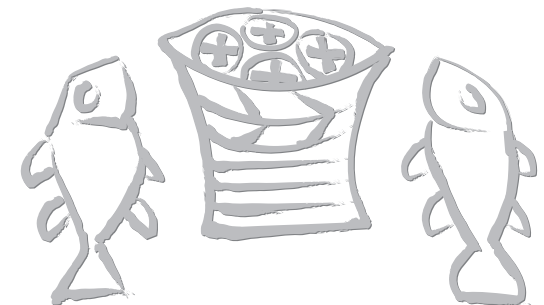


Introducing *Sacramentum Caritatis*

The sacrament of charity, the Holy Eucharist is the gift that Jesus Christ makes of himself, thus revealing to us God's infinite love for every man and woman.

What wonder must the eucharistic mystery awaken in our own hearts

Sacramentum Caritatis 1



The document is structured in three sections: the Eucharist, a mystery to be believed, celebrated and lived. This reflects the structure of the Catechism. The Holy Father also makes a connection with his first Encyclical Letter, *Deus Caritas Est* in which he 'frequently mentioned the sacrament of the Eucharist and stressed its relationship to Christian love, both of God and of neighbour'. (5)

This introductory leaflet gives a only brief overview. It does not even attempt to offer a summary of so rich a document.

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).

Sacramentum Caritatis 97

**Liturgy
Office**

**ENGLAND
& WALES**

Excerpts from *Sacramentum Caritatis* © 2007 Libreria Editrice Vaticana. It can be downloaded from [www.vatican.va] and is published in England and Wales by Catholic Truth Society [www.cts-online.org.uk]

This leaflet is one of series for resources on the Eucharist produced by the Liturgy Office, 39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1PL. www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources

What is an Apostolic Exhortation?

Sacramentum Caritatis is a document written by Pope Benedict XVI addressed to the whole Church. It is the final part of the Synod process where the Holy Father takes the reflections and propositions from the Synod Fathers, the bishops present at the Synod, and draws them together 'to offer some basic direction aimed at a renewed commitment to the eucharistic enthusiasm and fervour in the Church'. (Sac Car 5)

Other examples of Apostolic Exhortations would include *Evangelii Nuntiandi* on evangelisation by Paul VI and *Christifideles Laici* on the vocation and mission of the lay faithful by John Paul II.

What is a Synod?

The General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops was a process and a gathering instituted by Paul VI following the Second Vatican Council. Each Synod focuses on a particular aspect of the life of the Church. Pope John Paul II called for the 11th Synod to focus on the Eucharist as the source and summit of the Church's life and mission. It was held in October 2005 and was preceded by the Year of Eucharist.

Pope Benedict has already announced the theme for the 12th Synod: *The Word of God in the life and mission of the Church*.

Introducing Sacramentum Caritatis

The Sacrament of Charity explores the place of the Eucharist in the life of the Church both the centre or summit of her life but also as way of shedding light on the whole of Church's activity. The document draws on the propositions from the Synod and places them in the context of the teaching of the Church. With it seems particular pleasure Pope Benedict often refers to the writings of his 'beloved Predecessor, the Servant of God John Paul II'. (4)

Part One: **The Eucharist, a mystery to be believed**

This is the work of God: that you believe in him whom he has sent. John 6:29

The first part speaks about the **Church's eucharistic faith** (6) in particular the relationship between the **Blessed Trinity and the Eucharist** (7–13). Christ in the scriptures reveals himself to be the gift of the Father; by giving the totality of his life he reveals the ultimate origin of this love.

This leads to a reflection on the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper which 'demonstrates how Jesus' death, for all its violence and absurdity, became in him a supreme act of love and mankind's definitive deliverance from evil'. (10)

The presence of the Holy Spirit is traced through the New Testament noting that 'it is through the working of the Spirit that Christ himself continues to be present and active in his Church, starting with her vital centre which is the Eucharist'. (12)

The latter half of Part One looks at the relationship between the **Eucharist and the Sacraments** (16–29). Each Sacrament is considered alongside the Eucharist in turn both to show how they mutually illuminate the other and to raise some of the concerns raised at the Synod. Within this section the Holy Father expresses the 'gratitude of the whole Church for all those Bishops and priests who carry out their respective missions with fidelity, devotion and zeal'. (26)

The last two sections of the first part are the **Eucharist and Eschatology** (30–32), the liturgy of the Eucharist is a foretaste of the fulfilment for which every human being and all creation are destined (30), and the **Eucharist and the Virgin Mary** (33), Mary, who inaugurates the Church's participation in the sacrifice of the Redeemer'.

Part Two: **The Eucharist, a mystery to be celebrated**

Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. John 6:32

At the centre of the document is the section on the liturgy of the Church. It begins by making the connection between faith and celebration which is a theme of the whole document how the liturgy, the Eucharist, is both a source and an expression of faith.

Beauty and the liturgy speaks of Christ, the Father's glory, the fairest of the sons of men and therefore an essential element of the liturgical action (35) because Christ is the 'subject' of the liturgy.

Good celebration is encouraged as the best way of fostering the active participation of the People of God. (38) Good celebration means a knowledge and appreciation of the liturgical books and norms together with an attentiveness to the various kinds of language used in the liturgy: word and music, gestures and silence, movement and colour. (40)

The document goes on to detail some specific parts of the Mass which require special attention. (43–51) These include: the importance of well-prepared readers, the quality of homilies, the appreciation of the richness of the Eucharistic Prayers, the need for sobriety at the Sign of Peace, the distribution and reception of Holy Communion.

There follows an exploration of the different aspects of **Active Participation** (52–63). The Holy Father writes that 'the faithful need to be reminded that there can be no active participation in the sacred mysteries without an accompanying effort to participate actively in the life of the Church as a whole, including a missionary commitment to bring Christ's love into the life of society.' (55)

Active participation is linked to **Interior participation in the celebration** (64–65) in particular how, through mystagogical catechesis, the faithful can both deepen their faith in the Eucharist and transform their lives so that they can witness to Christ. The final section of this part stresses the importance of **Adoration and Eucharistic devotion** (66–69).

Part Three: **The Eucharist, a mystery to be lived**

As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. John 6:57

In the last part Pope Benedict draws together the mystery that is 'believed' and 'celebrated' and shows how every aspect of life is included and transfigured by the Eucharist. He quotes St Ignatius of Antioch who called Christians 'those living in accordance with the Lord's Day'. (72) Sunday provides a model for Christian living as it a day when the community gathers and is day of joy, rest and charity.

The Synod Fathers stated that 'the Christian faithful need a fuller understanding of the relationship between the eucharist and their daily lives. Eucharistic spirituality... embraces the whole of life'. (77) The documents goes on to speak of the Eucharist and moral transformation: 'the joy-filled discovery of love at work in the hearts of those who accept the Lord's gift'. (82)

The part is brought to conclusion by the looking outwards. First making the connection between the **Eucharist and mission** (84) and then as a **mystery to be offered to the world** (88–92), 'Each of us is truly called, together with Jesus, to be bread broken for the life of the world'. (88) So the final paragraphs speak about the Church's social teaching (91) and the sanctification of the world and protection of creation. (92)