

EUCHARIST — SIGN OF UNITY AND PEACE

Tomorrow we will celebrate the feast of "Corpus Christi", the feast of the Eucharist. The Church has already commemorated its institution on Holy Thursday by recalling and renewing sacramentally the Lord's Last Supper. That was so closely a part of the drama of the Passion, however, that there was no time for individual believers and their community to linger in particular reflection on the mystery of Jesus' perennial real presence in the Church itself, and of the renewal and multiplication of Christ's sacrifice, in a bloodless manner, in the eucharistic rite.

CHRIST AMONG US

The feast of "Corpus Christi" is, therefore, a rethinking of that fact and that mystery. It arose as a devotion of fervent souls in the 13th century, in Flanders, and liturgically in the universal Church after the miracle of Bolsena, thanks to Pope Urban IV, with the famous Bull *Transiturus* in 1264, the seventh centenary of which we celebrated some years ago. The theological importance of the eucharistic mystery, that is, the sacramental presence of the real, living Christ among us, and its effective sacrificial representation, deserved this special feast to reflect upon it. Moreover, the economy of this unlimited possibility of multiplication wherever this effective commemoration was celebrated called for a defence, an apologia, an apotheosis of Christ sacrificed and present as food of salvation and life for one and all of his faithful followers.

This is what we wish to tell you, and let it suffice now for this reference to the feast of "Corpus Christi": the Eucharist is for us, pilgrims on earth, bound for heaven, the focal point, blinding and illuminating, of the whole real system of our

In the course of the general audience on 31 May, the Holy Father delivered this meditation to the numerous groups present.

Christian religion. It is the presence of Emmanuel, that is, God with us, who is redemption, a divine victim for us, in a word, a plan of divine communion in us. The more impenetrable, the more unusual, the more miraculous the Eucharistic mystery appears to our worldly way of thinking (remember the discussion at Capernaum: "this is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" Jn. 6, 60), the more clear, logical, persuasive and beatifying it is to the man who believes and who loves Jesus Christ. The Eucharist. He is here.

TRANSUBSTANTIATION

We should study more deeply the mystery of the Eucharist, beloved Sons, with regard to the internal and external conditions of the Church in our times; regarding the presence of Christ under the species of bread and wine, and therefore regarding the necessity of having one's soul purified from every grave sin before approaching the eucharistic table (cf. Mt. 22, 12; I Cor. II, 28-29); regarding the comprehension of charity and unity, as the specific effect of the Eucharist, that is, as the ecclesial sacrament par excellence (St. Augustine's famous exclamations should always re-echo in our minds: "O sacramentum pietatis! o signum unitatis! o vinculum caritatis!"—*In Jo. tract.* 26, 13; P.L. 35, 1612-1613: and we must always remember how St. Thomas sees the specific effect, the grace, the "res" of the Eucharist in the "unity of the mystical body, without which there can be no salvation; the entrance to salvation is open to no one, in fact, outside the Church" *S. Th.* III, 73, 3).

PERMANENCE OF REAL PRESENCE

It is also well to reaffirm, in the face of certain denials circulating here and there, the permanence of the real presence of Christ in the eucharistic species even after the celebration of the Mass during which they were consecrated. Christ remains; and so a special cult of the Eucharist also outside Mass is justified, nay rather required, as the faith and piety of the Church has always professed and as, in times nearer to us, she has promoted and celebrated with ever greater reverence and solemnity (cf. F. W. Faber, *The Blessed Sacrament*; see particularly the Instruction *Eucharisticum mysterium*, in *Acta A. S.*, 1967, p. 539, ss). Thus the worship of Christ in the Tabernacle, private and public adoration of the Blessed Sacra-

ment, the procession, or the solemn worship outside the church, on the occasion of the feast of "Corpus Christi" (we will celebrate it tomorrow, God willing, at the Parish of the Blessed Sacrament, Centocelle), Eucharistic Congresses, all have their *raison d'être* according to faith, theology, liturgy, individual or collective piety.

Let us give supreme importance, Sons and Brothers, to the Eucharist, particularly in Holy Mass, the heart of our religion, and in communion with Christ, the Bread of life, which it offers us. Doing so, we will have given to our faith its highest expression, to the Church her genuine vitality, to our souls the school and food of our sanctification, to the world itself the beacon of its unity and peace (cf. Vonier, "The Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist").

This is our most earnest exhortation, our most heartfelt wish!

With our Apostolic Blessing.

Priests themselves extend to the different hours of the day the praise and thanksgiving of the Eucharistic celebration by reciting the Divine Office. Through it they pray to God in the name of the Church on behalf of the whole people entrusted to them and indeed for the whole world. (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 5)