

THE EUCHARIST CONSTITUTES THE CHURCH*

We have great pleasure today in welcoming this group of yours, distinguished members of the International Committee for Eucharistic Congresses. We greet all of you, who are in charge, at different levels, of the Committee itself. We greet particularly Archbishop James Knox of Melbourne, a Vice-President, and we thank him for the exemplary sense of responsibility which has brought him to this Audience from so far away, thereby underlining the importance of the event to which it is the solemn prelude. You are, in fact, preparing for the International Eucharistic Congress to be held in that city; and now that it is less than a year away, you wished to meet us. But if this desire of yours was great, ours, we do not hesitate to say, was even greater, and now our satisfaction is very great indeed.

You offer us the opportunity to address the whole Church, in order that she may prepare, in a fitting way, for that important manifestation of eucharistic piety; you provide us with the possibility of taking an earnest appeal to the whole ecclesial community. Actually the forthcoming International Eucharistic Congress is a fact that interests and involves all of us who belong, in whatever capacity, to the People of God, Christ's flock. We must all prepare our hearts, we must all feel committed: individuals, local Churches, the universal Church — and on as wide a scale as possible. It is a grace that the Lord offers to all those who, loving him and following him, are signed with the name of Christians.

It will be an opportunity for dogmatic and theological reflection, and therefore for spiritual and religious renewal,

* On March 1 Paul VI received in audience the Presidency of the Permanent Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses, led by Vice-President Archbishop J. R. Knox of Melbourne, where the 40th International Eucharistic Congress will take place in 1973. The Pope delivered this address.

centered on the mystery of the Eucharist. It will be a reminder of the duty of charity, as the motto of the Congress richly recalls: "Love one another, just as I have loved you" (Jn. 13, 34). It is in the Eucharist, indeed, that there is the source, the principle and the "bond of charity" (cf. St. Augustine, *In Io. Ev. Tractatus XXVI*, c. 13; P.L. 35, 1613), and this extends to practical applications in the human and social field; it will be an invitation to unity and for unity, of which the Eucharist is the humble and powerful sign.

REAFFIRMATION INDEED

At this moment of history, when the greater the longing of the human family for unity, the more serious and real are the threats and attempts against it, it is necessary to reaffirm solemnly this value of the Eucharist, as a "sign of unity" (St. Augustine, *loc cit.*), as a means of cohesion, as a "symbol of concord" (Council of Trent, Sess. 13, chap. 8). And because of that ineffable and mysterious mandate that was conferred upon us, in Peter, by Christ, to strengthen our brothers in the faith, (cf. Luke 22, 32), we wish to address to the whole Church, the invitation to look with particular expectation and intense hope to the great event, destined to emphasize this important aspect of the eucharistic mystery.

Our predecessor Pius XII of venerated memory admirably defined the Sacrament of the Eucharist as "a vivid and stupendous image of the unity of the Church" (*Enc. Mystici Corporis*; A.A.S. 35, 1943, p. 233). The Eucharist constitutes the Church, theology today has repeated with loving insistence, and this concept is a favourite one in recent and contemporary studies, in the meditations of priests, of consecrated souls and of the faithful, open today more than ever to the communitarian demands of their faith. But the concept is as ancient as the Church. Participation in the Sacrifice of Our Lord effectively actualizes community with Jesus Christ and among the faithful. Revelation emphasizes this very forcefully: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor. 10, 17). In the Acts of the Apostles (2, 41 ss.) there is put before our eyes, three-dimensionally, as it were, this unity, this "community" of life and property, which in the young Christian society was the effect of assiduous participation in the "breaking of bread".

Sitting down at the same table to nourish themselves with the one Body of Christ produces in Christians deep and indivisible unity, the source of dedication to God in worship and to their brothers in charity. The Liturgy, with the sober force of its words and the allusive eloquence of its gestures, has made this truth understandable to everyone, and has been a powerful instrument to have it put into practice. It is not necessary to recall here the solemn, mystical and moving eucharistic prayer of the *Didache* (9,4), known to all. Nor is it necessary to cite the rite of *fermentum*, the piece of consecrated bread sent by the Pope, and by bishops in their dioceses, to their priests for the celebration of Mass, as "a symbol of the unity of the local Church and in particular of her close union in the celebration of the eucharistic mystery" (L. Duchesne, *Liber Pontificalis I*, Paris 1955, n. p. 169). It is a very ancient rite, to which St. Irenaeus already testifies (cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* V, 24; and cf. *Mansi*, II, 566), established as a canonical norm by Popes Melchiades and Siricius, and in use in Rome, up to the 8th century, on Holy Thursday (De Rossi, *Inscript. christ.*, II p. 34). *Lex grandi, lex credendi*: and in the life of the early Church these forms of worship testified in a very special way to the faith of the Christian community in the Eucharist as the Sacrament of unity, the centre of fusion and the impulse to charity, in the mutual communion, signified even visibly, between the Hierarchy, the clergy and the faithful, all closely united, whether near or distant, in participation in the one Sacrifice and the one Body of Christ.

"... WITHOUT WHICH NO SALVATION"

Summing up this century-old patrimony of revelation and of Christian worship, Vatican II expressed this profound significance of the eucharistic mystery for our times as follows: "In any community existing around an altar, under the sacred ministry of the bishop, there is manifested a symbol of that charity and 'unity of the Mystical Body; without which there can be no salvation' (cf. St. Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, 3, q. 73, a. 3). In these communities, though frequently small and poor; or living far from any other, Christ is present. By virtue of Him the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church gathers together" (*Lumen Gentium*, 26).

The Eucharistic Congress, drawing crowds of worshippers before the Blessed Sacrament, is also a symbol, an extremely

efficacious one, of this interior and exterior ecclesial unity: yes, Christ present under the Eucharistic Species, calls the whole Church to himself, and makes her reflect on her vocation to unity and charity. Christ, solemnly and publicly worshipped, brings back the Christian community today to the original sources of its life, its very *raison d'être*.

The Congress is therefore an act of faith in the sovereignty of Christ's love, which radiates from the eucharistic presence (cfr. Pius XI, Litt. Enc. *Quas primas*, A.A.S. 17, 1925, p. 606); it is a reconfirmation of eucharistic worship in all its fullness and complementarity. We well know that the Sacrifice of the Mass holds the first place in the liturgy: all the documents of the Magisterium say so, up to the most recent ones. But we also wish to remind all our brothers, and sons, that, in spite of certain imprudent recent formulations, both theoretical and practical, all the forms of eucharistic worship maintain unaltered their validity, and their pedagogical and formative value as a school of faith, prayer and holiness.

The Church, right from the beginning, has always surrounded with the greatest respect the Eucharistic Species, the "caelestia membra", as they are called in the Damasus inscription on the tomb of St. Tarcisius, in memory of the young martyr to eucharistic faith, who was ready to give his life rather than leave the Lord's Body at the mercy of unbridled enemies (A. Ferrua, *Epigrammata Damasina*, Citta del Vaticano, 1942, pp. 117-119). As early as the second century, the Eucharist was brought to those who had not been able to be present at the liturgical celebration, or who were at death's door, and was preserved for this purpose. This is clearly confirmed by later testimonies, such as those of the First Council of Lyons (a. 1245; cf. Denz. Sch. 834), of Pope Gregory XI (a. 1370; cf. ib. 1101-1103), up to the solemn declarations of the Council of Trent "de cultu et veneratione huic ss. Sacramento exhibenda" (a. 1551; cf. ib. 1643.; 1656).

We do not wish to recall other well-known things, all the more so as in his Encyclical *Mediator Dei*, Pius XII, after summing up these testimonies, of Christian antiquity, the definitions of the Councils, the statements of the Fathers ("No one eats that flesh without having first worshipped it", St. Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps. 98*, 9; PL 37. 1264), stressed that the "cult of adoration has a valid and solid motive. The Eucharist, in fact, . . . differs from the other Sacraments in that it not only pro-

duces grace, but permanently contains the very author of grace. When therefore, the Church commands us to worship Christ hidden beneath the eucharistic veils, and to ask Him for supernatural and earthly gifts, which we always need, she manifests the living faith wherewith she believes in the presence of her Divine Spouse beneath those veils, shows forth her gratitude and enjoys close familiarity with Him" (A.A.S. 39, 1947, p. 569).

CHRIST'S PRESENCE WITH US

The preparation of the forthcoming Eucharistic Congress throws light, therefore, on this fact: that "Christ is with us always, to the end of the world" (Mt. 28, 20). He is present in the little ones and in the poor, present in the revealed Word, present in the eucharistic celebration, but above all present, always and everywhere and in a quite special way, in the Blessed Sacrament. As we emphasized in our Encyclical *Mysterium Fidei*, this presence "is called *real* not by exclusion, as if the others were not *real*, but by antonomasia, because it is substantial; by virtue of it Christ, the God-Man, is made completely present (A.A.S. 57, 1965, p. 764).

The real presence of Christ is the prolongation of the sacrificial liturgy, it makes present the eternal liturgy of Heaven (cf. Hb. 7, 25) in expectation of the eschatological meeting with Christ, and applies the fruits of Holy Communion in the widest manner. But in addition to these dogmatic foundations, this presence, and consequently eucharistic worship outside the Mass, is of an importance that cannot be equalled: whether from the point of view of *cult*, as a form of worship, thanksgiving, propitiation and petition, which are the same ends as those of the Sacrifice; or from the *ascetic and mystical* point of view, because without a genuine eucharistic piety, no real nourishment is provided for the apostolate, nor is the fidelity of ecclesiastic vocations and of the priestly ministry assured (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 4-5); or from the *ecclesial-communitarian* point of view, because "the Eucharist is preserved in churches and oratories as the spiritual centre of the religious and parish community, and in fact of the universal Church and of all humanity" (Encyclical *Mysterium Fidei*; A.A.S. 57, 1965, p. 772); or from the *social and human* point

of view, as the inspirer of charity and sociability or, finally, from the *ecumenical* point of view, as the source of food of unity, according to the principles we set forth in our above-mentioned Encyclical.

DISCOVERING CHRIST IN OTHERS

Venerable brothers and beloved sons.

This is what we wished to confide in you — and through you, to the whole Church — on the occasion of this first meeting in preparation for the International Eucharistic Congress at Melbourne. It is our heartfelt desire that those solemn celebrations in distant Australia, which we visited and which is so dear to us, will be the heart, as it were, of a new movement of piety, of a new love. Reviving the cult of the real presence of Christ, may they revive the generosity, the effort, the heroism of discovering Christ in the face and the sufferings of the poor, the needy, immigrants, the sick, the dying, and of serving him with one heart in them, sustained by the strength that derives exclusively from the long habit of prayer and familiarity with him.

May the Lord answer our desires with the secret and powerful outpouring of his grace which we invoke on you and on all those working for the success of the Congress. With our special Apostolic Blessing.

EPISCOPAL ORDINATION ANNIVERSARIES

Let us pray for our Bishops on the occasion of their ordination anniversaries.

Most Rev. Miguel Purrugganan
April 22, 1971

Most Rev. Joseph W. Regan
April 25, 1962

Most Rev. Jesus Y. Varela
April 30, 1967