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For the International
Eucharistic Congresses

«All My Springs are in You»

The Eucharist: Source of Christian
Life and Mission



*Theological and Pastoral Reflections in Preparation for the
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The International Eucharistic Congress

The International Eucharistic Congresses are one of the great public manifestations of the Church which underline and mark the importance of the Eucharist in the life of Christians, and in ecclesial practice. Originating in 1881 with the purpose of honouring Jesus Christ, truly present in the Eucharist and bearing witness to his infinite love for the world, they have given rise to historical processes of growth in the capacity of Christian communities, to respond to human expectations and to contribute to the building of a more human, just and peaceful world, all having its roots in the celebration of the Eucharist.

Hungary previously hosted a memorable international Eucharistic Congress in 1938 in Budapest. Eighty years later, the event will once again be celebrated in the same place but in circumstances which are historically and socially very different.

1.2 Hungary

Hungary has very deep Christian roots. Its first King, Saint Stephen (1000-1038) led the Hungarian people into the community of Christian nations of Europe. Among the mediaeval royal houses of Europe, the Arpad dynasty gave a significant number of saints to the Catholic Church; but neither do they lack more recent martyrs who have offered their lives for others. The Christian faith, the teaching and example of their ancestors sustained the Hungarian people throughout the storms of history. Today, the old saying remains valid: *"our past is our hope; our future is Christ"*.

Hungary planned its last International Eucharistic Congress around the motto *"Eucharistia, vinculum caritatis"*. The world at that time was experiencing great tensions and there was a great desire for peace in the face of a new and seemingly inevitable war. In the Congress hymn the faithful sang: *"Reunite in peace, o Lord, each people and nation"* and the participation of half a million people in the procession and the concluding mass became a kind of demonstration on the part of the people in favour of peace and against the war that threatened.

None of this succeeded in staving off the second world war which brought great struggle and sacrifice to Hungary. Then, following the war, the Christians were

persecuted and crushed by the dictatorial communist regime. The religious orders and congregations were abolished; many priests and lay people were imprisoned or deported to labour camps. The regime, which declared itself to be atheistic, engaged in an on-going campaign of torment and suppression, involving the bringing of Catholic schools, with the exception of eight colleges, and the prohibition of religious practice. All of that resulted in hundreds of thousands of people seeking refuge overseas.

The faith and the Christian values survived by going “underground” and were passed on to more recent generations by vibrant “illegal” communities. In this way, the number of practising Catholics was greatly reduced, while two or three generations grew up without any religious education. This is the root of the widespread religious ignorance, the indifference towards the faith and, sometimes, even of a certain hostility in respect of the Church, all of which are consequences of decades of anticlerical propaganda.

After the liberation and the regime change of 1989, there was a certain renewal in Hungary of religious practice. The return of democracy made it possible to re-open creches, schools, colleges and universities of both Catholic and other religious traditions. Some Christian values began to re-appear in political life and in legislation. Many Churches were re-opened for worship, some new Churches were built and Christian communities of various traditions gained a partial material compensation. While the various forms of consecrated life recommenced their proper activity with renewed vigour, the service of Caritas spread throughout the country and a growing number of lay people now participates in parochial and community life.

In the thirty years since 1989, however, many things have also changed for the worse. As in the other post-communist countries, so also in Hungary the picture of religious life and of faith has been weakened because of secularisation, laicisation, the desire for material well-being, relativism and agnosticism. This has led to an increase in the average age of the faithful and a reduction in the number of those practicing, such that out of ten million Hungarians, only about 7% to 10% of the population participate in the Sunday Mass. The crisis has also affected family life and vocations to the priesthood and religious life, because of the difficulty of evangelising among the youth. The social presence of the Church is also becoming less effective, even though larger numbers of adults are turning to the Christian communities in search of a response to the fundamental questions of life.

1.3. The Objectives of the Congress

The preparation for the International Eucharistic Congress of 2020 and its celebration offer to Catholics and to those with whom they are in close connected through cultural heritage and through friendship, an extraordinary opportunity to stand together before society and to bear public witness to their faith. Modern man as Pope Saint Paul VI said: *«listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses »*.¹

The International Eucharistic Congress, therefore, becomes an opportunity for Catholics to strengthen the faith and to share hope, life and joy with those who walk the same path, starting out from the Eucharistic source of the Risen Christ.

Through participation in the Eucharist the faith of believers is confirmed, their Christian identity is renewed and their communion with Christ and with their brothers and sisters is deepened. In this way, Christians, in a society dominated by the dictatorship of relativism, can bear witness to the truth before the world with their heads held high, with courageous serenity, and with love and gentleness after the example of Christ.

The International Eucharistic Congress is, furthermore, an opportunity to strengthen dialogue among Christians, with confidence that there are far more things that unite us than those that divide us. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we are drawn to listen and to understand in order to resolve those questions that remain open and to seek, in the truth, our future path together. Only the combined witness of believers can offer to unbelievers the Good News of salvation.

To people of every class and social condition who seek God, the Congress addresses the *kerygma*, the initial proclamation of the Gospel: God, the source of every life, loves every one of his creatures unconditionally. Because of this, he sent us his only Son, Jesus Christ, made flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary. With his words and his message, by his Death and resurrection, he has cancelled our sins and, through the action of the Holy Spirit he lives forever in his Church. Whoever freely decides to turn his back on evil and to accept Christ as Saviour, enters through Baptism into that great family of the redeemed and builds up the great community of the children of God.

1 PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation (1975) *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN), 41.

On the global scale, in the Eucharistic Congress, we give thanks to Christ and we glorify him, the only one who is able to offer life. And we pray that the joy which flows from the Eucharistic source will spread out not only throughout Hungary, but also in the countries of middle Europe, throughout the whole of Europe and the whole world. In this way, we can all find a moment of spiritual renewal, an evangelical reorientation, a crumb of faith which will overcome uncertainty, a light of hope for those who are sad, and a little love to triumph over solitude and isolation.

2. «IN YOU IS THE SOURCE OF LIFE»

2.1. God the Source of Life

It is a fundamental truth of Sacred Scripture that the source of all life is God because from him comes everything that we human beings need, both for our natural life and for our supernatural life.² The essential elements of life on earth themselves are His gift. Already in the symbolic account of the creation of man and woman (Gen 2, 4b-25) it is made very clear that God not only created man, but placed him in the Garden of Paradise, full of every kind of fruit-bearing tree and irrigated by four rivers. Man is indebted to God, therefore, not only for his own life, but also for all the good things necessary to sustain it.

The love and care of God are also at the centre of the account of the journey of Israel across the wilderness. It is the same Lord who, through Moses, provides the necessary food in the form of Manna and Quail (Ex 16, 1-15) and who causes water to spring forth from the rock (Ex 17, 1-17; Num 20, 1-13). Later biblical tradition speaks of these as gifts given directly by God. This vision is to be found above all in the Psalms: *«He split rocks open in the wilderness, and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep. He made streams come out of the rock, and caused waters to flow down like rivers.... he rained down on them manna to eat, and gave them the grain of heaven. Mortals ate of the bread of angels; he sent them food in abundance.»* (Psalm 78, 15-16. 24-25). *«They asked, and he brought quails, and gave them food from heaven in abundance. He opened the rock, and water gushed out; it flowed through the desert like a river.»* (Psalm 105, 40-41).

In so far as the tradition of the water is concerned, even if it did gush from the rock, its original source was God himself. So the water is not presented simply as something to drink, but also as a symbol of the spiritual goods which come from God. In fact, in some passages of the Old Testament, that interpretation prevails, *«In you is the source of life, and in your light we see light»*, proclaims the Psalmist (Psalm 36, 10). The prophet Jeremiah rebukes Israel for her as follows: *«My people have committed two offences against me: they have abandoned me, the source of living water, and have dug cisterns for themselves, cisterns full of cracks, which hold no water.»* (2, 13). Particularly worthy of attention is the promise that we read in a hymnic text of the prophet Isaiah: *«Surely,*

2 The faithful of the Byzantine Church pray each morning in the liturgy of the hours: *In you is the source of life, and in your light we see light ».*

*God is my salvation, I will trust, I will not be afraid, for the Lord is my strength and my song; he has been my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation» (12, 2–3).*³

All these scriptural texts affirm, therefore, that God is the source from whom flow all the gifts that we need for our salvation.

2.2. « If Anyone is Thirsty, let him come to me and drink »

In the New Testament, water as a symbol of spiritual goods appears above all in the Gospel according to John. Jesus, in the Temple at Jerusalem, on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, tells his listeners: *«Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As Scripture has said: out of the believer's heart will flow rivers of living water »* (7,37-38). During the Feast of Tabernacles, which lasts seven days, pious Jews used to recall the journey in the wilderness and, in the celebrations they placed particular emphasis on water as a gift from God, the source of life. During the seven days of the festival, indeed, early in the morning, the crowd followed the priests and the Levites to the pool of Siloam, to collect water in golden amphorae, as they recited: *«With joy you will draw water from the springs of salvation»*. Having then returned to the Temple, the water would be poured over the altar. It is in the context of this celebration that Jesus defines himself as the source to which the words of the prophet refer.⁴

We should not forget, however, that the evangelist refers the words of Jesus to the Holy Spirit, who is given to those who believe in Christ, through his glorification on the cross, and through the Paschal event of his death and resurrection. In anticipation of Pentecost, Christ already gives his Spirit on the cross when he says *«I commend my spirit»* (Jn. 19: 30).⁵ And, from the side of Jesus, pierced by the spear of a soldier, comes blood and water (Jn. 19: 34) which in the ecclesial tradition refer to the sacraments of Baptism (water) and the Eucharist (blood).

As we pray in the preface of the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus:

*«raised up high on the Cross,
he gave himself up for us with a wonderful love*

3 It is also worth mentioning the invitation we find in Deutero-Isaiah: *«Oh you who are thirsty, come to the waters, you who have no money, come, buy and eat; come and buy wine and milk without money»* (Is 55,1).

4 Beginning with Origen the second interpretation began to take precedence, according to which the rivers of living water would flow out from those who believed in Christ. Today, however, the majority of scripture scholars, because of the old-testament roots and the character of the Feast of Tabernacles, hold that the rivers of living water flow from Christ. Cf. R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Das Johannesevangelium II*, Freiburg 1980, 214; J. RATZINGER/BENEDIKT XVI, *Jesus von Nazareth I*, Vaticano City 2007, 289.

5 Cf. I. DE LA POTTERIE, *Studi di cristologia giovannea*, Genova 1986, 285.

*and poured out blood and water from his pierced side,
the wellspring of the Church's Sacraments,
so that, won over to the open heart of the Saviour,
all might draw water joyfully from the springs of salvation.».*⁶

The Eucharistic interpretation of the blood of Christ is also supported by the final part of the discourse on the “Bread of Life” which we find in Chapter 6 of the Gospel according to John, in which Jesus speaks of his own body as food and his own blood as drink (6, 53-58). Blood and water appear again in the first Letter of John, together with the Holy Spirit: *«There are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood, and these three agree.»* (5,7-8). Baptism and Eucharist become sources of salvation through the Holy Spirit.

Likewise, Saint Paul, in the first Letter to the Corinthians, referring to the Exodus of the Fathers in the desert, recalls: *«They all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them and the rock was Christ»* (1Cor 10, 3-4).

2.3. «All My Springs are in You» (Psalm 87, 7)

The Eucharist is the source of life not only for individual Christians, but for the whole Church, as a community of believers. Indeed, in order for Christ celebrated in the Eucharist to become a perennial source, the mediating role of the Church is essential.

In order to understand this, we turn again to the Old Testament from which is taken the theme of this International Eucharistic Congress. We refer to Psalm 87 the text of which we quote in its entirety: ⁷

*« On the holy mount stands the city he founded;
the Lord loves the gates of Zion
more than all the dwellings of Jacob.
Glorious things are spoken of you,
O city of God.*

6 This preface of the *Roman Missal*, echose the Augustinian interpretation of the *Tractatus in Iohannis Euangelium*, CXX, 2; in *Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana (NBA)*, vol. XXIV/2, p. 1912.

7 We refer to the psalm according to the numbering of the Hebrew Bible. In the *Septuagint* and in the *Vulgate* the prayer would be found as Psalm 86.

*Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon;
 Philistia too, and Tyre, with Ethiopia–
 “This one was born there,” they say.
 And of Zion it shall be said,
 “This one and that one were born in it”;
 for the Most High himself will establish it.
 The Lord records, as he registers the peoples,
 “This one was born there”.
 Singers and dancers alike say,
 “All my springs are in you.”».*

The psalm belongs to the so-called “Canticles of Sion”, at the heart of which is the vocation and the privileged position of Jerusalem.⁸ The Lord, as the psalm tells us at the beginning, prefers “the gates of Sion”, that is the holy city in which are to be found the Temple and the home of the Davidic dynasty, more than all the places in Israel.⁹ And the same YHWH Lord confers the citizenship of Jerusalem on the pagan nations who “know” him.

The promise contained in the Psalm is worthy of attention for two reasons. In the first place the list begins with Egypt (Rahab) and Babylon, two mortal enemies who, having come to faith in the God of Israel, become citizens of Israel with all the right that this involves. The list then continues with the Cardinal points: Egypt/the West – Babylon/the East – Philistia and Tyre/the North – Ethiopia/the South. In this way, the five nations listed represent the whole world converging on Jerusalem, the city where, thanks to the knowledge of God, nations which were previously antagonistic towards one another, are come together in peace and unity. At the end of the Psalm, all these nations united in the context of a liturgical celebration proclaim: *«All my sources are in you»*.

The idea that in eschatological times the city of Jerusalem and its Temple would become a stream of living water, is also to be found in the prophetic writings: *«On that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity»*, we read in the prophet Zechariah (13, 1). In the book of the prophet Ezekiel we read the prophecy of the stream which flows from the east side of the Temple, becoming a great navigable (Ez 47, 1-12). These prophetic texts, like

8 The Canticles of Sion include Psalms 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122.

9 Cf G. RAVASI, *I Salmi*. II, Bologna, 1986, p. 800.

Psalm 87, announce the return to the conditions of paradise, characterised by abundance, fruitfulness and peace: *«From Sion comes forth a new creation, fruitful and green, joyful and blessed. »*.¹⁰

The Christian tradition reads Psalm 87 with reference to the Church, with the conviction that the “Heavenly Jerusalem” is to be identified with the Church (cf. Gal 4, 26; Heb. 12, 22–24): *«Sion was an earthly city which reproduced in shadowy form the image of that Sion to which we refer, or in other words of that Jerusalem of which the Apostle speaks “who is the mother of us all” »*(Gal 4: 26).¹¹ The Church is the community of those who are saved, coming from *«every tribe, language, people and nation»* (Rev 5: 9), who worship God *«in Spirit and truth»* (Jn 4: 24) and find unity by building one body.

As St. Paul reminds us: *«The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. »* (1Cor. 10: 16-17). Participation in the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharistic celebration creates a real communion with Christ and builds up his body, the Church. All who participate in the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, become one body, one single. The source from which the faithful draw is the sure guarantee of unity among them.

10 *Ibid*, p. 802.

11 *«Erat enim quaedam civitas Sion terrena, quae per umbram gestavit imaginem cuiusdam Sion de qua modo dicitur, coelestis illius Ierusalem de qua dicit Apostolus: Quae est mater omnium nostrum»* Cf. *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 86,2 in NBA, vol XXVII/I.

3. THE EUCHARIST SOURCE OF CHRISTIAN LIFE

3.1. The Foundations in the Old Testament

Since the beginning of its history, the Church, faithful to the commandment of the Lord «*Do this in Memory of Me*» (Lk 22: 19; 1Cor 11: 24) has celebrated the Eucharist, defining it by two fundamental titles: «The Lord's Supper» (1Cor 11: 20) e «*The Breaking of Bread*» (Acts 2: 42). These two titles connect the Eucharist with the historical event of the last Supper shared by Jesus with his disciples and with other celebrations of the Apostolic Church.

The «Lord's Supper»

The «*Lord's Supper*» bears witness to how the Eucharistic action was understood from the beginning as the ritual of re-living the Paschal Mystery of the *Kyrios* remembering all that he had done and said on the night he was betrayed.

During the Last Supper, Jesus offers himself in the signs of bread and wine in a prophetic action which anticipates the paschal mystery of death and life: the bread broken symbolises his body which is given and the wine his blood which is poured out. The gift is given in the course of a meal «*take and eat... take this and drink of it*» and it is offered as an event of communion and of forgiveness. In this way, the Last Supper appears as the exegesis of the whole life of Jesus before and after the Paschal events; a life which is explained as a mystery of death and life, because the believers can obtain through Him a share in the risen life.

The Last Supper of Jesus is situated within the frame of the meals shared by the Master with sinners during his earthly life and those shared with his disciples after His Resurrection. By sitting at table with sinners, Jesus proclaimed that in him the universal pardon proclaimed by the prophets for messianic times, was already a reality, and he made it clear that all are called to participate in the eschatological banquet of salvation. (Is 25: 6).

In so far as the meals of the risen Lord with the eleven are concerned, more than simply convincing the disciples of the reality of the resurrection, they ensure that the *Kyrios* continues to make himself present among his people by means of the paschal sign of the meal. This is particularly evident in the form given to the episode of the disciples at Emmaus which expresses in a very notable way the Eucharistic faith of the

apostolic community. Here, the Risen Lord shows himself and is recognised as being present in the reception of his Word and in the sign of the breaking of bread.

If, for Jesus, celebrating his Passover signified a passing from death to life *«having loved his own ... to the end»* (Jn 13: 1), so also for his disciples the Eucharistic memorial is an act which continuously brings about the passage from death to life, proclaiming the presence of the Risen Lord in his Church.

The «Breaking of Bread»

This expression picks up on a reality which was already present in the Jewish world and recalls the communion that is established every time that Christians gather to break the one bread and to eat around the one table, becoming one body, that of Jesus Christ.

In the Acts of the Apostles the breaking of bread is placed in a significant ecclesial frame. Those who came to faith *«broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts»* (Acts 2:46) and *«They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers»* (Acts 2: 42).

Joined with that breaking of bread in memory of the new Passover were the listening to the Word of God presented by the leaders of the community, a fraternal meal (*agápê*) together with the sharing of material necessities and prayer in common, raised up to God the Father of Jesus Christ, the Messiah whose coming had been awaited through the ages.

With the giving of thanks over the gifts on the table, the community experienced, in continuity with the experience of the Apostles and the disciples at Emmaus, the presence of the Risen Lord, and celebrated the saving event realised once and for all by the death and resurrection of the Saviour. A similar faith is expressed in the account of the breaking of bread celebrated by Paul at Troas during his last missionary journey. (Acts 20, 7-8, 11).

The Witness of Paul

Beginning in the year 50 AD, Saint Paul had shared with the community at Corinth what he himself had received at the time of his conversions and his first contacts with the Church in Antioch and in Jerusalem. In the first letter to the Corinthians (11, 17-34), the Apostle takes it for granted that the community will gather as a Eucharistic assembly they celebrate the Lord's Supper. What preoccupies him is

the need to remind his readers about the essential nature of the Eucharist and the manner in which it should be believed, celebrated and lived.

In Corinth the celebration of the Eucharist was preceded by a meal shared in common, which was intended to express fraternal communion. This corresponded with the historical context in which Jesus celebrated the Passover and was born out of the Eucharistic action. In this way, the Eucharistic gathering was linked to fraternity and solidarity.

But this gathering, instead of expressing communion and solidarity towards the poor had become an occasion of division and of inequality. This says Paul is no longer «*eating and drinking the Lord's Supper*» because it no longer manifests the true meaning of the supper of Jesus with his friends. If fraternity is not respected, it is not possible to recognise in the celebration what Jesus asked us to do in memory of Him and the profound meaning of the Eucharist is devalued.

It is for that reason that Paul proposes once again what he himself received, namely the account of the last Supper. If the Eucharist is the living memorial of the death of the Lord, then to receive the bread and the cup is to enter into a communion of life through his Body and Blood and to become therefore one body with him. It is impossible to grasp the reality of the Body of Christ given and the Blood of Christ poured out in any way which fails to live up to the demands of fraternal communion.

John and the "bread of life"

John the Evangelist was undoubtedly familiar with the Eucharistic practice in the apostolic Church and, while he does not give an account of the institution of the Eucharist it is because that account was already known to his communities and used in the liturgy. But there is an even more profound reason: the evangelist supports us in understanding the Eucharist in the wider context of the whole experience of Jesus who came among us to give life and who returned to the Father to draw us to himself.

The life of Jesus unfolds as a great paschal movement *from the Father to the world* (the Incarnation) and *from the world to the Father* (death and resurrection). It is in this movement that the salvation of the whole of humanity is manifested. The discourse on the bread of life (Jn. 6) is situated in this movement of descent and ascent. The Eucharist is the living bread come down from heaven which makes possible the ascent towards the Father. In the face of the objections of the Jews, the catechesis of Jesus unfolds progressively to the point of announcing explicitly a food and drink which are defined as his flesh and blood given for the life of the world: «*for my flesh is true food*

and my blood is true drink. 56 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them » (Jn 6: 55-56).

The word *flesh* evokes the close connection that exists between the incarnation, the cross and the Eucharist: in it the believer is nourished with the Son of God made man and dying for us, and lives by faith in and through Him, the Risen one. In that way Jesus presents himself to the believers as a victim offered in sacrifice (flesh and blood) and as a gift of universal redemption.

3.2. From the Lord's Supper to the Eucharist of the Church.

There are relatively few accounts remaining of how the Eucharist developed in the Patristic period.¹² Ignatius of Antioch (†115) refers to it on a number of occasions but records nothing concerning its ritual celebration. The first document which explicitly refers to the Eucharist is probably the *Didaché* which contains three prayers of Eucharistic origin and a brief description of the Eucharistic meal on the Lord's Day.¹³ Around the year 112 AD, we have the testimony of Pliny the Younger, Governor of Bithynia and Pontus who, in a letter to the Emperor Trajan, reports that the Christians were accustomed to gather «on a fixed day before dawn to sing in alternating choirs a hymn to Christ» and that it was «their custom to depart and meet again to take food, but it was of no special character and quite harmless».¹⁴

The identity of the Eucharistic action was more clearly expressed around the year 160 AD, in the first Apologia of Justinian, in which the community of the Baptised is described as an assembly of celebration in which each one is greeted with a kiss of peace, in which gifts of bread and wine are presented, and in which a long prayer of praise and supplication is raised up to the Father in the name of his Son Jesus Christ to which all reply «Amen, Amen». There follows the communion in the consecrated gifts, of which a portion is reserved to be brought to those who are absent. A short while later, Justinian proposes a deep synthesis of Eucharistic doctrine and a description of the Eucharistic action celebrated on the «Day of Sun».¹⁵ The formation of a coherent Eucharistic liturgy is already to be seen in the ecclesiastical ordo of Hippolytus dating

12 J. A. JUNGSMANN, *Missarum sollemnia*; Casale (1953), pp. 20 ss.

13 Cf. *Didaché* 9-10 e 14-15 in *Sources Chrétiennes* (Sch) 248/bis.

14 C. PLINI CAECILI SECUNDI, *Epistularum libri decem*, X, 96; Oxford (1963).

15 GIUSTINO, *Apologia* I, 65. 67; in *Sch* 597.

from the third century with a prayer which celebrated the saving work of God in Christ in the Eucharistic memory of the community.¹⁶

In the years of the late Antiquity and the High Middle Ages, the celebration of and participation in the Eucharist are perceived as constitutive elements of every Christian community. Thus, in the history of the Church, we can admire with gratitude: « *the orderly development of the ritual forms in which we commemorate the event of our salvation. From the varied forms of the early centuries, still resplendent in the rites of the Ancient Churches of the East, up to the spread of the Roman rite; from the clear indications of the Council of Trent and the Missal of Saint Pius V to the liturgical renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council: in every age of the Church's history the Eucharistic celebration, as the source and summit of her life and mission, shines forth in the liturgical rite in all its richness and variety* ». ¹⁷

3.3. A Mediaeval Synthesis

The Second Vatican Council reminds us, drawing on the teaching of the “*Angelic Doctor*”,¹⁸ that «*The other sacraments, as well as every ministry of the Church and every work of the apostolate, are tied together with the Eucharist and are directed toward it. The Most Blessed Eucharist contains the entire spiritual wealth of the Church, that is, Christ himself, our Pasch and Living Bread*». ¹⁹

It was Thomas Aquinas himself who, in his *Summa*, offered that synthesis of the mediaeval Eucharistic doctrine which would become the matrix of most of the Eucharistic doctrine which followed later. Thomas emphasised two particular points.²⁰ First of all, the Eucharist is the most important Sacrament, because Christ is essentially present in it, whereas in the other Sacraments Christ only comes to our assistance through his grace and his power.

The other sacraments, then, are ordered towards the Eucharist which is the ultimate end of sacramental life. The sacrament of orders, indeed, has the purpose of making it present; baptism and, in part, Confirmation are ordered towards receiving it;

16 IPPOLITO, *Traditio Apostolica* 4; in *Sch* 11/bis.

17 BENEDETTO XVI, Post synodal Apostolic Exhortation (2007) *Sacramentum Caritatis* [SCa], 3.

18 Thus Thomas Aquinas was defined by Pope Saint Pius V in 1567. Pius XI, in the encyclical letter *Studiorum Ducem* (AAS XV/1923, 309-326), defines him as «*Eucharistiae praeco et vates maximus*».

19 SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree (1965) *Presbyterorum Ordinis* [PO], 5.

20 Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* [STH], Bologna 2014, III, q 65, a 3; vol. IV p. 781.

penance and the anointing of the sick forgive sin so as to be worthy to receive the body of Christ. In marriage, then, the sign of the communion of Christ with his Church, the communion of the husband and wife with one another and with Christ is sealed.

In the celebration of the Eucharist, the salvific presence of Christ, his death and resurrection, are made present. For that reason the holy Mass is the appropriate frame for the administration of the other sacraments which, of their nature, direct us towards the Eucharist.²¹

3.4. The Protestant Reformation and the Council of Trent

«O sacred banquet in which Christ is received, the memory of His Passion is renewed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory given to us.». In the Antiphon for first Vespers of the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord, the liturgy of the Church makes felt her unceasing admiration for the miracle of the Eucharist, and summarises Catholic faith on the essence of this Sacrament.²²

The Eucharist not only contains grace, like the other Sacraments, but also the author of grace himself, Christ and his salvific work, the sacrifice of salvation and, for that reason, it is the greatest gift.²³ The Council of Trent did not set out to develop a complete and all-embracing treatise on the Eucharist, but simply to respond to the problems posed by the reformation²⁴ and to conserve the integrity of the mystery.

Concerning the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the Council teaches that: *«in the nourishing sacrament of the Holy Eucharist after the consecration of the bread and wine our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and man, is truly, really, and substantially contained under the species of those sensible things»*.²⁵ That permanent real presence comes about by means of transubstantiation: *«by the consecration of the bread and wine a conversion takes place of the whole substance of bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood. This conversion is appropriately and properly called transubstantiation by the Catholic Church»*.²⁶

21 Cf. *STH* III, q 79, a 1; vol. IV p. 1007.

22 Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter (2004) *Mane Nobiscum Domine* [MND], 29.

23 *«The Eucharist is called the host in so far as it contains Christ in person, who is “ostia salutare»* in *STH* III, q 73.a.4. ad 3; vol IV p. 912.

24 Cfr H. DENZINGER, *Echiridion Symbolorum* [DH] a cura di P. HÜNERMANN, Bologna 2009⁴, 1725.

25 *DH*, 1636.

26 *DH*, 1651.

As an alternative to the Tridentine terminology of *transubstantiation* the terms *transignification* and *transfinalisation* have been proposed in recent times. Other terms to describe that change, which is both real and mysterious, might also be proposed as being more in keeping with our contemporary culture. In any case, none of these terms can escape the limits and the linguistic and philosophical provisionalism of the term *transubstantiation*.²⁷

Regarding the sacrificial character of the Holy Mass, the Council of Trent teaches that: «*This, our Lord and God..., at the Last Supper, on the night He was betrayed (1Cor 11,23), so that He might leave to His beloved spouse the Church a visible sacrifice (as the nature of man demands), whereby that bloody sacrifice once to be completed on the Cross might be represented, and the memory of it remain even to the end of the world [1 Cor. 11:23 ff.] and its saving grace be applied to the remission of those sins which we daily commit ... offered to God the Father His own body and blood under the species of bread and wine*».²⁸

The Holy Mass is not, therefore a new sacrifice, as if the one perfect sacrifice of Christ were not effective or sufficient (cf. Heb. 10:12), but rather a “representation”: it causes us to enter into the eternal present of the sacrifice of Christ. What is repeated is the sacramental act and the possibility of our offering.²⁹

Among these themes which restate in essence the mediaeval theology, the one exception is the theme of the Eucharist as a sign of unity, which is characteristic of the great patristic tradition which, however, is only referred to by the Council from a moral perspective: «*And finally this holy Synod with paternal affection admonishes, exhorts, entreats, and beseeches that each and all, who are classed under the Christian name, will now finally agree and be of the same opinion in this "sign of unity," in this "bond of charity"*».³⁰

27 C. GIRAUDO, *In unum corpus*, Cinesello Balsamo 2000, p.453.

28 *DH*, 1739–1740.

29 Cf. C. JOURNET, *Le mystère de l'Eucharistie*, Paris 1980, p. 33.

30 *DH*, 1649.

4. THE EUCHARIST IN THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

The first innovative thrust, after the decrees of the Council of Trent which guided theological and catechetical thought during the following centuries, came from the liturgical movement. Arising out of pastoral need the movement contributed, among other things, the the rediscovery of the Eucharist as the presence of the saving action of the paschal event of Christ as well as to an appreciation of the principle of “active participation”. In this way, together with the biblical and patristic movement, it prepared the ground – in the context of a return to the sources and to the Tradition enshrined in Vatican II – for a new synthesis of Eucharistic doctrine. While not producing a document specifically on the Eucharist, the Second Vatican Council dealt with it in many documents in addition to the Constitution on the Liturgy.

4.1. The Eucharist if the Source and Summit of Christian Life

For the Second Vatican Council, the Eucharistic celebration is «*the source and summit of the whole Christian life*»,³¹ «*the basis and centre*» of the Christian community,³² «*the source of the Church’s life*»,³³ «*the source and the apex of the whole work of evangelisation*»,³⁴ «*the centre and culmination of the whole life of the Christian community*»;³⁵ and from it «*the Church continually lives and grows*».³⁶

The affirmation that the Eucharist is the «*source and summit of the life and mission of the Church*» is deeply rooted in our language to the extent of being a theological common-place. Its origin is found in *Lumen Gentium* where, speaking of the “*common priesthood*” of all the baptised, it is written: «*The faithful... taking part in the Eucharistic sacrifice, which is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life, they offer the Divine Victim to God, and offer themselves along with It...*».³⁷

31 SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (1964) *Lumen Gentium* [LG], 11.

32 PO, 6.

33 SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism(1964) *Unitatis Redintegratio* [UR],15.

34 PO, 5.

35 SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Decree on the Pastoral Mission of Bishops in the Church* (1965) *Christus Dominus* [Chd], 30.

36 LG, 26.

37 This definition in LG, 11 is found again in: SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (1963) *Sacrosanctum Concilium* [SC], 10; Chd, 30; Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church (1965) *Ad Gentes* [AD], 9 & 39; Decree on Ecumenism (1964) *Unitatis Redintegratio* [UR],15; PO, 5 & 14; Decree on the

The Eucharist is not only the act of the whole priestly people of the baptised but is also its “form”, or model, the womb out of which the Church is born. We can say, in other words, that «*The Most Blessed Eucharist contains the entire spiritual wealth of the Church, that is, Christ himself, our Pasch and Living Bread, by the action of the Holy Spirit through his very flesh vital and vitalizing, giving life to (his) people*».³⁸

The Council then presents the Eucharist in relationship not only to the sacrifice of the cross but to the entire paschal mystery: «*At the Last Supper, on the night when He was betrayed, our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of His Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again, and so to entrust to His beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of His death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity [36], a paschal banquet in which Christ is eaten, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us*».³⁹

The Eucharist is thus not only a prayer or a hymn but the celebration of a Passover, an action oriented not simply to produce or to cause the real presence, but to gather up the richness of the entire paschal mystery.

Another new dimension coming from the Council is the relationship between the table of the Word and that of the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Word, appropriately connected into the flow of the Liturgical year, is an integral part of the celebration. Christ, indeed, «*is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church*».⁴⁰ In the binary structure of the Eucharistic celebration, the Liturgy of the Word proclaims the history of salvation brought about by God while the Liturgy of the Eucharist celebrates and makes present that history in its key moment, the death and Resurrection of Jesus, his glorious Paschal event. The first part of the Mass proclaims salvation and makes it present; the second part realises it in its fullness by means of sacramental participation in the Body and Blood of Christ. The Word creates in the assembly the attitude of faith which gives full meaning to the celebration of the sacramental sign.

The unique reality is the work of the Holy Spirit, who has brought forth the Word and who has sanctified the bread and wine to transform them into the body and blood

Apostolate of the Laity (1965) *Apostolicam Actuositatem* [AA], 3; Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (1965) *Gaudium et Spes* [GS], 38. Cf. R. FALSINI, *La liturgia «come culmen et fons»: genesi e sviluppo di un tema conciliare*”, in AA.VV., *Liturgia e spiritualità*, Roma 1992, 27–49.

38 PO, 5.

39 SC, 47.

40 *Ibid*, 7. The same paragraph presents in great detail the various modes of the presence of Christ in the celebration and represents one of the newest Conciliar statements by contrast with the medieval Eucharistic piety.

of Christ. «Just as the life of the Church is strengthened through more frequent celebration of the Eucharistic mystery, similar we may hope for a new stimulus for the life of the Spirit from a growing reverence for the word of God, which 'lasts forever'». ⁴¹

4.2. The Eucharist Makes the Church

In the Council, the Eucharist reaches its fullest ecclesial dimension according to the expression of the French Jesuit, Henri De Lubac (1896-1991), «*The Eucharist Makes the Church*», which suggests a return to the Eucharistic model developed by the Fathers of the Church. The Eucharistic celebration is a dynamic event in which the Church receives the gifts of bread and wine transformed, in order to transform herself in her own turn into the Body of Christ. The Christian assembly is invited to receive the Eucharistic body of Christ in order to become his ecclesial body.

This dimension of the Church as communion was developed primarily in *Lumen Gentium*. Going rapidly through the document, one finds from the very beginning some important statements which refer directly to the Pauline text of 1 Cor 10:17 : « *in the sacrament of the Eucharistic bread, the unity of all believers who form one body in Christ (8) is both expressed and brought about* »⁴². The same declaration is repeated a little later: « *Really partaking of the body of the Lord in the breaking of the Eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion with Him and with one another. " Because the bread is one, we though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread"(1 Cor 10:17). In this way all of us are made members of His Body, (cf. 1 Cor 12:27) (54) "but severally members one of another" (Rom 12:5)* ».⁴³ The Eucharist not only indicates the Church but brings her into existence: « *Strengthened in Holy Communion by the Body of Christ, they then manifest in a concrete way that unity of the people of God which is suitably signified and wondrously brought about by this most august sacrament* ».⁴⁴

The most important declaration of this theme is to be found, however, in the section which concerns the episcopal function. Having stated clearly that the Eucharistic ecclesiology leads to a new theological appreciation of the local Church, it is stated: « *In any community of the altar, under the sacred ministry of the bishop, there is exhibited a symbol of that charity and 'unity of the mystical Body, without which there can be no salvation' . In these communities, though frequently small and poor, or living in the Diaspora, Christ is present, and in virtue of His presence there is brought together one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. For 'the partaking of*

41 SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (1965) *Dei Verbum* [DV], 26.

42 *LG*, 3.

43 *Ivi*, 7.

44 *Ibid*, 11.

*the body and blood of Christ does nothing other than make us be transformed into that which we consume'».*⁴⁵

In the post-conciliar period, the re-proposal of the Eucharistic ecclesiology of communion came from the extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1985 which placed the Church as Communion at the centre of its work: « *The ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the Council's documents.Fundamentally it is a matter of communion with God through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. This communion is had in the Word of God and in the sacraments. Baptism is the door and the foundation of communion in the Church. The Eucharist is the source and the culmination of the whole Christian life. The communion of the Eucharistic Body of Christ signifies and produces, that is, builds up, the intimate communion of all the faithful in the Body of Christ which is the Church* ».⁴⁶

Thus Pope Saint John Paul II could say that « *A causal influence of the Eucharist is present at the Church's very origins*»⁴⁷

45 *Ibid.*, 26.

46 *Relatio finalis*, II C 1; in ENCHIRIDION VATICANUM 9, Bologna 1987, p. 1761.

47 JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter (2003) *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* [EE], 21.

5. THE CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST, SOURCE AND SUMMIT OF ECCLESIAL LIFE

The ritual structure of the Eucharist is presented as follows in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal: « *The Mass is made up, as it were, of two parts: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. These, however, are so closely interconnected that they form but one single act of worship. For in the Mass the table both of God's word and of Christ's Body is prepared, from which the faithful may be instructed and refreshed. There are also certain rites that open and conclude the celebration.* ».⁴⁸

The Mass is constituted by a double table⁴⁹ framed by some other minor ritual moments, which are nonetheless essential for the internal balance of the celebration as a whole. All of this has come down to us through a rich and timeless tradition of faith which the liturgical reform, promoted by the Second Vatican Council, has carefully winnowed in order to lead to «*to a conscious, active, and full participation of the faithful both in body and in mind, a participation burning with faith, hope, and charity, of the sort which is desired by the Church and demanded by the very nature of the celebration*».⁵⁰

Thus the liturgical rite, celebrated by the Church in fidelity to the Saviour's command («*Do this in Memory of Me*»), is the permanent and vital fruit of the work of evangelisation carried out by Jesus Christ and entrusted by him to his Apostles and to their successors. It is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles in the summary dedicated to the life of the early apostolic community (Acts 2, 42:46-47). It is recorded by the Apostle Paul in his testimony to the people of Corinth (1 Cor 11: 23). Luke the evangelist allows it to be seen also in the account of the disciples at Emmaus (Lk 24: 13-35) where the paschal encounter with the Risen Lord is presented with the characteristic elements of the Sunday Eucharistic liturgy.

In the liturgical gesture of the celebration we find the proclamation of the Resurrection of Christ and of his return; the source of life, of faith and of mission; the school of communion; the dynamic energy for evangelisation. In order to unearth the

48 *General Instruction on the Roman Missal [OGMR]*, 28. The liturgies of the various oriental Churches, catholic and orthodox, follow for the most part the same structure, while demonstrating in their detail, a rich variety even among themselves.

49 *SC*, 44: «*From the two tables of the Word of God and of the Body of Christ the Church receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life*».

50 *OGMR*, 18.

treasures let us go through the ritual itinerary of every Eucharistic celebration following the method of mystagogy.⁵¹

5.1. The Eucharistic Celebration, source of Christian life

a. Introductory Rites

«After the people have gathered».⁵² The words of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal are essential for understanding what constitutes the Eucharistic celebration. The assembly of the people of God is the first sacramental reality of the Mass. This ecclesial convocation, beyond its concrete existence and the preoccupations of the individual members, is in reality a divine convocation. This is something which is not always clearly present in the minds of the faithful or of the pastors, because the motives of faith are mixed through with other motives. The rites of introduction have the task of mediating between the intentions of those who are gathered for the celebration and the demands of the celebration itself.

The introductory rites (hymn, sign of the cross, greeting of the assembly by the presider, introductory words, penitential act, Gloria and collect)⁵³ while they open up the communication between God and his people, and of the faithful with one another, they focus all their potential with a view to the evangelisation of the minds and hearts of the faithful.

The veneration of the altar by the celebrant and the sign of the cross bear witness to the sacramental quality of the altar and of the assembly. The greeting in the short form: «*The Lord be with you*», or in some of the other forms, manifests at one and the same time the presence of the risen Christ in the midst of his disciples and the mystery of the Church which is gathered. The various forms of the penitential act are addressed to God or to Christ to ask for the forgiveness of sins and they are a call to conversion rather than a reminder of guilt. After the Gloria, the priests, saying «*Let Us Pray*», invites the assembly to a moment of silent prayer before saying the Collect, which collects in an ecclesial form the prayer of the assembly. The «*Amen*» which

51 The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: «*Liturgical catechesis seeks to introduce (people) into the mystery of Christ (it is in fact "mystagogical") in so far as it proceeds from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to that which is signified, from "sacraments" to "mysteries"*» (n. 1075). Cf. C. GIRAUDO, *In unum corpus... cit.*; P. DE CLERCK, *La celebrazione eucaristica. Senso e dinamica*, in M. BRUARD (a cura di), *Eucharistia*, Bologna 2004, pp. 379-397

52 OGMR, 47.

53 Ibid 46: «*Their purpose is to ensure that the faithful who come together as one establish communion and dispose themselves to listen properly to God's word and to celebrate the Eucharist worthily*».

concludes the prayer proclaims our faith in the goodness of God who hears the prayer of his people.

In the introductory rites, the faithful constitute a «*sacred assembly*» and hear at this point the good news that having been «*reborn not from a perishable but from an imperishable seed through the word of the living God, not from the flesh but from water and the Holy Spirit (they) are finally established as 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people . . . who in times past were not a people, but are now the people of God' »*».⁵⁴

b. The Liturgy of the Word

The Eucharistic gathering moves on, then, to the table of the Word where the proclamation of the Scriptures becomes a grace-filled encounter with the risen Lord.⁵⁵ As we listen to the Word proclaimed in the liturgical assembly, the celebration taking place finds its own place in the logic of the history of salvation; we experience divine revelation in an ecclesial context, and we are taught by the Lord Jesus, the one true master.

The Liturgy of the word teaches us to form a synthesis of the Old and New Testaments, as required by the General Instruction to the Lectionary, in which the treasures of the bible are «*opened up more lavishly, so that richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's word. In this way a more representative portion of the holy scriptures will be read to the people in the course of a prescribed number of years*».⁵⁶ The great intuition of the Fathers which saw the New Testament as being prefigured in the Old Testament, and the Old Testament more completely unveiled in the New, is the basis for the way in which Scripture is used in the liturgy liturgical use of Scripture. In that sense, then, the proclamation of the Gospel becomes the focal point of the salvific dialogue which takes place between God and his people throughout history: «*Christ does not speak in the past, but in the present, even as he is present in the liturgical action. In this sacramental context of Christian revelation, knowledge and study of the word of God enable us better to appreciate, celebrate and live the Eucharist*».⁵⁷

54 Cf. LG, 9.

55 OGM, 55: «*God speaks to his people, opening up to them the mystery of redemption and salvation, and offering them spiritual nourishment; and Christ himself is present in the midst of the faithful through his word. By their silence and singing the people make God's word their own, and they also affirm their adherence to it by means of the Profession of Faith. Finally, having been nourished by it, they pour out their petitions in the Prayer of the Faithful for the needs of the entire Church and for the salvation of the whole world*».

56 SC, 51.

57 SCa, 45.

The exposition given in the homily helps to transform listening into reception of the Word contributing to a growth in our openness to the Gospel and helping us to take up the example of Christ who offered himself to the Father and for his brothers.⁵⁸ The homily is intended to assist the faithful in communicating with the mystery which they have come to celebrate.

The liturgy of the Word concludes with the Prayers of Intercession in which «*the people exercises their own baptismal priesthood*»,⁵⁹ praying for themselves and for the world.

c. *The Liturgy of the Eucharist*

The transition from the liturgy of the Word to the liturgy of the Eucharist supports the reciprocal integration of Word and Sacrament and allows the faithful to perceive that the Word prepares us for the Sacrament, while the Sacrament effectively completes the Word.

The ritual order of the Liturgy of the Eucharist (gifts - Eucharistic prayer - communion) is presented as a liturgico-ritual re-enactment of what was done by Christ at the last Supper.

The rite of the presentation of the gifts clearly proclaims the goodness of all created things because the «*fruit of the earth and work of human hands*» is destined to become the sacrament of the Body and Blood of the Lord. In other words, it is a source of blessing because the sight of the works of creation opens the heart to gratitude and, because in the offering of bread and wine, a heavenly and «super-substantial» («*ἐπίσσιος*», Mt 6: 11) food is prepared.

Coming to the Eucharistic Prayer, the heart of the entire liturgical rite, we will focus our attention on just two of its most significant aspects: the *anamnesis* and the *epiclesis*.

The *anamnesis* is the celebration-memorial of the works of God on behalf of his people. Thus the Eucharistic prayer opens with praise, thanksgiving, the glorification of God for the words and deeds with which he has transformed the history of the world into a space of salvation. The pinnacle of the great marvels worked for us is the memory of the Paschal mystery of his “beloved” Son, «*the sign of the eternal covenant*».⁶⁰

58 Cf. C. M. MARTINI, *Sia pace sulle tue mura*, Bologna 1984, pp. 128-129.

59 OGMR, 69.

60 *Eucharistic Prayer I of Reconciliation*.

The *epiclesis*, that is the invocation of the Holy Spirit by means of which the sacrament is actuated, begins first of all with a prayer of invocation: «*You are indeed Holy, O Lord, the fount of all holiness. Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray, by sending down your Spirit upon them* ».⁶¹ The bread and wine are transformed by the power of the Spirit into the body and blood of the Lord (the first *epiclesis*) so that: «*all who partake of this one Bread and one Chalice ... gathered into one body by the Holy Spirit... may truly become a living sacrifice in Christ to the praise of your glory* » (second *epiclesis*).⁶²

It is by means of the Spirit that the Church which celebrates the Eucharist gives to herself and to the world the sacramental body of the Lord Jesus so that through the communion in the one bread we might all become the ecclesial body of Christ, his holy people.

All the Eucharistic prayers, both past and present, direct the celebration to this ecclesial outcome: the fruit which is proper and specific to the holy Mass is the building up of the Christian community in its communion of life with Jesus Christ and in the sharing of a common end with the brothers and sisters in faith.

Through their participation in the Eucharistic prayer, the faithful praise, bless and glorify the Lord. In the act of thanksgiving which the whole Church, head and body raises up to the Father for his work of salvation but above all for having sent his Son, those present imitate Jesus who «*having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end* » (Jn 13:1). In one Eucharist after another they learn to say with him «*This is my Body which is given up for you*» and they become «*a living sacrifice in Christ to the praise of your glory*».⁶³ In this way, the Eucharistic prayer celebrates the living heart of the Gospel which is the paschal mystery.

d. The Communion Rites;

When the Eucharistic prayer is ended, the *Our Father*, the rite of peace and the breaking of the bread lead up to the communion which is the culmination of the mass: now Christ offers himself effectively to his brothers and sisters, draws them in to his paschal journey, nourishes them and introduces them into the life of the Trinity.

In the New-Testament catechesis, the Eucharist is bread for the journey, the nourishment necessary for every for every state of life. The Eucharistic action is

61 *Eucharistic Prayer II.*

62 *Eucharistic Prayer IV.*

63 *Eucharistic Prayer IV.*

oriented not only towards bringing about or causing the Eucharistic presence, but towards the creation of communion, to enter into the very life of the one who gives himself as food. The Eucharist, therefore, becomes for us, the act of communicating in the gift of the Lord, acting like Jesus Christ who «*though he was in the form of God, did not cling to his equality with God*» (Phil. 2: 5-6). The communal procession to the Sacrament to receive the same bread of life, the *Amen* which attests in a personal way to the identical faith of the Church, the hymn and the shared silence for thanksgiving, all become the source of love for the life of the believer: in communion with Jesus, the bread of life, our availability to build a human brotherhood is born.

e. The Concluding Rites

The Mass concludes by sending people forth to life and to mission. The prayer after communion prays that the fruits of the Eucharist which has been celebrated will visibly demonstrate the new face of the humanity of the disciples of the Lord.

The final blessing gathers synthetically the richness of the gifts of God experienced throughout the celebration and makes of it a *viaticum* (bread-for-the-journey) for the witness that we will bear in the world. The dismissal («*The Mass is ended. Go in peace*») is at one and the same time and invitation to care for the gift that has been received and a mandate to those who have participated in the Mass to go and spread in the real circumstances of this world the Spirit received during the celebration: «*Concéde nobis, omnipotens Deus, ut de percéptis sacraméntis inebriémur atque pascámur, quátenus in id quod súmimus transeámus* (*Grant us, almighty God, that we may be refreshed and nourished by the Sacrament which we have received, so as to be transformed into what we consume. Through Christ our Lord*)».⁶⁴

5.2. The Worship of the Eucharist Outside of the Mass

The worship of the Eucharist outside of the Mass is regulated by the Church in an *Instruction* entitled *De sacra comunione et de cultu mysterii eucaristici extra missam*.⁶⁵ While it translates liturgically the norms expressed by Pope Saint Paul VI in the *Instruction Eucharisticum mysterium*, the ritual offers criteria for and approach to Eucharistic worship which come out of the vision of the Second Vatican Council. The order of the

64 Final prayer of the 27th Sunday of the Ordinary Time in *Missale Romanum*.

65 SACRA CONGREGAZIO PRO CULTU DIVINO, *Rituale Romanum* (21 iunii 1973), *De Sacra Communione et de Cultu Mysterii Eucharistici extra Missam* [Rituale] in *Enchiridion Vaticanum* IV, pp. 1624-1659.

three great chapters which form the ritual is significant; communion outside of the Mass; communion and viaticum brought to the sick; the different forms of worship to be given to the Eucharist. It is in this final part that we find the explanation of the significance of adoration together with the answers to a number of practical questions. It is a fundamental matter which cannot be ignored.

If the fundamental reason for the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament, as attested by tradition, is the need to take holy communion to those who are absent and to the sick in the form of viaticum, it is stated with regard to the worship of the Eucharist that: *«the celebration of the Eucharist in the sacrifice of the mass is truly the origin and the end of the worship which is given to it outside of the Mass»*.⁶⁶ Since, therefore, the Eucharist is the *«centre of the whole Christian life»*, we must ensure that *«the worship of the blessed Sacrament appears clearly, through the signs, in its relationship with the Mass»*.⁶⁷

«The act of adoration outside Mass» - as Pope Benedict XVI recalled - *«prolongs and intensifies all that takes place during the liturgical celebration itself. Indeed, "only in adoration can a profound and genuine reception mature. And it is precisely this personal encounter with the Lord that then strengthens the social mission contained in the Eucharist, which seeks to break down not only the walls that separate the Lord and ourselves, but also and especially the walls that separate us from one another»*.⁶⁸

The essential and fundamental principle which connects the celebration and the Eucharist worship outside of the Mass allows us to allocate to the latter its spatial coordinates. Because of the indispensable relationship between the Eucharist and the celebration *«one must carefully avoid anything which could obscure the desire of Christ in instituting the Eucharist; for He instituted it above all with the purpose of nourishing, healing and sustaining us»*.⁶⁹ For that reason, it is specified that *«the pyx or monstrance is to be placed on the altar table»* making it clear in this way that the place of Eucharistic adoration is the altar of celebration.⁷⁰ For that reason, the worship of the Eucharist outside of the Mass should normally take place in a church or a chapel in which people come to the table of the Word and of the Bread of Life.

The link between the celebration and the worship of the Eucharist outside of the Mass allows us to emphasise not only the “real presence” of the Lord but to consider

66 Ivi, 2.

67 Ivi, 82.

68 SCa, 66

69 SACRA CONGREGATIO RITUUM, *Instructio* (1967) *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, 60

70 Ibid, 62;.

carefully the other dimensions of this mystery which are made obvious or considerably enriched by the theological research of the 20th century. Because «*in the Eucharist we do not pass from the non-presence to the presence of Christ, but from his multiform presence to the memorial of his gift of himself in sacrifice, entering into communion with him who gives himself making us participants in the new covenant in his blood*».⁷¹ It is necessary, therefore, that we allow ourselves to be formed by the objectivity of the Eucharistic mystery, the memorial of the Passover of the Lord, out of which the Church is born; if Word and Eucharist are the one bread which is eaten and assimilated, the two faces of the same mystery which mutually illuminate one another, it is indispensable that in the worship of the Eucharist, some passage of the Word of God would be proclaimed, selected perhaps from among the passages presented for the Mass of the day.

In conclusion, since it is a specific grace of the Eucharist and the building up of the ecclesial body, the worship of the Eucharist involves a communal dimension which takes precedence over a “journey” which would be simply individual or private.⁷²

The Eucharistic devotions which have been handed down to us have grown, for the most part, out of an individualist Eucharistic theology.⁷³ Now, «*Since the Eucharistic celebration is the centre and culmination of all the various manifestations and forms of devotion, ...all the Eucharistic devotions, also recommended and encouraged by the Encyclical Ecclesia de Eucharistia, and by the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Sacramentum Caritatis, should be harmonized in accordance with a Eucharistic ecclesiology oriented to communion.*».⁷⁴

In the context of the communitarian purpose of Eucharistic adoration, there is room also for the practice of individual adoration exercised by members of institutes of consecrated life, by individual members of the faithful, by so many young people who pass some of their time in prayer before the Sacrament of the altar. In silence the place themselves before the loving gaze of Christ and, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, recognise his presence in the breaking of bread. The welcome given to the Risen Lord spontaneously generates praise, thanksgiving, a desire for profound communion with

71 L. GIRARDI, «*Del vedere l'ostia*». *La visione come forma di partecipazione*, in *Rivista Liturgica* 87 (2000), p. 445.

72 Cfr D. MICHLER, *L'adorazione eucaristica. Riflessione teologica e progetto pastorale*, San Paolo, Cinesello Balsamo 2003, pp. 58.

73 W. KASPER, *Ecclésiologie eucharistique: de Vatican II à l'exhortation Sacramentum Caritatis*, in *L'Eucharistie don de Dieu pour la vie du monde. Actes du Symposium international de théologie. Congrès eucharistique, Québec, Canada, 11-13 juin 2008*; CECC Ottawa, 2009, p. 211.

74 BENEDETTO XVI, *Address at the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses*, in *AAS* 102 (2010), pp. 900-902.

the Lord, prayer for the Church and for the world.⁷⁵ Thus, by means of the prayerful rest before the Eucharist sacrament, there grows a generous commitment of Christian life in living out and bearing witness to the Gospel in the complexity of the world of today.

75 J. M. CANALS, *Prier devant l'Eucharistie*, in M. BROUARD (dir.), *Eucharistia. Encyclopédie de l'Eucharistie*; Paris 2002, pp. 639 - 646.

6. THE EUCHARIST, SOURCE FROM WHICH CREATION IS TRANSFORMED

6.1. The Cosmic Significance of the Eucharist

The mystery of the Eucharist is the synthesis and the centre of every mystery of faith. In it the paschal sacrifice of Christ, of his sacred passion, of his saving death and of his glorious resurrection are concentrated. In it is concentrated. In it, the event of restoration which began with the incarnation of Christ is extended to the whole cosmos: « *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth* » (Eph 1: 7-10).

The Eucharist has a cosmic dimension which embraces everything. Its universal effect extends beyond the Church, humanity, the living and the dead and concerns the whole of creation. It has this cosmic universality because it contains Christ, who died and is risen for us, who is the beginning and the end of the whole of creation (cf. Col 1: 15–17).

By his Resurrection, Christ has overcome the power of sin and death, has made to made resplendent the ultimate meaning of human life and of creation and has prefigured their completion. His Resurrection is the sure foundation of «*the new heaven and the new earth*» for which we hope (2Pet 3: 13), the beginning of the new creation of the universe (cf. Rev 21: 5). It is the beginning of that total transformation, in which man becomes a resurgent participant together with Christ, and to which the whole of creation is mystically called.

6.2. The Mass on the Altar of the World

Christ, the redeemer of all created things, comes to us in the holy Mass and is present to us in the Eucharist. «*Through him, with him and in him*» to the Father belongs «*all honour and glory, in unity with the Holy Spirit*», including the honour and glory coming from humanity, from the angels and from the whole universe. Thus, the priest prays in the Eucharistic prayer: «*all you have created rightly gives you praise*»;⁷⁶ and in

76 Eucharistic Prayer III.

introducing the recitation of the *Sanctus*, the hymn of praise to God from the whole Cosmos, he proclaims: «*And so with all the choirs of angels in heaven we proclaim Your glory and join in their unending hymn of praise*». Then, at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, he says: «*To all of us, your children, grant, O merciful Father, that we may enter into a heavenly inheritanceThere, with the whole of creation, freed from the corruption of sin and death, may we glorify you through Christ our Lord,*».⁷⁷

The cosmic dimension of the celebration of the Eucharist nourishes the hope of the whole of creation: «*even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world. It unites heaven and earth. It embraces and permeates all creation. The Son of God became man in order to restore all creation, in one supreme act of praise, to the One who made it from nothing. He, the Eternal High Priest who by the blood of his Cross entered the eternal sanctuary, thus gives back to the Creator and Father all creation redeemed. He does so through the priestly ministry of the Church, to the glory of the Most Holy Trinity. Truly this is the *mysterium fidei* which is accomplished in the Eucharist: the world which came forth from the hands of God the Creator now returns to him redeemed by Christ*».⁷⁸

The relationship between creation, renewed by the Paschal Mystery of Christ, and the Eucharist is well expressed in the fact that the first Christians gathered on the first day of the week to celebrate the Eucharist. On the first day of the week, the tomb of Christ was found empty and the Risen Lord appeared to his disciples. The Eucharist on «*the Lord's day*» celebrates the risen Christ. The same first day of the week, beginning with the Old Testament – recalls also the first of the seven days of Creation. This, from the beginning, Christians celebrated in the Eucharist the mystery of Christ who died and is risen, source of the new creation, while waiting for his glorious return: «*Sunday is the day of the Resurrection, the "first day" of the new creation, whose first fruits are the Lord's risen humanity, the pledge of the final transfiguration of all created reality*».⁷⁹

77 *Eucharistic Prayer IV.*

78 *EE*, 8. The author who most decisively explored this idea was the Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. We recall his book: *The Mass on the World* (1923), written in the desert of Ordos in China on the Feast of the Transfiguration when, finding himself without bread and without wine, he presented the history of the Universe to God as a great offering that, through Christ and in the Holy Spirit, returns everything to the father: «*Since I am once again without bread, without wine and without an altar, I will raise myself above the symbols to the pure majesty of the real, and I will offer to you, I your priest, on the altar of the whole earth, the work and the struggle of the world* » (opera cit., 9-23)].

79 POPE FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter (2015) *Laudato si'* [LS], 237.

For that reason, every Sunday, the Christian community celebrates the Eucharist announcing the saving death of Jesus, proclaiming his resurrection while awaiting his coming as Lord of all creation.

6.3. The Eucharist and the Transformation of Creation

The Eucharist is not only the centre of the cosmic liturgy, but it is also the place in which created things are lifted up and transformed. The bread and the wine – as created gifts – are elevated to a superior level of being, when they become the Sacrament of the presence of the risen Christ. A «*marvelous exchange*» is brought about: we place on the altar the fruit of the earth and work of human hands, and Christ makes himself present in the bread and wine . « *It is in the Eucharist that all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation.... The Lord, in the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation, chose to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter. He comes not from above, but from within, he comes that we might find him in this world of ours..... Joined to the incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God. Indeed the Eucharist is itself an act of cosmic love.... The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation. The world which came forth from God's hands returns to him in blessed and undivided adoration*». ⁸⁰

The Eucharistic “conversion” is the beginning of that definitive transformation which is the destiny of the whole of creation: « *The substantial conversion of bread and wine into his body and blood introduces within creation the principle of a radical change, a sort of “nuclear fission,” to use an image familiar to us today, which penetrates to the heart of all being, a change meant to set off a process which transforms reality, a process leading ultimately to the transfiguration of the entire world, to the point where God will be all in all (cf. 1 Cor 15:28)”*».⁸¹

In essence, in every Mass, through the working of the Holy Spirit, the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ and those who communicate in the Sacrament are transformed in Christ. These changes anticipate the great transformation which will be brought about in the resurrection of the body and the new creation.

80 *Ibid.*, 236.

81 *SCa*, 11.

The Eucharist, the focus point of the praise of God on the part of all creation, nourishes our hope in the resurrection and in the transformation of the whole cosmos, and is the source of our commitment to protect creation.

7. THE EUCHARIST, SOURCE OF HOLINESS

In the Church, the body of Christ *«each member has a different function»*, because *«We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us»* (cfr. Rm 12: 4, 6). In that way every member of the Church realizes his or her proper Christian vocation according to a personal way of life. The Second Vatican Council teaches that: *«The classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one — that sanctity which is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God»* and that among the the ways and means of holiness by means of which a perfection is reached which corresponds with one's proper state of life, the use of the Sacraments - *«and in a special way the Eucharist»* - cannot be overlooked.⁸²

7.1. The Example of the Hungarian Martyrs of the 20th Century

In the Eucharistic Prayer we turn to the *«Father»* who is *«Holy indeed, the source of all holiness»*⁸³. We say *«through your Son our Lord Jesus Christ, by the power and working of the Holy Spirit, you give life to all things and makes them Holy»*.⁸⁴ It is precisely through the Eucharist that every baptised person becomes capable of behaving in a manner worthy of the call that he or she has received (Cf. Eph 4:1).

Many Hungarian martyrs and saints of the 20th century, in the strength of the Eucharist and and imitating the self-gift of Christ, became *«a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God»* (cf. Rom 12: 1). We remember here the example of some of those who illuminated the history of the Hungarian Church in the last century.⁸⁵

Blessed János Brenner (1931–1957)⁸⁶ is one of the priests with whose fate the party-state sought to intimidate the Church. Fr. Janos was called to the bedside of a sick person during the night of the 14th December 1957. On the street, the agents of the secret police killed him in a brutal manner. In Hungary, we venerate him as the Saint Tarcisius of Hungary, a martyr for the Eucharist. Pointing for us to Christ living in the Eucharist, he became at the same time an example for religious - he was in fact a “secret” member of the Cistercian order , which had been abolished by the Communist dictatorship – and for diocesan priests.

82 LG, 41 e 42.

83 Eucharistic Prayer II.

84 Eucharistic Prayer III.

85 For example: the Blesseds Szilárd Bogdánffy, János Scheffler, Zoltán Meszlényi, Péter Pál Gajdics, István Sándor, the seven Franciscan martyrs.

86 CSÁSZÁR, ISTVÁN – SOÓS, VIKTOR ATTILA, *Magyar Tarcízusz. Brenner János élete és vértanúsága 1931–1957* [The Hungarian Tarcisius. *The life and martyrdom of János Brenner, 1931-1957*], Szombathely 2003, pp. 49-51.

Likewise, the Bishop of Győr, *Blessed Vilmos Apor* (1892–1945), came to martyrdom because of his strong Eucharistic spirituality. He often said to the faithful: «*It is pointless to come regularly to Holy Mass if we do not have in us the active love that flows from faith*». During the German occupation he defended those who were persecuted, irrespective of their race or religious affiliation. In 1945, on Holy Thursday, he celebrated the Eucharist with the faithful and with his priests. The following day, Good Friday, he was shot by a Soviet soldier, when he sought to defend some women who had sought refuge in the cellar of the episcopal residence.

Blessed Sára Salkaházi (1899–1944), a religious sister and saviour of the Jews, obtained the grace of martyrdom from her Eucharistic spirituality. «*All strength comes from the Eucharist*», she wrote in her diary.⁸⁷ As a member of the society of apostolic life, the Sisters of Social Service, she struggled against the inhuman consequences of the diffusion of National Socialism. Among approximately one thousand people to whom her community offered asylum, about one hundred were saved personally by Sr. Sara. She prayed consistently, even during daily Mass for the strength she needed for her struggle. Arrested by members of the Hungarian fascist party on 27th December 1944, she was shot and thrown into the Danube.

The Servant of God *József Mindszenty* (1892–1975), Cardinal Archbishop of Esztergom, was condemned by the communist state in a sham trial for the courageous stance that he took against the atheist power and for the firm defence of the rights of the Church and of human rights. He described very movingly how, during his eight years of imprisonment, the source of his fidelity and of his Christian forgiveness, the spirituality of reconciliation and his comfort in captivity was the daily Mass and the real presence of Christ in the prison: «*I guarded the Eucharist with care. I knew that, when they allowed us out to walk, they were rummaging and searching in my cell, and so I brought it with me even when I went for walks, even to Vác. I even received communion there. I frequently did Adoration in such a way that, during the night it was beside me in the dark. I touched it through the veil. How much it means to someone who is imprisoned to have Jesus in the Sacrament in his cell!*».⁸⁸

The Greek-Catholic Bishop Transcarpatia, *Blessed Teodor Romzsa* (1911–1947)⁸⁹ was killed by the secret police on the orders of Stalin. He was known for his deep love of

87 D. ISTVÁN (editor), *Boldog Salkaházi Sára. Emlékkönyv* [*Blessed Sára Salkaházi. Memorial Book*], Budapest 2006.

88 J. MINDSZENTY, *Emlékirataim* [Memories], Budapest 2015, 395–396.

89 L. PUSKÁS, *Megalkuvás nélkül – Boldog Romzsa Tódor élete és vértanúhalála* [*Without compromise. The life and*

the Eucharist. His last act, as a prelate, was the dedication of a Church. As he was returning home, he was knocked down by a truck and assassinated in hospital with an injection of poison.

The secretly ordained Greek Catholic bishop *Péter Orosz* (1917–1953),⁹⁰ was admired while he was still a seminarian for his love which led him to give everything. He lived his life as a Bishop in the same way. The soldier who arrested him while he was bringing communion to a sick person, shot him as he knelt before a roadside crucifix.

7.2. A Universal Call to Holiness

In every period of the Church's history, in every part of the world, Saints are found in every age-group and in every state of life; they are the concrete face of every people, language and nation. They are the ones who have loved and followed Christ in their daily lives and who show us that it is possible for everyone to follow the same road.

Their lives, matured in the faith of the Church, show the true face of Christianity. We rejoice in their presence and in their company and we cultivate the firm hope of being able to follow the path they walked and to enjoy one day the life of the Blessed.

We are all called to the fullness of life. St. Paul expresses this very powerfully, when he writes: « *But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.... The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.* » (Eph 4: 7, 11-13).

The Second vatican Council echoes those words of the Apostle, saying that: « *The classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one — that sanctity which is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God and ... these people follow the poor Christ, the humble and cross-bearing Christ in order to be worthy of being sharers in His glory.* » and « *It is the love of God and the love of one's neighbor which points out the true disciple of Christ*». ⁹¹ This is true

martyrdom of Blessed Tódor Romzsa], Budapest 2005.

90 L. PUSKÁS, *Ilyeneké Isten országa. Isten Szolgája Orosz Péter (1917–1953) titokban felszentelt püspök élete és vértanúsága* [To these belongs the Kingdom of Heaven. The life and martyrdom of the secretly ordained Bishop Péter Orosz (1917-1953)], Nyíregyháza 2010.

91 LG, 41-42.

simplicity, greatness and depth of Christian life. In this way, every Baptised person becomes a tile in that great mosaic of holiness which God is creating throughout history, so that the face of Christ shines forth in all its brightness.

Charity, like a good seed, grows and bears fruit as a result of listening to the Word of God and participation in the Eucharist. The Eucharistic celebration is the culminating moment in which Jesus, through his body given for us and his blood poured out, reveals the mystery of his identity and indicates the vocational direction of each believer. Whoever is nourished with this “bread of life” receives the energy to transform himself or herself in turn into a gift. As St. Augustine says: *«Be what you see; receive what you are»*.⁹² This kind of renewing action is also emphasised by Pope Francis: *« When we receive him (Christ) in Holy Communion, we renew our covenant with him and allow him to carry out ever more fully his work of transforming our lives »*.⁹³

So, it is essential never to leave a Sunday with an encounter with the Risen Christ in the Eucharist; this is not a burden imposed, but a light for the whole week and a source of the life of holiness. In the Sunday encounter with the Risen Lord, the Christian existence takes of a Eucharistic form which is capable of shaping the whole of one's life.⁹⁴

7.3. In Everyday Life

Priests are particularly aware of this. *« Priestly spirituality is intrinsically Eucharistic. The seeds of this spirituality are already found in the words spoken by the Bishop during the ordination liturgy: "Receive the oblation of the holy people to be offered to God. Understand what you do, imitate what you celebrate, and conform your life to the mystery of the Lord's Cross.»*.⁹⁵

Thus, by means of the daily exercise of their office, *«they should grow daily in their love of God, they should preserve the bond of priestly communion, and they should abound in every spiritual good and thus present to all men a living witness to God. All this they should do in emulation of those priests who often, down through the course of the centuries, left an*

92 Sermo 272 1, *In die Pentecostes*; in NBA XXXII/2, p. 1162.

93 POPE FRANCIS, Apostolic exhortation (2018) *Gaudete et exultate* [GE], 157.

94 SCa, 76-77.

95 SCa, 80.

*outstanding example of the holiness of humble and hidden service. Their praise lives on in the Church of God».*⁹⁶

To them has been entrusted the “mystery of faith” so that together with their communities they might offer “spiritual sacrifices” to God. (1 Pet. 2:5). The worship of the Eucharist, whether in the celebration of the Mass or in our devotion towards the Blessed Sacrament, becomes in this way « *a life-giving current that links our ministerial or hierarchical priesthood to the common priesthood of the faithful, and presents it in its vertical dimension and with its central value*». ⁹⁷

A life consecrated to God through the evangelical councils signifies and brings about in the Church the total gift of self to the Lord. The religious renew this response during every Mass and in every communion. It is natural that the celebration of the Eucharist, communion and Eucharistic adoration, should be at the centre of the consecrated life like a spring out of which the gift of self must be renewed on a daily basis.⁹⁸

A particular word of encouragement is directed towards families, that they might draw inspiration and energy from the Sacrament of the Eucharist. « *The love between man and woman, openness to life, and the raising of children are privileged spheres in which the Eucharist can reveal its power to transform life and give it its full meaning*». ⁹⁹ In this Sacrifice of the New and Eternal Covenant, «*Christian spouses encounter the source from which their own marriage covenant flows, is interiorly structured and continuously renewed. As a representation of Christ’s sacrifice of love for the Church, the Eucharist is a fountain of charity*». ¹⁰⁰

The world is the field in which God sows his sons and daughters like good seed. It is there, in their daily lives, that all baptised lay people, strengthened by the Eucharist, are called to live the radical newness brought by Christ, in the shared circumstances of life. The Eucharist must be engraved more and more deeply in their daily existence, so that they bear witness in a recognisable way in their own work environment and in the whole of society.

And this is the witness that was offered by *Blessed László Batthyány-Strattmann* (1870–1931), a Hungarian doctor and father of eleven children who, in his work as an

⁹⁶ LG, 41.

⁹⁷ JOHN PAUL II, Letter (1980) *Dominicae cenae* [DC], 2.

⁹⁸ JOHN PAUL II., Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation (1996) *Vita Consecrata* [VC], 95.

⁹⁹ SCa, 79.

¹⁰⁰ JOHN PAUL II., Apostolic Exhortation (1981) *Familiaris Consortio* [FC], 57.

ophthalmologist, assisted the poor in a most remarkable way, committing his energies not only to healing them but also to nourishing their faith. This Doctor who received Holy Communion daily, lived a Eucharistic life through the committed exercise of his vocation and in the service of the poor.

Then, there is a new generation of Christians called to contribute to the building up and renewal of the human reality: that is the young people. After so much violence and oppression, the world needs them to be "bridge builders" , to unify and to reconcile. In the aftermath of the culture of "people-without-vocation" there is an urgent need of men and women who believe in life and who welcome it as a call that comes from God; beyond the kind of relationships mediated by social media, *«only courageous young people, with minds and hearts open to high and generous ideals, can restore beauty and truth to life and to human relationships»*.¹⁰¹

The way to become prophets in this new era and messengers of love is sustained by the Word of God and by active participation in the Eucharist, the heart of the existence and the mission of every believer and of every Christian community. Participating in the body and blood of Christ and living our ecclesial communion with joy, young people will find the strength to live this particular historical moment, as indeed is demonstrated by the World Youth Days, which place the Eucharist at their very centre.

Jesus loved children and gladly welcomed them (cf. Mk 10:13). As they complete their journey of Christian initiation with catechesis in the family and in the parish, children – in the Mass of First Communion - become active members of the Christian community.

Saint John Paul II reminds us of how the holy Eucharist nourishes the love of children for Jesus: *«Jesus wanted to stay with us forever. Jesus wanted to unite himself with us in Holy Communion, to show us his love in a direct and personal way. Every one can say: 'Jesus loves me! I love Jesus' ...Jesus is the friend that we can no longer do without, when we meet him and we realise that he loves us and desires our lovetry to remain worthy of Jesus whom you receive. Be innocent and generous. Commit yourselves to making life beautiful for everybody else, through obedience, gentleness, good behaviour. The secret of joy is goodness!* ».¹⁰²

101 BENEDICT XVI, *Homily at the Holy Mass at the Conclusion of the XXIII World Youth Day* (Sydney, 20 July 2008), in AAS 100 (2008), p. 548.

102 JOHN PAUL II, *Homily at the Childrens' First Communion*, in *Osservatore Romano*, 16 June 1979.

During the parish Sunday Mass, boys and girls serve at the altar; they sing in the choir and they commit themselves to making the celebration a joyful one. Together with their families, they discover, in the encounter with Jesus, the source of their love and their strength to grow gradually in faith and to be «fully inserted in the body of Christ».¹⁰³

The poor, the frail, the sick and those who are persecuted for the sake of Justice are united in a special way to Christ.: the Lord, in the Gospel proclaimed them blessed, and «*the God of all grace, who has called (them) to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish (them)*» (1 Pet 5:10).¹⁰⁴

To those who are about to depart this life, the Church offers the anointing of the sick and the Eucharist as Viaticum because, in the Body and Blood of Christ, there is a seed of eternal life and the power of resurrection: «*Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day*» (Jn. 6:54). In this way, the Eucharist shows itself to be the «*medicine of immortality*», to live forever in Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁵

In an ancient prayer, the Church acclaims this Sacrament as an anticipation of the glory of heaven: «*O sacred banquet in which Christ is received, the memory of His Passion is renewed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory given to us*». After Christ in his paschal mystery had passed from this world to the Father, the pledge of future glory in him is conserved in the Eucharist: «*Participation in the Holy Sacrifice identifies us with his Heart, sustains our strength along the pilgrimage of this life, makes us long for eternal life, and unites us even now to the Church in heaven, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and all the saints*».¹⁰⁶

103 SACRA CONGREGATIO RITUUM, Instruction (1967) *Eucharisticum Mysterium* [EM], 14.

104 LG, 41.

105 Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], 1524.

106 *Ibid*, 1419.

8. THE EUCHARIST, SOURCE OF MISSION AND OF FRATERNAL SERVICE

8.1. The Sacrament Of Mission Accomplished

«To evangelise [...] is the grace and the vocation proper to the Church, and its most profound identity.» – said Pope Saint John Paul II in 2003.¹⁰⁷ The Eucharist is the source of Evangelisation and, at the same time, the final destination to be reached; the «*the sacrament of the mission accomplished*” where the common desire of humanity is fed: communion with God, when and where He will be all in all, and universal brotherhood.»¹⁰⁸ Since all have the right to hear the Gospel, Christians proclaim it without excluding anyone, as people who are sharing their joy, pointing towards a beautiful horizon and offering a «desirable banquet».¹⁰⁹

«After the blessing, the deacon or the priest sends the people away with the words: “Go the Mass is ended” In this greeting, we are given to understand the relationship between the Mass and the Christian mission in the world».¹¹⁰

So then, the Eucharist is the source from which flows the evangelising power of the Church because it «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 ».¹¹¹

Whoever has drunk from the source of living water (cf. Jn 4:14) must give something to drink to others. «The Samaritan Woman, as soon as her conversation with Jesus was ended, became a missionary and many Samaritans believed in Jesus because of the

107 JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (2003) *Ecclesia in Europa* [EEu], 45.

108 PONTIFICAL COMMITTEE FOR THE INTERNATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESSES, *Christ in You the Hope of Glory. The Eucharist, Source and Summit of the Mission of the Church*, Ponteranica 2015, p. 85.

109 POPE FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation (2013) *Evangelii Gaudium* [EG], 14.

110 SCa, 51.

111 JOHN PAUL II., Apostolic Letter (2004) *Mane nobiscum Domine* [MND], 25. An echo of this affirmation is found in SCa 84: «We cannot approach the Eucharistic table without being drawn into the mission which, beginning in the very heart of God, is meant to reach all people. Missionary outreach is thus an essential part of the Eucharistic form of the Christian life».

words of that woman. Jn. 4:39) ... „So what are we waiting for?». ¹¹² It is time to move from the liturgical project to its actuation in the lived reality of our communities.

8.2. From Emmaus to Jerusalem

The Evangelical Icon of the disciples of Emmaus (Lk 24:13–35), well represents the missionary physiognomy of the Church and of every baptised person because the encounter with the Risen Lord, which occurs through listening to the Word and in the breaking of bread, drives the two pilgrim disciples to become enthusiastic heralds of the Lord.

The story of Emmaus begins on the path walked by the two profoundly disillusioned disciples, who had lived through the paschal event, not as a saving event but as the failure of the mission of Jesus and of their own hopes. An unnamed pilgrim draws close to them.

The *point of departure* of evangelisation is the love of God which goes ahead of us: God loves you! He draws close to you without imposing conditions. «*Behold. Jesus himself drew near to them*» (Lk 24: 15). The *first step* of evangelisation consists in making ourselves fellow travellers to our brothers and sisters, bearing witness to them concerning the love of God which goes ahead of us. We experience this at the beginning of the Mass when God comes to meet us and when, as we make the sign of the cross, we place ourselves in the love of the God, who is three in one.

But the disciples of Emmaus did not recognise Jesus until he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures (Lk 24:17). We likewise, as we celebrate the Eucharist in the rhythm of each week, come to realise above all that evangelisation is not so much a matter of explaining a doctrine as of interpreting everything, life and liturgy, in the light of the saving events of the Paschal Mystery of the Lord. This is the task involved in proclaiming the Scriptures. As we listen to the Old Testament and the New Testament “our hearts burn within us” while Christ himself reveals not only the plot of the mystery, but also the meaning of all of our lived experience. «*Word and Eucharist are so deeply bound together that we cannot understand one without the other: the word of God sacramentally takes flesh in the event of the Eucharist. The Eucharist opens us to an understanding of Scripture, just as Scripture for its part illumines and explains the mystery of*

¹¹² Ivi, 120.

the Eucharist.»¹¹³ For this reason, the Church, when the Eucharist is celebrated, has never ceased to proclaim «*the things about himself in all the scriptures*» (Lc 24, 27).

On arriving at Emmaus, in response to the request of the two disciples, the Risen Lord goes into the house with them, sits at table and, taking bread, blessed it, breaks it and gives it to them. They are the same gestures which are proposed to us again in the Eucharistic liturgy. It is only then that they recognise Him. Astounded and full of joy, once they have recognised the Lord in the breaking of bread, the disciples of Emmaus «*returned to Jerusalem*» (Lk 24;33), to the community of the Twelve, to tell the news that they had seen the Lord.

All of this continues to happen when, on the *Lord's Day* (Rev. 1:10) men and women of *every race, language, people and nation* (Rev. 7:9) set out on the way to a series of Cathedrals, Basilicas, and Parish Churches ... It is an immense river which gathers up Christians coming from everywhere: from the Scandinavian countries and from those of the Mediterranean, from the Americas and from Asia, from Africa and Australia. Christians coming on foot, on bicycles, in the metro and by bus or in cars; hundreds of thousands of the baptised coming forward, uniting in an assembly around the altar of the Lord, to become together the Body of Christ in the heart of the modern city. For twenty centuries the People of God has undertaken this Eucharistic movement which will find its ultimate goal when human beings break bread once again in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Then, the Mass having been celebrated, once again, but this time in the opposite direction, the same procession of the faithful sets out joyfully on the journey. And dissolving little by little, they disperse like seeds in the furrows of the earth, returning to their normal activities. Enlightened by the Word of Life, nourished by the Eucharist, they trace new paths in the heart of the earthly city, which form the hidden out-playing of human life. Like streams of living water flowing out from the right side of the temple (Cf. Ez 47: 2) they irrigate the squares, the streets, the avenues, the districts, right down to the last dwelling of the most remote suburb.

It is in this way that the celebration of the Eucharist becomes an engine for change in the heart of society and creates a culture of fraternity: «*The Eucharistic encounter....reawakens in the disciple the decisive desire to announce boldly to others, what has*

113 BENEDICT XVI, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum Domini* n. 55.

*been heard and seen, in order to lead them also into the same encounter with Christ. In this way, the disciple, sent by the Church, opens himself or herself to a mission without borders.»*¹¹⁴

8.3. The Eucharist and fraternal service; *Diaconia* in the Church

Since the holy Mass is the source and the motor of the life of the Church, especially in the field of the *diaconia*, which is one of her principal activities, the celebration of the Eucharist does not end with the blessing and the final dismissal. According to the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy « *The liturgy in its turn moves the faithful, filled with "the paschal sacraments," to be "one in holiness"; it prays that "they may hold fast in their lives to what they have grasped by their faith"; the renewal in the Eucharist of the covenant between the Lord and man draws the faithful into the compelling love of Christ and sets them on fire.* »¹¹⁵

The entire mystery of the charity of God, revealed and activated in the Paschal Mystery of his Only Son and in the gift of the Spirit, is enclosed in the mystery of the Eucharist. It ensures that the charity is the attitude of all who have entered into communion with the Lord. Before being a work or an initiative, charity is a complex of attitudes which exemplify the gift of Christ.

In the paschal memorial the Church is born as a community of service. The Eucharist, year after year, makes the invitation resound in the community to do as Jesus did, that is to offer oneself for the salvation of all. The Eucharistic community, entering into communion with destiny of the Servant, becomes itself a Servant: «eating the bread that has been given» it becomes «*an ecclesial body which is given; a body for others; a body offered for the multitude*». And the faithful, as they proclaim «*the death of the Lord and profess his Resurrection until he comes again*», make of their own existence a total gift.

Likewise, in the working out of the New Evangelisation, the fundamental law is that of the Cross of Christ, which fell to the earth like a grain of wheat in order the bear much fruit (Jn. 12: 24). History continues to show us that one cannot give life without offering oneself. The evangelising energy which is born out of the Eucharist drives the faithful in this way to make present in their own historical context the action of Him who « *Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.... And during*

¹¹⁴ XI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Final List of Propositions* (22 October 2005) n. 42; in *Echiridion Vaticanum* V. 23, p. 767.

¹¹⁵ SC, 10.

supper he...began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ... "if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet"» (Jn. 13, 1-5, 14).

Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, we are reminded that the Sacrifice of Christ is for all and that the Eucharist: «compels all who believe in him to become "bread that is broken" for others, and to work for the building of a more just and fraternal world.... Each of us is truly called, together with Jesus, to be bread broken for the life of the world.».¹¹⁶

In the service of charity towards the poor, the lowly, the marginalised, we celebrate our true Easter, our passage from death into life. As we leave the Church after the final dismissal of the Mass: «Let us walk with no illusions, with no utopian ideologies, on the highways of the world bearing within us the Body of the Lord, like the Virgin Mary in the mystery of the Visitation. With the humility of knowing that we are merely grains of wheat, let us preserve the firm certainty that the love of God, incarnate in Christ, is stronger than evil, violence and death».¹¹⁷ In truth, one cannot participate with love in history without the Eucharist, nor can one celebrate the Eucharist without then serving the world with the Gospel of charity.

8.4. The Eucharist and the Unity of the Baptised: the communion of the Church

«*Ubi eucharistia, ibi ecclesia, wherever the Eucharist is celebrated, there is the Church*». This is the principle of Eucharistic ecclesiology which we find, not only among the orthodox theologians but, in a diverse manner, also in individual passages from the Second Vatican Council and among Catholic theologians.

The Eucharist in so far as it is actuation of the messianic banquet is offered to us as a communion in the one table and a universal convocation not only of believers, but of all of humanity.¹¹⁸ In fact, the Eucharist is not simply a sign of personal faith; it is not celebrated to reinforce partiality or barriers but to demolish fences and open up the universality of the call to salvation. Unfortunately, in the present situation, it is not possible for all the baptised irrespective of Christian denomination to gather around the one table of the Risen Lord. This is because of the historical divisions of the

116 SCA, 88.

117 BENEDICT XVI, *Homily on the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord* 2011 in AAS 103(2011) p. 464.

118 Already the *Didaché* (9,4) recalls this theme when it explains the symbolism of the bread and wine and the banquet of salvation: «*Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let your church be gathered together into your kingdom from the ends of the earth*».

Churches, a sin which openly contradicts the meaning of the cross and of the Eucharistic mystery.

The documents concerning the Eucharist which have followed one after the other in recent decades, have smoothed out the oppositions, which were once so strong, between Christians of various confessions. Positive signs of rapprochement have appeared where once there were only divisions and disparities. We note them here in the hope that, thanks to the International Eucharistic Congress, they can be given greater theological recognition and find a place in the common consciousness of the faithful.

Of particular significance was the convergence document on «*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*» [BEM], published by the *Faith and Constitution Commission of the World Council of Churches* in 1982. The result of 50 years of study, the document is recognised as one of the most influential results of multilateral dialogue. It represents the highest level of ecumenical convergence and, in some respects, of agreement, on three fundamental themes which have divided and continue to divide Christians since the sixteenth century. Concerning the Eucharist, the official response of the Catholic church recognises that : «*the structure and the treatment sequence of the basic aspects of the document ... are in conformity with Catholic teaching*». ¹¹⁹

The position of the separated brothers and sisters regarding the divisive theme of the Eucharistic “sacrifice” have seen a rapprochement with the help of the biblical concept of “memorial”: «*The Eucharist is the memorial of the crucified and risen Christ, i.e. the living and effective sign of his sacrifice, accomplished once and for all on the cross and still operative on behalf of all humankind. The biblical idea of memorial as applied to the Eucharist refers to this present efficacy of God’s work when it is celebrated by God’s people in a liturgy. Christ himself with all that he has accomplished for us is present in this anamnesis, granting us communion with himself*». ¹²⁰

As far as the “real presence” is concerned, then, the BEM recognises that: «*The words and acts of Christ at the institution of the Eucharist stand at the heart of the celebration; the Eucharistic meal is the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, the sacrament of his real presence. Christ fulfills in a variety of ways his promise to be always with his own even to the*

119 MAX THURIAN (ed.), *Churches Respond to BEM*, 6 vol., Geneva 1986-1988. The sixth volume contains the “Official Response” of the Catholic Church.

120 COMMISSIONE FEDE E COSTITUZIONE, *Battesimo, eucaristia, ministero. Documento di Lima, 1982*, in *Enchiridion Oecumenicum*, vol. I, Bologna 1986, p. 1411.

*end of the world. But Christ's mode of presence in the Eucharist is unique... The Church confesses Christ's real, living and active presence in the Eucharist».*¹²¹

The question of intercommunion remains particularly significant, given the tension that exists between Eucharist as the *sign* and Eucharist as the *cause* of unity.¹²² If we focus on the Eucharist as *sign*, Eucharistic hospitality seems difficult because the Eucharist must express and celebrate the unity which has already been achieved and actuated. According to Catholic and Orthodox teaching, the Eucharist is not only an instrument of our individual unity with Christ but also the sacrament of full adherence to the Church, to her faith, to her sacramental structure, to her moral teaching. If we focus, however, on the Eucharist as *cause*, then intercommunion is possible in certain cases.

Meanwhile the movement towards unity is growing and developing and is reinforcing the «*ecumenism of life*» which, placed under the sign of the cross, commits everyone to live the compassion and the mercy of God. It is translated fundamentally into the testimony of faith which is lived on a daily basis, mediated by the Sacred Scriptures, by the work in common with the Baptised members of other Churches, and with collaboration in catechetical and formation initiatives in the local communities of the various denominations.

In the field of worship, ecumenical celebrations of the Word of God can be used, as well as the Liturgy of the Hours, ecumenical pilgrimages and more. In the field of *diaconia* Christians are already engaged in many common initiatives because reduced financial resources demand that we should combine our forces: social centres, support for the elderly, visits to families in difficulty, hospital chaplaincy, media ... These are just some of the contexts in which the Gospel of communion joined with liturgical celebration finds a way to be active and pervasive.

In conclusion, we must not forget «*spiritual ecumenism*», which is the soul of the journey towards unity. In the widest variety of situations there are men and women inspired by the Holy Spirit who bring to life «*the Good News*» causing the energy of the

¹²¹ Ivi, p. 1413

¹²² Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism (1964) *Unitatis Redintegratio* [UR], 8: « Yet worship in common (*communicatio in sacris*) is not to be considered as a means to be used indiscriminately for the restoration of Christian unity. There are two main principles governing the practice of such common worship: first, the bearing witness to the unity of the Church, and second, the sharing in the means of grace. Witness to the unity of the Church very generally forbids common worship to Christians, but the grace to be had from it sometimes commends this practice. The course to be adopted, with due regard to all the circumstances of time, place, and persons, is to be decided by local episcopal authority, unless otherwise provided for by the Bishops' Conference according to its statutes, or by the Holy See. ».

Gospel to be heard where the Church is tired; who practice in a communal way forms of evangelical ecumenical life, creating in this way a spiritual movement in which prayer is offered incessantly for the coming about of unity.¹²³

8.5. The Eucharist for Reconciliation

The psalmist signs: «*In you are found all my springs*» (Sal 87,7). Those who drink from the springs of the Eucharist, residents in Palestine, Tyre and Ethiopia (cf. Ps 87: 4) and children of whatever people, will become members of the same Body of Christ, citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, of the city of God (cf. Phil. 3,20).

In the Eucharist is made present the Trinitarian mystery of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit which draws the great human family into the same communion: «*By a happy intuition, Rublëv's celebrated icon of the Trinity clearly places the Eucharist at the centre of the life of the Trinity*».¹²⁴ Christ is the one who in his redemptive Paschal Mystery has broken down the wall that divided the peoples, and has ended their enmity (cf. Eph 2:14), and has made members of his body those who nourish themselves from him. In fact: «*we are one body*» as St. Paul insists (1Cor 10: 17) and: «*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus*.» (Gal 3:28). The gift of Christ and of his Spirit, which we receive in Eucharistic Communion, «*superabundantly fulfils the yearning for fraternal unity deeply rooted in the human heart; at the same time it elevates the experience of fraternity already present in our common sharing at the same Eucharistic table to a degree which far surpasses that of the simple human experience of sharing a meal*».¹²⁵

An authentic unity between people and between nations can only be realised fully if it has its roots in God alone: «*Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ. To his saving power open the boundaries of States, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization and development. Do not be afraid!*».¹²⁶

123 For all these questions see: L. BIANCHI, *Eucaristia ed ecumenismo. Pasqua di tutti i cristiani*, Bologna 2007. W. KASPER, *Sacrament of Unity: The Eucharist and the Church*. New York: Crossroad, 2004. M. FLORIO-C. ROCCHETTA, *Sacramentaria speciale I*, (Corso di Teologia sistematica 8/a), Bologna 2004.

124 Cf. *Mane Nobiscum Domine* 11.

125 *EE*, 24.

126 Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Homily at the Mass of Inauguration of the Pontificate* ((22 October 1978), in *AAS* 70 (1978), pp. 944 ss.

This unity doesn't do away with the differences between nations. The creator intended man to be a social and historical being and that this would come about in different civilisations, and with the use of different maternal languages.¹²⁷ Because the unity given by God is not chaos nor is it an artificial brotherhood that sends to the guillotine those who think differently. It grows out of the gift of the Holy Spirit who, at Pentecost, comes to heal the confusion of languages and makes it possible for all to understand one another by means of the same Spirit.

In recent years the peoples of Central Europe, caught up in the storm of history have often faced one another on the battlefield. But, in spite of everything, they never forgot the deep bond that continues to unite them, namely their Christian faith. And so, once again, Christ is the one hope of this region of the world, of the whole of Europe and of the whole of humanity; and the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign and an instrument of the common belonging of these peoples to Christ.

Conscious of this, in recent years, the Episcopal Conference of the various European Countries, have celebrated the Eucharist together and have signed joint declarations as a sign of reconciliation.¹²⁸ Indeed, *«it is thanks to celebrations of the Eucharist that peoples in conflict can gather around the table of the Word of God, listen to its prophetic proclamation, freely obtain pardon and receive the grace of conversion which makes possible their communion in the one bread and the one chalice. Jesus Christ, who offers himself in the Eucharist, reinforces the communion between brothers and sisters and drives those who are in conflict to be reconciled without delay through dialogue and justice»*.¹²⁹

In this way, the International Eucharistic Congress will be an ideal opportunity to continue the journey of healing memories¹³⁰ forgiving past offences and rediscovering in Christ the level of complete reconciliation which allows them to overcome the temptations of the present time.¹³¹ In this commitment to reconciliation, the Eucharist becomes in life what it signifies in celebration.

127 PONTIFICAN COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 384-387.

128 This took place, for example, *Questo è avvenuto, per es.*, between the Hungarian and Slovak episcopal conferences at the national shrine of Mátraverebély-Szentkút on 28 June 2008. A similar document was born in 2003 with the *Versöhnte Nachbarschaft im Herzen Europas* (between the Austrian and Czech Episcopal Conferences and in 2004 at the Centraleuropean Catholic Gathering at Mariazell.

129 XI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS: *Propositions of the Synod on the Eucharist*: 22 October 2005), 49; in *Echiridion Vaticanum* vol. 23, p. 771.

130 Following an expression which was close to the heart of Pope Saint John Paul II. The concept was born in the context of the Great Jubilee of the year 2000. Cf. *Tertio Millenio Ineunte* 33-35.; *Incarnationis Mysterium* (1998), 11.

131 The theological foundations of the path of reconciliation can be found in: INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Memory and Reconciliation: the Church and the faults of the past*, 2002. The full text in:

Every European country, in the course of its history, has expressed its faith in the Eucharist with its own particular emphasis and according to its own traditions. Eucharistic processions on “*Corpus Christi*”, floral carpets, solemn Eucharistic adoration, the liturgies of the presanctified gifts and the celebrations of first Holy Communion have been a common bond between the peoples of Central Europe (Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Slovenians, Croats, Serbs, Hungarians, Austrians, Ukrainians, and Romanians etc.). Our civilisation has built up the spiritual unity of Europe which we are living; the individual local Churches are not in a position on their own to respond to the challenges that they face.

Without denying the differences arising from historical events, there is a growing awareness of the unity that, having its roots in a shared Christian inspiration, comprises the various cultural traditions and promotes, on a social as well as an ecclesial level, a movement towards mutual understanding in the sharing of the values of each.¹³²

All of this applies equally to our brothers and sisters of the Roma community, who have in Blessed Ceferino, a man of profound Eucharistic faith as their patron. That faith found expression when, in 1965, in the course of their pilgrimage (to Rome) a monstrance made out of barbed wire was presented to Pope Saint Paul VI, in memory of the gypsies killed in the Nazi concentration camps.

Almost a century ago, Martin Buber insisted that a civilisation remains alive as long as it remains in contact with the living mystery out of which it was born. The European civilisations were born out of the mystery of Christ. We must return to this source, in response to the call of Pope Saint John Paul II: «*Down the centuries you have received the treasure of Christian faith. It has grounded your life as a society on principles drawn from the Gospel, and traces of this are evident in the art, literature, thought and culture of your nations. But this heritage does not belong just to the past; it is a project in the making, to be passed on to future generations, for it has indelibly marked the life of the individuals and peoples who together have forged the continent of Europe* ».¹³³

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000307_memory-reconc-itc_en.html.

132 *EEu*, 120.

133 *EEu*, 120.

9. AVE VERUM CORPUS NATUM DE MARIA VIRGINE

In the final Chapter of the encyclical [*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*](#) (17 aprile 2003), Saint John Paul II invites the faithful to come c “to the school of Mary, woman of the Eucharist”. He affirms that « *The Church, which looks to Mary as a model, is also called to imitate her in her relationship with this most holy mystery* »¹³⁴ and assures us that, as we follow in her footsteps, we can celebrate and live the Eucharistic mystery, « *the Church’s treasure, the heart of the world, the pledge of the fulfilment for which each man and woman, even unconsciously, yearns* ».¹³⁵

The profound relationship between Mary and the Eucharist, is found in the first place in the background of Chapter VIII of the Conciliar Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* according to which « *Mary (through her participation in) in salvation history unites in herself and re-echoes the greatest teachings of the faith* ».¹³⁶ To these greatest teachings of the faith belongs the Eucharist, *mysterium fidei* par excellence.

Equally, the presentation of Mary “woman of the Eucharist” and exemplar for the Christian community can only be understood on the basis of the patristic-conciliar doctrine of the Virgin Mother « *type of the Church* » in the order of « *faith, charity and perfect unity with Christ* ».¹³⁷ This doctrine is applied by the apostolic exhortation *Marialis cultus* of Pope Saint Paul VI (1967) to the liturgy which is to be celebrated and lived under the inspiration of Mary « *as the model of the spiritual attitude with which the Church celebrates and lives the divine mysteries* ».¹³⁸ The same document then goes on to present Mary as the « *Attentive Virgin ..., in prayer..., mother..., offering* » (MC 17-20) and to mention her presence in the Eucharistic sacrifice which « *the Church does in union with the saints in heaven and in particular with the Blessed Virgin* ».¹³⁹

The community of believers sees in Mary, «woman of the Eucharist», her own most perfect image and contemplates her as the unsubstitutable model of Eucharistic life. « *For this reason, as the priest prepares to receive on the altar the “verum Corpus natum de Maria Virgine”, speaking on behalf of the liturgical assembly, he says in the words of the*

134 *EE*, 53.

135 *Ivi*, 59.

136 *LG*, 65.

137 *Ivi*, 63.

138 PAUL VI, Apostolic exhortation (1974) *Marialis Cultus*, 16.

139 *Ivi*, 20.

canon: "We honour Mary, the ever-virgin mother of Jesus Christ our Lord and God"». ¹⁴⁰ And her holy name is invoked and venerated likewise in the canons of the Oriental Church.

«She is the "tota pulchra", the all-beautiful, for in her the radiance of God's glory shines forth. The beauty of the heavenly liturgy, which must be reflected in our own assemblies, is faithfully mirrored in her». ¹⁴¹ The faithful for their part, striving to have the same feelings as Mary, learn to become Eucharistic and ecclesial people and assist the community to live as an living offering, pleasing to the Father, to present themselves then as "immaculate" in the sight of the Lord, according to his will. (cf Col 1:21; Eph 1:4).

The Church, which La Chiesa «in the Eucharist is fully united with Christ and with his sacrifice, making her own the spirit of Mary» ¹⁴² sings with her the Magnificat in the Eucharistic perspective. Praise, thanksgiving, the memorialisation of the great things that God has done in the history of salvation as well as the eschatological tension towards heaven and the new earth, whose seed is in the life of the lowly ones raised up by God – these are all, indeed, authentic Eucharistic attitudes. As the poor one of the Jahweh and the servant of the Lord, Mary continues to point the disciples of her Son towards the Eucharistic gift of self and of service.

The Holy Spirit, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, fans to a flame in us the same experience of hearts-on-fire as was had by the disciples at Emmaus (cfr Lc 24,13-35) and renews in our life the Eucharistic amazement by means of the splendour and the beauty which shine forth in the liturgical rite, the effective sign of the Pasch of Christ and the place where the glory of God is found. Those disciples got up and returned in haste to Jerusalem to share their joy with their brothers and sisters in faith.

True joy is to recognise that the dead-and-risen Lord remains among us, as the faithful companion on our journey and he shows himself to be our contemporary in the mystery of the Church, which is his body. ¹⁴³

As witnesses of this mystery of love, filled with joy and with wonder, let us continue our encounter through the Holy Eucharist, in order to experience and to proclaim to others the truth of the word with which Jesus took leave of his disciples: «I am with you always, to the end of the age» (Mt 28:20).

140 SCa 96

141 Ibid..

142 EE, 58.

143 Cf. SCa, 96-97.