

APOSTOLIC LETTER
**MANE NOBISCUM
DOMINE**



OF THE HOLY FATHER
JOHN PAUL II

TO THE BISHOPS, CLERGY AND FAITHFUL,
FOR THE YEAR OF THE EUCHARIST.
OCTOBER 2004 – OCTOBER 2005

INTRODUCTION

1. “Stay with us, Lord, for it is almost evening” (cf. *Lk* 24 :29). This was the insistent invitation that the two disciples journeying to Emmaus on the evening of the day of the resurrection addressed to the Wayfarer who had accompanied them on their journey. Weighed down with sadness, they never imagined that this stranger was none other than their Master, risen from the dead. Yet they felt their hearts burning within them (cf. v. 32) as he spoke to them and “explained” the Scriptures. The light of the Word unlocked the hardness of their hearts and “opened their eyes” (cf. v. 31). Amid the shadows of the passing day and the darkness that clouded their spirit, the Wayfarer brought a ray of light which rekindled their hope and led their hearts to yearn for the fullness of light. “Stay with us”, they pleaded. And he agreed. Soon afterwards, Jesus' face would disappear, yet the Master would “stay” with them, hidden in the “breaking of the bread” which had opened their eyes to recognize him.

2. The *image of the disciples on the way to Emmaus* can serve as a fitting guide for a Year when the Church will be particularly engaged in living out the mystery of the Holy Eucharist. Amid our questions and difficulties, and even our bitter disappointments, the divine Wayfarer continues to walk at our side, opening to us the Scriptures

and leading us to a deeper understanding of the mysteries of God. When we meet him fully, we will pass from the light of the Word to the light streaming from the “Bread of life”, the supreme fulfilment of his promise to “be with us always, to the end of the age” (cf. *Mt 28 :20*).

3. The “breaking of bread”—as the Eucharist was called in earliest times—has always been at the centre of the Church's life. Through it Christ makes present within time the mystery of his death and resurrection. In it he is received in person as the “living bread come down from heaven” (*Jn 6 :51*), and with him we receive the pledge of eternal life and a foretaste of the eternal banquet of the heavenly Jerusalem. Following the teaching of the Fathers, the Ecumenical Councils and my own Predecessors, I have frequently urged the Church to reflect upon the Eucharist, most recently in the Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. Here I do not intend to repeat this teaching, which I trust will be more deeply studied and understood. At the same time I thought it helpful for this purpose *to dedicate an entire Year to this wonderful sacrament*.

4. As is known, the *Year of the Eucharist* will be celebrated from October 2004 to October 2005. The idea for this celebration came from two events which will serve to mark its beginning and end: the *International Eucharistic Congress*, which will take place from 10-17 October 2004 in

Guadalajara, Mexico, and the *Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, which will be held in the Vatican from 2-29 October 2005 on the theme : “The Eucharist : Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church”. I was also guided by another consideration : this year's *World Youth Day* will take place in Cologne from 16-21 August 2005. I would like the young people to gather around the Eucharist as the vital source which nourishes their faith and enthusiasm. A Eucharistic initiative of this kind had been on my mind for some time : it is a natural development of the pastoral impulse which I wanted to give to the Church, particularly during the years of preparation for the Jubilee and in the years that followed it.

5. In the present Apostolic Letter, I wish to reaffirm this pastoral continuity and to help everyone to grasp its spiritual significance. As for the particular form which the *Year of the Eucharist* will take, I am counting on the personal involvement of the Pastors of the particular Churches, whose devotion to this great Mystery will not fail to suggest suitable approaches. My Brother Bishops will certainly understand that this initiative, coming as it does so soon after the celebration of the *Year of the Rosary*, is meant to take place on a deeply spiritual level, so that it will in no way interfere with the pastoral programmes of the individual Churches. Rather, it can shed

light upon those programmes, anchoring them, so to speak, in the very Mystery which nourishes the spiritual life of the faithful and the initiatives of each local Church. I am not asking the individual Churches to alter their pastoral programmes, but to emphasize the Eucharistic dimension which is part of the whole Christian life. For my part, I would like in this Letter to offer *some basic guidelines*; and I am confident that the People of God, at every level, will welcome my proposal with enthusiasm and fervent love.

I. IN THE WAKE OF THE COUNCIL AND THE GREAT JUBILEE

Looking towards Christ

6. Ten years ago, in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (10 November 1994), I had the joy of proposing to the Church a programme of preparation for the *Great Jubilee of the Year 2000*. It seemed to me that this historic moment presented itself as a great grace. I realized, of course, that a simple chronological event, however evocative, could not by itself bring about great changes. Unfortunately the Millennium began with events which were in tragic continuity with the past, and often with its worst aspects. A scenario emerged which, despite certain positive elements, is marred by acts of violence and bloodshed which cause continued concern. Even so, in inviting the Church to celebrate the Jubilee of the two-

thousandth anniversary of the Incarnation, I was convinced—and I still am, more than ever!—that this celebration would be of benefit to humanity in the “long term”.

Jesus Christ stands at the centre not just of the history of the Church, but also the history of humanity. In him, all things are drawn together (cf. *Eph* 1 :10 ; *Col* 1 :15-20). How could we forget the enthusiasm with which the Second Vatican Council, quoting Pope Paul VI, proclaimed that Christ is “the goal of human history, the focal point of the desires of history and civilization, the centre of mankind, the joy of all hearts, and the fulfilment of all aspirations” ?¹ The Council's teaching gave added depth to our understanding of the nature of the Church, and gave believers a clearer insight not only into the mysteries of faith but also into earthly realities, seen in the light of Christ. In the Incarnate Word, both the mystery of God and the mystery of man are revealed.² In him, humanity finds redemption and fulfilment.

7. In the Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, at the beginning of my Pontificate, I developed this idea, and I have frequently returned to it on other occasions. The Jubilee was a fitting time to invite believers once again to consider this fundamental

¹ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 45.

² Cf. *ibid.*, 22.

truth. The preparation for the great event was fully Trinitarian and Christocentric. Within this plan, there clearly had to be a place for the Eucharist. At the start of this Year of the Eucharist, I repeat the words which I wrote in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* : “The Year 2000 will be intensely Eucharistic ; in the *Sacrament of the Eucharist* the Saviour, who took flesh in Mary's womb twenty centuries ago, continues to offer himself to humanity as the source of divine life”.³ The International Eucharistic Congress, held that year in Rome, also helped to focus attention on this aspect of the Great Jubilee. It is also worth recalling that my Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini*, written in preparation for the Jubilee, invited believers to meditate on Sunday as the day of the Risen Lord and the special day of the Church. At that time I urged everyone to rediscover the celebration of the Eucharist as the heart of Sunday.⁴

Contemplating with Mary the face of Christ

8. The fruits of the Great Jubilee were collected in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. In this programmatic document, I suggested an ever greater pastoral engagement based on the contemplation of the face of Christ, as part of an ecclesial pedagogy aimed at “the high standard” of holiness and carried out

³ No. 55 : *AAS* 87 (1995), 38.

⁴ Cf. Nos. 32-34 : *AAS* 90 (1998), 732-734.

especially through the art of prayer.⁵ How could such a programme be complete without a commitment to the liturgy and in particular to the *cultivation of Eucharistic life*? As I said at the time: “In the twentieth century, especially since the Council, there has been a great development in the way the Christian community celebrates the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist. It is necessary to continue in this direction, and to stress particularly *the Sunday Eucharist* and *Sunday* itself, experienced as a special day of faith, the day of the Risen Lord and of the gift of the Spirit, the true weekly Easter”.⁶ In this context of a training in prayer, I recommended the celebration of the *Liturgy of the Hours*, by which the Church sanctifies the different hours of the day and the passage of time through the liturgical year.

9. Subsequently, with the proclamation of the Year of the Rosary and the publication of the Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, I returned to the theme of contemplating the face of Christ, now *from a Marian perspective*, by encouraging once more the recitation of the Rosary. This traditional prayer, so highly recommended by the Magisterium and so dear to the People of God, has a markedly biblical and evangelical character, focused on the name and the face of Jesus as contemplated in the mysteries

⁵ Cf. Nos. 30-32 : *AAS* 93 (2001), 287-289.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 35 : *loc. cit.*, 290-291.

and by the repetition of the “Hail Mary”. In its flow of repetitions, it represents *a kind of pedagogy of love*, aimed at evoking within our hearts the same love that Mary bore for her Son. For this reason, developing a centuries-old tradition by the addition of the mysteries of light, I sought to make this privileged form of contemplation an even more complete “compendium of the Gospel”.⁷ And how could the mysteries of light not culminate in the Holy Eucharist ?

From the Year of the Rosary to the Year of the Eucharist

10. In the midst of the *Year of the Rosary*, I issued the Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, with the intention of shedding light on the mystery of the Eucharist in its inseparable and vital relation to the Church. I urged all the faithful to celebrate the Eucharistic sacrifice with due reverence, offering to Jesus present in the Eucharist, both within and outside Mass, the worship demanded by so great a Mystery. Above all, I suggested once again the need for a Eucharistic spirituality and pointed to Mary, “woman of the Eucharist”,⁸ as its model.

The *Year of the Eucharist* takes place against a *background which has been enriched by the passage of the*

⁷ Cf. Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (16 October 2002), 19-21 : *AAS* 95 (2003), 18-20.

⁸ Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 April 2003), 53 : *AAS* 95 (2003), 469.

years, while remaining ever rooted in the theme of Christ and the contemplation of his face. In a certain sense, it is meant to be a year of synthesis, *the high-point of a journey in progress*. Much could be said about how to celebrate this year. I would simply offer some reflections intended to help us all to experience it in a deeper and more fruitful way.

II. THE EUCHARIST, A MYSTERY OF LIGHT

“He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Lk 24 :27)

11. The account of the Risen Jesus appearing to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus helps us to focus on a primary aspect of the Eucharistic mystery, one which should always be present in the devotion of the People of God : *The Eucharist is a mystery of light !* What does this mean, and what are its implications for Christian life and spirituality ?

Jesus described himself as the “light of the world” (*Jn 8 :12*), and this quality clearly appears at those moments in his life, like the Transfiguration and the Resurrection, in which his divine glory shines forth brightly. Yet in the Eucharist the glory of Christ remains veiled. The Eucharist is pre-eminently a *mysterium fidei*. Through the mystery of his complete hiddenness, Christ becomes a mystery of light, thanks to

which believers are led into the depths of the divine life. By a happy intuition, Rublëv's celebrated icon of the Trinity clearly places the Eucharist at the centre of the life of the Trinity.

12. The Eucharist is light above all because at every Mass the liturgy of the Word of God precedes the liturgy of the Eucharist in the unity of the two "tables", the table of the Word and the table of the Bread. This continuity is expressed in the Eucharistic discourse of Saint John's Gospel, where Jesus begins his teaching by speaking of the mystery of his person and then goes on to draw out its Eucharistic dimension : "My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed" (*Jn* 6 :55). We know that this was troubling for most of his listeners, which led Peter to express the faith of the other Apostles and of the Church throughout history : "Lord, to whom can we go ? You have the words of eternal life" (*Jn* 6 :68). In the account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, Christ himself intervenes to show, "beginning with Moses and all the prophets", how "all the Scriptures" point to the mystery of his person (cf. *Lk* 24 :27). His words make the hearts of the disciples "burn" within them, drawing them out of the darkness of sorrow and despair, and awakening in them a desire to remain with him : "Stay with us, Lord" (cf. v. 29).

13. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, in the Constitution *Sacrosanctum*

Concilium, sought to make “the table of the word” offer the treasures of Scripture more fully to the faithful.⁹ Consequently they allowed the biblical readings of the liturgy to be proclaimed in a language understood by all. It is Christ himself who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read in the Church.¹⁰ The Council Fathers also urged the celebrant to treat the homily as part of the liturgy, aimed at explaining the word of God and drawing out its meaning for the Christian life.¹¹ Forty years after the Council, the *Year of the Eucharist* can serve as an important opportunity for Christian communities *to evaluate their progress in this area*. It is not enough that the biblical passages are read in the vernacular, if they are not also proclaimed with the care, preparation, devout attention and meditative silence that enable the word of God to touch people's minds and hearts.

“*They recognized him in the breaking of bread*” (cf. *Lk* 24 :35)

14. It is significant that the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, duly prepared by our Lord's words, recognized him at table through the simple gesture of the “breaking of bread”. When minds are enlightened and hearts are enkindled, signs begin to “speak”. The Eucharist unfolds in a dynamic context of signs containing a rich and

⁹ Cf. No. 51.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹ Cf *ibid.*, 52.

luminous message. Through these signs the mystery in some way opens up before the eyes of the believer.

As I emphasized in my Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, it is important that no dimension of this sacrament should be neglected. We are constantly tempted to reduce the Eucharist to our own dimensions, while in reality *it is we who must open ourselves up to the dimensions of the Mystery*. “The Eucharist is too great a gift to tolerate ambiguity and depreciation”.¹²

15. There is no doubt that the most evident dimension of the Eucharist is that it is a *meal*. The Eucharist was born, on the evening of Holy Thursday, in the setting of the Passover meal. *Being a meal* is part of its very structure. “Take, eat... Then he took a cup and... gave it to them, saying : Drink from it, all of you” (*Mt 26 :26, 27*). As such, it expresses the fellowship which God wishes to establish with us and which we ourselves must build with one another.

Yet it must not be forgotten that the Eucharistic meal also has a profoundly and primarily *sacrificial* meaning.¹³ In the Eucharist,

¹² Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 April 2003), 10 : *AAS* 95 (2003), 439.

¹³ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 April 2003), 10 : *AAS* 95 (2003), 439. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum* on certain matters to be observed or to be avoided regarding the Most Holy Eucharist (25 March 2004), 38 : *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, 28 April 2004, Special Insert, p.3.

Christ makes present to us anew *the sacrifice offered once for all on Golgotha*. Present in the Eucharist as the Risen Lord, he nonetheless bears the marks of his passion, of which every Mass is a “memorial”, as the Liturgy reminds us in the acclamation following the consecration: “We announce your death, Lord, we proclaim your resurrection...”. At the same time, while the Eucharist makes present what occurred in the past, it also *impels us towards the future, when Christ will come again* at the end of history. This “eschatological” aspect makes the Sacrament of the Eucharist an event which draws us into itself and fills our Christian journey with hope.

“I am with you always...” (Mt 28 :20)

16. All these dimensions of the Eucharist come together in one aspect which more than any other makes a demand on our faith: *the mystery of the “real” presence*. With the entire tradition of the Church, we believe that Jesus is truly present under the Eucharistic species. This presence—as Pope Paul VI rightly explained—is called “real” not in an exclusive way, as if to suggest that other forms of Christ's presence are not real, but *par excellence*, because Christ thereby becomes substantially present, whole and entire, in the reality of his body and blood.¹⁴ Faith demands

¹⁴ Cf. Encyclical Letter *Mysterium Fidei* (3 September 1965), 39: *AAS* 57 (1965), 764; Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction *Eucharisticum Mysterium* on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery (25 May 1967), 9: *AAS* 59 (1967), 547.

that we approach the Eucharist fully aware that we are approaching Christ himself. It is precisely his presence which gives the other aspects of the Eucharist – as meal, as memorial of the Paschal Mystery, as eschatological anticipation – a significance which goes far beyond mere symbolism. The Eucharist is a mystery of presence, the perfect fulfilment of Jesus' promise to remain with us until the end of the world.

Celebrating, worshiping, contemplating

17. The Eucharist is a great mystery ! And it is one which above all must be *well celebrated*. Holy Mass needs to be set at the centre of the Christian life and celebrated in a dignified manner by every community, in accordance with established norms, with the participation of the assembly, with the presence of ministers who carry out their assigned tasks, and with a serious concern that singing and *liturgical music* be suitably “sacred”. One specific project of this *Year of the Eucharist* might be for each parish community to study the General Instruction of the Roman Missal. The best way to enter into the mystery of salvation made present in the sacred “signs” remains that of following faithfully the unfolding of the liturgical year. Pastors should be committed to that “*mystagogical*” *catechesis* so dear to the Fathers of the Church, by which the faithful are helped to understand the meaning of the liturgy's words and actions, to pass from its signs to the mystery

which they contain, and to enter into that mystery in every aspect of their lives.

18. There is a particular need to cultivate *a lively awareness of Christ's real presence*, both in the celebration of Mass and in the worship of the Eucharist outside Mass. Care should be taken to show that awareness through tone of voice, gestures, posture and bearing. In this regard, liturgical law recalls—and I myself have recently reaffirmed¹⁵—the importance of moments of silence both in the celebration of Mass and in Eucharistic adoration. The way that the ministers and the faithful treat the Eucharist should be marked by profound respect.¹⁶ The presence of Jesus in the tabernacle must be a kind of *magnetic pole* attracting an ever greater number of souls enamoured of him, ready to wait patiently to hear his voice and, as it were, to sense the beating of his heart. “O taste and see that the Lord is good !” (Ps 34 :8).

During this year *Eucharistic adoration outside Mass* should become a particular commitment for individual parish and religious communities. Let us take the time to kneel before Jesus present in

¹⁵ Cf. Message *Spiritus et Sponsa*, for the fortieth anniversary of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (4 December 2003), 13 : *AAS* 96 (2004), 425.

¹⁶ Cf. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum* on certain matters to be observed or to be avoided regarding the Most Holy Eucharist (25 March 2004) : *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, 28 April 2004, Special Insert.

the Eucharist, in order to make reparation by our faith and love for the acts of carelessness and neglect, and even the insults which our Saviour must endure in many parts of the world. Let us deepen through adoration our personal and communal contemplation, drawing upon aids to prayer inspired by the word of God and the experience of so many mystics, old and new. The Rosary itself, when it is profoundly understood in the biblical and christocentric form which I recommended in the Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, will prove a particularly fitting introduction to Eucharistic contemplation, a contemplation carried out with Mary as our companion and guide.¹⁷

This year let us also celebrate with particular devotion the Solemnity of *Corpus Christi*, with its traditional procession. Our faith in the God who took flesh in order to become our companion along the way needs to be everywhere proclaimed, especially in our streets and homes, as an expression of our grateful love and as an inexhaustible source of blessings.

III. THE EUCHARIST SOURCE AND MANIFESTATION OF COMMUNION

“*Abide in me, and I in you*” (Jn 15 :4)

19. When the disciples on the way to Emmaus asked Jesus to stay “with” them, he

¹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 137, *loc. cit.*, p.11.

responded by giving them a much greater gift : through the Sacrament of the Eucharist he found a way to stay “in” them. Receiving the Eucharist means entering into a profound communion with Jesus. “Abide in me, and I in you” (*Jn* 15 :4). This relationship of profound and mutual “abiding” enables us to have a certain foretaste of heaven on earth. Is this not the greatest of human yearnings ? Is this not what God had in mind when he brought about in history his plan of salvation ? God has placed in human hearts a “hunger” for his word (cf. *Am* 8 :11), a hunger which will be satisfied only by full union with him. Eucharistic communion was given so that we might be “sated” with God here on earth, in expectation of our complete fulfilment in heaven.

One bread, one body

20. This special closeness which comes about in Eucharistic “communion” cannot be adequately understood or fully experienced apart from ecclesial communion. I emphasized this repeatedly in my Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. The Church is the Body of Christ : we walk “with Christ” to the extent that we are in relationship “with his body”. Christ provided for the creation and growth of this unity by the outpouring of his Holy Spirit. And he himself constantly builds it up by his Eucharistic presence. It is the one Eucharistic bread which makes us one body. As the Apostle Paul states : “Because there is one

bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1Cor 10 :17). In the mystery of the Eucharist Jesus builds up the Church as a communion, in accordance with the supreme model evoked in his *priestly prayer* : “Even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (Jn 17 :21).

21. The Eucharist is both the *source* of ecclesial unity and its greatest *manifestation*. The Eucharist is an *epiphany of communion*. For this reason the Church sets conditions for full participation in the celebration of the Eucharist.¹⁸ These various limitations ought to make us ever more conscious of *the demands made by the communion which Jesus asks of us*. It is a *hierarchical* communion, based on the awareness of a variety of roles and ministries, as is seen by the reference to the Pope and the Diocesan Bishop in the Eucharistic Prayer. It is a *fraternal* communion, cultivated by a “spirituality of communion” which fosters reciprocal openness, affection, understanding and forgiveness.¹⁹

“... of one heart and soul” (Acts 4 :32)

¹⁸ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 April 2003), 44 : AAS 95 (2003), 462 ; *Code of Canon Law*, canon 908 ; *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, canon 702 ; Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directorium Oecumenicum* (25 March 1993), 122-125, 129-131 : AAS 85 (1993), 1086-1089 ; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter *Ad Exsequendam* (18 May 2001) : AAS 93 (2001), 786.

¹⁹ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 43 : AAS 93 (2001), 297.

22. At each Holy Mass we are called to measure ourselves against the ideal of communion which the *Acts of the Apostles* paints as a model for the Church in every age. It is the Church gathered around the Apostles, called by the word of God, capable of sharing in spiritual goods but in material goods as well (cf. *Acts* 2 :42-47 ; 4 :32-35). In this *Year of the Eucharist* the Lord invites us to draw as closely as possible to this ideal. Every effort should be made to experience fully those occasions mentioned in the liturgy for the Bishop's "Stational Mass", which he celebrates in the cathedral together with his presbyters and deacons, with the participation of the whole People of God. Here we see the principal "manifestation" of the Church.²⁰ It would be praiseworthy to specify *other significant occasions*, also on the parochial level, which would increase a sense of communion and find in the Eucharistic celebration a source of renewed fervour.

The Lord's Day

23. In a particular way I ask that every effort be made this year to experience Sunday as the day of the Lord and the day of the Church. I would be happy if everyone would reflect once more on my words in the Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini*. "At Sunday Mass, Christians relive with particular

²⁰ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 41.

intensity the experience of the Apostles on the evening of Easter, when the Risen Lord appeared to them as they were gathered together (cf. *Jn* 20 :19). In a sense, the People of God of all times were present in that small nucleus of disciples, the first-fruits of the Church”.²¹ During this year of grace, priests in their pastoral ministry should *be even more attentive to Sunday Mass* as the celebration which brings together the entire parish community, with the participation of different groups, movements and associations.

IV. THE EUCHARIST, PRINCIPLE AND PLAN OF “MISSION”

“They set out immediately” (cf. *Lk* 24 :33)

24. The two disciples of Emmaus, upon recognizing the Lord, “set out immediately” (cf. *Lk* 24 :33), in order to report what they had seen and heard. Once we have truly met the Risen One by partaking of his body and blood, we cannot keep to ourselves the joy we have experienced. The encounter with Christ, constantly intensified and deepened in the Eucharist, issues in the Church and in every Christian *an urgent summons to testimony and evangelization*. I wished to emphasize this in my homily announcing the *Year of the Eucharist*, based on the words of Saint Paul : “As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the

²¹ No. 33 : *AAS* 90 (1998), 733.

Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11 :26). The Apostle closely relates meal and proclamation : entering into communion with Christ in the memorial of his Pasch also means sensing the duty to be a missionary of the event made present in that rite.²² The dismissal at the end of each Mass is *a charge* given to Christians, inviting them to work for the spread of the Gospel and the imbuing of society with Christian values.

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

Giving thanks

26. One fundamental element of this *plan* is found in the very meaning of the word "Eucharist" : thanksgiving. In Jesus, in his sacrifice, in his unconditional "yes" to the will of the Father, is contained the "yes", the "thank

²² Cf. Homily for the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ (10 June 2004) : *L'Osservatore Romano*, 11-12 June 2004, p.6.

you” and the “amen” of all humanity. The Church is called to remind men and women of this great truth. This is especially urgent in the context of our secularized culture, characterized as it is by a forgetfulness of God and a vain pursuit of human self-sufficiency. Incarnating the Eucharistic “plan” in daily life, wherever people live and work—in families, schools, the workplace, in all of life's settings—means bearing witness that *human reality cannot be justified without reference to the Creator*: “Without the Creator the creature would disappear”.²³ This transcendent point of reference, which commits us constantly to give thanks for all that we have and are—in other words, to a “Eucharistic” attitude—in no way detracts from the legitimate autonomy of earthly realities,²⁴ but grounds that autonomy more firmly by setting it within its proper limits.

In this *Year of the Eucharist* Christians ought to be committed to bearing more forceful witness to God's presence in the world. We should not be afraid to speak about God and to bear proud witness to our faith. The “culture of the Eucharist” promotes a culture of dialogue, which here finds strength and nourishment. It is a mistake to think that any public reference to faith will somehow undermine the rightful autonomy

²³ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 36.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

of the State and civil institutions, or that it can even encourage attitudes of intolerance. If history demonstrates that mistakes have also been made in this area by believers, as I acknowledged on the occasion of the Jubilee, this must be attributed not to “Christian roots”, but to the failure of Christians to be faithful to those roots. One who learns to say “thank you” in the manner of the crucified Christ might end up as a martyr, but never as a persecutor.

The way of solidarity

27. The Eucharist is not merely an expression of communion in the Church's life ; it is also a *project of solidarity* for all of humanity. In the celebration of the Eucharist the Church constantly renews her awareness of being a “sign and instrument” not only of intimate union with God but also of the unity of the whole human race.²⁵ Each Mass, even when celebrated in obscurity or in isolation, always has a universal character. The Christian who takes part in the Eucharist learns to become a *promotor of communion, peace and solidarity* in every situation. More than ever, our troubled world, which began the new Millennium with the spectre of terrorism and the tragedy of war, demands that Christians learn to experience the Eucharist as *a great school of peace*, forming men and women who, at various

²⁵ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

levels of responsibility in social, cultural and political life, can become promoters of dialogue and communion.

At the service of the least

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

Can we not make this *Year of the Eucharist* an occasion for diocesan and parish communities to commit themselves in a particular way to responding with fraternal solicitude to one of the many forms of poverty present in our world? I

think for example of the tragedy of hunger which plagues hundreds of millions of human beings, the diseases which afflict developing countries, the loneliness of the elderly, the hardships faced by the unemployed, the struggles of immigrants. These are evils which are present—albeit to a different degree—even in areas of immense wealth. We cannot delude ourselves : by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognized as true followers of Christ (cf. *Jn* 13 :35 ; *Mt* 25 :31-46). This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged.

CONCLUSION

29. *O Sacrum Convivium, in quo Christus sumitur!* The *Year of the Eucharist* has its source in the amazement with which the Church contemplates this great Mystery. It is an amazement which I myself constantly experience. It prompted my Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. As I look forward to the twenty-seventh year of my Petrine ministry, I consider it a great grace to be able to call the whole Church to contemplate, praise, and adore in a special way this ineffable Sacrament. May the *Year of the Eucharist* be for everyone a precious opportunity to grow in awareness of the incomparable treasure which Christ has entrusted to his Church. May it

encourage a more lively and fervent celebration of the Eucharist, leading to a Christian life transformed by love.

There is room here for any number of initiatives, according to the judgement of the Pastors of the particular Churches. The *Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments* will not fail to provide some helpful suggestions and proposals. I do not ask, however, for anything extraordinary, but rather that every initiative be marked by a profound interiority. If the only result of this Year were the revival in all Christian communities of the celebration of Sunday Mass and an increase in Eucharistic worship outside Mass, this Year of grace would be abundantly successful. At the same time, it is good to aim high, and not to be content with mediocrity, since we know we can always count on God's help.

30. To you, dear *Brother Bishops*, I commend this Year, confident that you will welcome my invitation with full apostolic zeal.

Dear *priests*, who repeat the words of consecration each day, and are witnesses and heralds of the great miracle of love which takes place at your hands : be challenged by the grace of this special Year ; celebrate Holy Mass each day with the same joy and fervour with which you celebrated your first Mass, and willingly spend time in prayer before the tabernacle.

May this be a Year of grace also for you, *deacons*, who are so closely engaged in the ministry of the word and the service of the altar. I ask you, *lectors, acolytes and extraordinary ministers of holy communion*, to become ever more aware of the gift you have received in the service entrusted to you for a more worthy celebration of the Eucharist.

In particular I appeal to you, *the priests of the future*. During your time in the seminary make every effort to experience the beauty not only of taking part daily in Holy Mass, but also of spending a certain amount of time in dialogue with the Eucharistic Lord.

Consecrated men and women, called by that very consecration to more prolonged contemplation : never forget that Jesus in the tabernacle wants you to be at his side, so that he can fill your hearts with the experience of his friendship, which alone gives meaning and fulfilment to your lives.

May all of you, *the Christian faithful*, rediscover the gift of the Eucharist as light and strength for your daily lives in the world, in the exercise of your respective professions amid so many different situations. Rediscover this above all in order to experience fully the beauty and the mission of the *family*.

I have great expectations of you, *young people*, as I look forward to our meeting at the next *World Youth Day* in Cologne. The theme of our

meeting—“*We have come to worship him*”—suggests how you can best experience this Eucharistic year. Bring to your encounter with Jesus, hidden in the Eucharist, all the enthusiasm of your age, all your hopes, all your desire to love.

31. We have before us the example of the Saints, who in the Eucharist found nourishment on their journey towards perfection. How many times did they shed tears of profound emotion in the presence of this great mystery, or experience hours of inexpressible “spousal” joy before the sacrament of the altar ! May we be helped above all by the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose whole life incarnated the meaning of the Eucharist. “The Church, which looks to Mary as a model, is also called to imitate her in her relationship with this most holy mystery”.²⁶ The Eucharistic Bread which we receive is the spotless flesh of her Son : *Ave verum corpus natum de Maria Virgine*. In this Year of grace, sustained by Mary, may the Church discover new enthusiasm for her mission and come to acknowledge ever more fully that the Eucharist is the source and summit of her entire life.

To all of you I impart my Blessing as a pledge of grace and joy.

From the Vatican, on 7 October, the Memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary, in the year 2004, the twenty-sixth of my Pontificate.

²⁶ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 April 2003), 53 : AAS 95 (2003), 469.

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