



Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference

7 September 2011

A Year Of Eucharistic Renewal

Dear Beloved,

The burning desire with which Jesus said 'I have longed to eat this Passover supper with you before I suffer' (Luke 22:15) inspires us as we join with the Catholic faithful around the world to prepare for the Eucharistic Congress which will take place in Dublin next year. We are inspired to enter more deeply into the mystery of the Eucharist in which we personally meet Jesus who assured us that he remains with us in his Church till the end of time. This is also an invitation to meet each other anew as we become one flesh and blood through our communion in the flesh and blood of the Lord. 'Blessed are all who are invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb' (Rev 19:9)

The Eucharist at the heart of the Church

"It was above all on the first day of the week, Sunday, the day of Jesus' resurrection that the Christians met to break bread." (Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church 1343) "Thus from celebration to celebration, as they proclaim the Paschal mystery of Jesus until he comes, the pilgrim People of God advances, following the narrow way of the cross, toward the heavenly banquet, when all the elect will be seated at the table of the kingdom." (Cf. Catechism 1344)

Renewal in Eucharistic spirituality and practice means that Sunday needs to regain its special significance in the life of each Catholic. What does that mean for you and your family?

The Second Vatican Council teaches that the Eucharist is the climax and summit of the Christian faith. With great enthusiasm the Church took up the challenge of the Council so that all could participate whole-heartedly in this great mystery which is so dear to our hearts. Gradually new hymns were composed and practices were established which have become part of the vibrancy of our Catholic faith as we celebrate the Mass today in all the different languages of our territory.

As your Bishops we are called and in turn we call upon you, priests and deacons and the faithful, to continue to deepen this renewal of our celebration of the Eucharist.

The implementation of the new English texts of the Mass offers us a new opportunity to a deeper renewal in the celebration of the Mass and Eucharistic spirituality.

Our publications like 'The Pastoral Introduction to the Order of the Mass' and the DVD-ROM 'Becoming One Body, One Spirit in Christ,' direct us in continuing the reforms and renewal called for by the Council. How are these used in your parish?

In the Eucharist we encounter Jesus

The Gospels relate how people encountered Jesus and found new life. Like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, we too meet Jesus who comes to meet us in the "scriptures and the breaking of the bread". In this year of spiritual renewal, let us strive with renewed prayer to encounter the Lord Jesus more fully in the celebration of the Eucharist – so that our hearts burn within us. (cf. Luke 24) We are called to enter more deeply into the mystery of his love. This means more than just 'what we do' and 'how we do it'. We want to respond to Jesus' desire, 'I have longed to eat this supper with you before I die'. (Luke 22:15) We want also to become one Body, his Church – something we are involved in at this time of preparing for the inter-diocesan consultation which will bring us together as Church. 'Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.' (I Corinthians 10:17) "Grant that we, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ." (Eucharistic Prayer 3)

Many of our rural communities are only able to gather for the celebration of the Mass once every month or two and in many of the rural communities there is no reservation of the Eucharist for the comforting of the sick and the dying. In these circumstances the fostering of Eucharistic spirituality is seriously limited and we would like to ask our priests to reflect with the members of these communities on what fostering Eucharistic spirituality in such circumstances means and requires.

The Eucharist and Evangelisation - Renewed call to live Gospel values

In the Eucharistic Prayer the priest prays in the name of Jesus and of the Church: "May this sacrifice of our reconciliation ... advance the peace and salvation of all the world." (Eucharistic Prayer 3) The renewed encounter of the Risen Lord in the Eucharist brings the courage to live the truth and to live honestly, living by those virtues which were so much part of Jesus' life: compassion and thirsting for what is right.

In every celebration of the Eucharist we begin by acknowledging our unworthiness and our failure to live Jesus' way; and just before we receive the Lord in his Body and Blood, we acknowledge our need of healing, and we acknowledge the one who heals: "... only say the word and my soul shall be healed." Healing of our families and our society, personal healing of body and spirit, healing of friendships and relationships, all healing begins with a personal knowledge of the Lord Jesus. "Save us, Saviour of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free." (Memorial Acclamation 3)

Illness, pain and the burden of personal sinfulness often leave us feeling alone and isolated. The experience of healing opens us to God so that we are 'no longer strangers and sojourners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, a dwelling place of God in the Spirit'. (Cf. Ephesians 2:19-22)

In dealing with the breakdown of family life, unjust laws like abortion on demand, and the public ridicule of the Gospel virtues of chastity and purity of heart, we find new strength in our encounter with the Eucharistic Lord to live by his virtues.

The Eucharist and fostering a personal and communal spirituality

The Second Vatican Council facilitated greater possibilities for participating in the Eucharist which were unheard of before the Council. Reducing the fast to one hour before receiving Holy Communion and other constructive measures like allowing for Mass to be celebrated in homes and at hospital beds, really brought the Mass to the people. We call for a renewal of these and other Eucharistic practices which support the celebration of the Eucharist and prolong its spiritual effects. We ask Parish Priests and Parish Pastoral Councils to find ways of promoting the following:

Eucharistic adoration and prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

Eucharistic devotions which cater for families and the youth.

Communal celebrations of Reconciliation and more time given to the Sacrament of Reconciliation so as to help priest and people prepare for the Eucharist.

Eucharistic Processions.

Arrangements whereby churches and chapels are open at certain hours to encourage personal devotions and visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

Arrangements with Religious whereby their houses become centres of Eucharistic adoration.

It is also our fervent hope that this time of renewal will inspire in many young men the desire to devote themselves to priestly service which lies at the heart of the celebration of the Eucharist.

We entrust this year to Mary, Tabernacle of the Most High

Dearly Beloved, as each celebration of the Mass ends with, "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord" or with these alternative words "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life," we launch out into a year of Eucharistic renewal together with you. We ask Mother Mary, Tabernacle of the Most High, in whose womb the Word became flesh, to help us with her prayers and example. Mary said "Let it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38) and "Do whatever he asks of you". In responding as she did, let us renew our love and celebration of the Eucharist and the way in which we live the Mystery of Faith: "When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your Death, O Lord, until you come again.



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