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World Synod of Bishops

The Synod of Bishops, convened by Pope Benedict XVI from October 2-23, 2005 met on the theme: *The Eucharist: Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church*. Four of the synod fathers, from the United States of America, addressed various aspects of the Eucharistic mystery from their perspective as American Bishops. The following interventions are offered for the reflection of our readers.

Mystery of Faith, Trinitarian Love

Cardinal Justin Rigali

In speaking about the relation of Jesus to his Father in the communion of the Most Blessed Trinity, we find the deepest explanation of the Eucharist, especially as sacrifice - a sacrifice renewed in the Eucharist.

Christ's love for us and the love of the Father who sent his Son into the world to redeem us explain to a great extent the Eucharist. Two other aspects of God's love are, however, even more basic for an understanding of the Eucharist and all the suffering Christ endured for us on Calvary. The Eucharist flows directly from the love of the Son of God for his Father, in response to the eternal love by which he is loved by the Father in the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' greatest proclamation was the love that the Father has for him and the love that he has for the Father. Jesus says, "The Father loves the Son" (Jn. 3:35; 5:20). "The Father loves me" (Jn. 10:17). "I love the Father" (Jn. 14:31).

The sacrifice of Jesus is motivated by his love for the Father and his obedience to the Father. Calvary and the Eucharist, which re-enacts and renews Calvary, express the exchange of love between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. The resurrection is the Father's response of love to Christ's sacrifice and the greatest proclamation of his eternal love for his Son. As the mystery of faith, the Eucharist is, above all, the mystery of Trinitarian love.

The Quality of Preaching

Archbishop Wilton Gregory

Archbishop Wilton Gregory is the Archbishop of Atlanta, former chairman of the Committee on the Liturgy and former president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. On October 11, 2005 he addressed the Synod of Bishops on the Quality of Preaching.

The theme and topic of our synod is as ancient as is the church herself. Its importance to the life and mission of the church transcends Christian ages and epochs. Nonetheless, there are special concerns that we face in this our moment of history. One of these is the elevated expectation on the part of the laity for true inspiration, edification and sound pastoral direction from the homily at the eucharistic celebration.

In my own country of the United States of America, I have repeatedly heard of people who regularly will travel excessive distances to participate in a Mass that has a celebrant with proven capability to offer a serious, moving and compelling homily. In 1956 the late Cardinal Bea observed in his presentation to the Assisi Liturgical Conference that a priest who was skilled in offering the holy sacrifice of the Mass but not in breaking open the word of God for people was only exercising half of his priestly ministry.

Unfortunately today too many people have stopped attending Sunday Mass and often because of poor preaching. While some may use the justification of poor preaching to rationalize their failure to participate at Sunday Mass, I have heard the narrative too often not to find some truth in its telling. In the United States of America, some of our faithful Catholic people will go to Sunday Mass and then return home to listen to the radio or view the televised religious programming of other Christian denominations simply because they are still hungry for inspiring preaching.

Still others go so far as to attend religious services at these other churches after they have attended Sunday Mass. The quality of preaching is a serious concern for many Catholics in the United States of America.

We bishops in our role as the primary preachers in our local churches must lead by our own good example rather than merely asking our priests and deacons to be better prepared homilists for our people. We must not forget that ours is the church that has produced John Chrysostom, Augustine of Hippo and Patrick, saints known not only for their holiness of life but also for their eloquence as preachers of the word of God.

As other synod fathers have already duly noted, the liturgical celebrations of the Eucharist need so much more than mere ritual precision and accuracy. Truly good celebrants of the church's worship do infinitely more than carefully to observe the ritual requirements of the liturgy, although they must do that as well.

Our people are starving for truly prayerful expressions of the eucharistic actions. While we must provide them with careful and accurate translations of the liturgical texts, celebrants must also offer those prayers in such a way that they inspire and edify the faithful. Good translations will only be effective when they are offered reverently and in such a manner as to lift the human heart to the ineffable and loving God, who encounters us in the eucharistic mystery.

The priest skilled in the *ars celebrandi* will offer the prayers from a heart so conformed to the heart of Christ that "by the way he says the divine words he must convey to the faithful the living presence of Christ" (General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 94).

Catechesis in a Secular Culture

Bishop Donald Wuerl

The preparation for this synod coincided with and followed a great deal of work done within the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to address serious catechetical needs in the church today and to prepare adequate instruments and tools for parents, catechists, religious and priests to use in the ongoing effort to teach the faith and to introduce the faithful entrusted to our care to an encounter with the living Lord.

These efforts include nearly a decade of reviewing catechetical works used throughout the country for their conformity to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the production of a National Directory for Catechesis, the development of a national adult catechism and the preparation of catechetical guidelines for religious education at every level.

None of this effort has taken place detached from the experience that so many of us have of the culture and generation with which we work as we try to introduce them to Christ.

It seems that what we have experienced is directly applicable to our need today to prepare and present an adequate catechesis on the Eucharist and its significance for the person who would claim Christ as Lord and Savior.

To begin we must recognize that our proclamation takes place in the context of a highly secularized world. Perhaps the single biggest challenge that we as followers of Christ face today is the great disparity between what we see in faith as the horizon of life and what this secular culture and materially focused world sees as the goal, end and purpose of life.

Where once there were community and social structures that supported religious faith and encouraged family life, we now find an increasing lack of both the support and the encouragement.

This culture has no sustaining vision beyond the material world of the senses and scientific investigation. Thus concepts involving transcendence, sacramental life, revelation, grace and spiritual transformation have no culture counterpart and thus seem alien or unreal.

Much energy is spent on worthy activities, but they are often unrelated, at least in the minds of many of the young, to the experience of Christ, the meaning of his incarnation, our redemption and the mystery of eucharistic participation in salvation.

Catechesis can be too often disconnected from the very heart of our faith that is the death and resurrection of Christ and our participation in that salvific event through the Eucharist. As we are reminded in *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, "When the church celebrates the Eucharist, the memorial of her Lord's death and resurrection, this central event of salvation becomes really present and 'the work of our redemption is carried out'" (No. 11).

As we face the challenges of the future, there are a number of elements we need to keep before us which include the recognition that eucharistic catechesis must be, as all catechesis, complete and authentic. It must present the whole teaching of the church and do so in a way that echoes the very words of the faith - a commonality in the language of the faith.

All teaching should lead to an appropriation in spirit and in truth of the eucharistic mystery, and all activity, social engagement and cultural renewal should flow from that new life capable of generating a new creation.

In concluding these remarks I want to highlight that there is also a very encouraging aspect to our experience with the young people of this generation.

On the brighter side is a sense among some of our young people that the secular material world does not provide them sufficient answers for their lives. There is a hunger for God and the things of the spirit, but it needs to be encouraged, informed and directed.

Personally I think one of the reasons for the enormous worldwide popularity of events such as the recently concluded World Youth Day in Cologne is the church's ability to confront the very narrow and limiting vision of the secular world with the truth that all of us have a relationship with God.

It seems that many, many young people all over the world responded to that Gospel message because there is a longing in each human heart, no matter how secular the society, for some enduring, meaningful relationship with the transcendent. Whatever operative pastoral plan or suggestions emerge for future orientation of the church's pastoral ministry, I respectfully suggest that it should include both renewal of our catechetical energies and an emphasis on the foundational mystery of Christ's enduring presence and action in the Eucharist.

Eucharistic Foot Washers

Bishop William Skylstad

We believe that the Eucharist is the supreme means by which we grow in holiness. In receiving the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, we come into communion with him, our Savior, the source of all holiness. We might be tempted to cling to this growth, to grasp it, to hold it close, as though it were meant only for us as individual believers. The profound truth is, this growth in holiness springs forth from the gift that is the Eucharist. And this growth compels us forward, outward, into the world. It compels us to grow in holiness, but just as important it compels us to serve others and bring to them this new life of holiness. At the end of Mass we are sent forth: *Ite missa est*.

The biblical basis for this is found in John's Gospel. We remember the scene: Jesus washes the feet of his disciples. As he does so, Jesus says to them, "You call me teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him" (Jn. 13:13-15).

Through words, through actions, Jesus teaches his disciples a profound truth: Since they are in communion with him in this Passover supper, then they too, like him, are sent forth to serve that unity that exists among the whole of humankind. We are sent forth to serve. We are sent forth to wash the feet of women and men throughout the world. How are we to do this? I would like to make three suggestions.

First, we are disciples. We are men and women of the Gospel, in communion with Jesus. Just as Jesus was sent forth by the Father to bring the Gospel of salvation to the whole world, so we too are to be servants of that same Gospel, bearing witness to it in word and deed. The Eucharist is always the wellspring of our evangelization. Through the Eucharist we are empowered to share Christ's love with the entire world. God's love for the world and our love for the world have never diminished. We must recognize that the Eucharist is the source of our zeal for spreading the Gospel. Through our communion with Christ we come to share in his very own zeal for the salvation of all.

By sharing in Christ's love for the world, we are compelled to wash the feet of the nonbeliever in the sanctifying waters of the Gospel. The command is the same for us today as it was for the first disciples: Every country in every continent needs to hear anew the saving Gospel of Christ. Jesus gave us the example. We Catholics are commissioned by our Eucharist to kneel humbly at the feet of every human person. There we offer to wash his feet in the life-giving waters of the Gospel.

Second, the Eucharist compels us to reach out to all the world. In a similar way the Eucharist demands that the needs of the poor, the vulnerable and the marginalized must be ever near the hearts of us disciples. This call is more demanding today as we witness the desperate needs of our brothers and sisters in Third World countries. To address these needs, Catholics in the First World will need to sacrifice their own material well-being. And by doing so we share in the eucharistic sacrifice of Jesus himself, who gave his very life that we might live. If we would give life to others, we Catholics must die to ourselves, in union with Christ. We are called to wash, literally, the physical feet of our brothers and sisters.

Third, to participate in the Eucharist is to be reconciled to the Father and reconciled to one another. Christ sends us forth to be instruments of reconciliation and peace in a world that is consumed by hatred, violence and war. Such enmity exists within families, between races and religions, between nations. As Christians we believe that lasting peace and reconciliation can be obtained. But they can be obtained only when we forgive one another as the Father has forgiven us in Christ, as we are united in the Spirit of love. Through Christ's Gospel of reconciliation and peace we are to strive to wash away such hostility from the feet of those who oppose one another and anoint them with the healing oil of the Holy Spirit.

In his words and his actions Christ has revealed to us the very heart of Eucharist. At the very heart is mission: through evangelization, through care for the poor, through the ministry of reconciliation and peace. In the Eucharist Jesus continues to wash our feet. With him we continue to wash the feet of our brothers and sisters - in our own communities and around the earth. This is his example. This is his gift. And this is our mission.