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THE EUCHARIST SUMMIT OF OUR CHRISTIAN LIFE
AND SOURCE OF ALL OUR HOPE

Introduction

The word Eucharist means Thanksgiving. We will do well to start on the note of giving thanks to God Almighty for making this Congress in Budapest possible.

This conference was supposed to have taken place last year 2020 but had to be postponed until now because of the covid-19 pandemic. In everything, we must thank God and we thank God even for the covid-19. For those who have ears to hear, God certainly has been talking to us through this pandemic. The most important message is that we all belong together. The core of the Eucharistic message is the love of God for all humanity. From this point of view there is an eminently Eucharistic component to the global experience of covid-19. We pray that God will liberate us from the pandemic without too much delay, while we pray for the souls of the many thousands, perhaps even millions, who have died. May their souls rest in peace.

Still on the note of Thanksgiving, all of us who are here should thank God that we have been able to be here for this great celebration. We cannot forget that there are many people who would have wanted to be here and have been kept away for various reasons, including the restrictions on traveling that are still operating in many places as a result of the pandemic. Those of us who are here therefore must thank God because he has called us here to pray for our world, with all the problems that the human family is facing today, most of them man made but also sometimes natural. Whatever the cause of these problems we can take the opportunity of the Eucharistic Congress to pray to God to have mercy on his people.

Finally on a more personal note I really want to thank God, and the organizers of this great occasion, that I have yet again another opportu-

nity not only to be present at an international Eucharistic Congress but also to have the honor of being asked to conduct this catechesis. I still remember a similar honor given to me at the last international Eucharistic Congress in Cebu, in 2016, in the Philippines. I pray that the Holy Spirit guides what I have to share with the audience of this congress, both those who are here in person and the many more millions out there all over the world who are linked up with us by modern means of social communication.

1. My Task

Many other people have been given the honor of conducting catechesis at this Congress on various topics about the mystery of the Holy Eucharist. My own task is to share some reflections with you on a particular dimension of the doctrine of the Holy Eucharist, according to the theme assigned to me, namely: “The Eucharist, summit of our Christian life and source of all our hope”. Both parts of this theme are quite interconnected.

I will draw my reflection from some of the most recent teachings of the church. In particular I will make good use of three main sources of church doctrine.

- The first is the compilation of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, which took place in 1962-65.
- The second is the Catechism of the Catholic Church, published in 1992.
- And the third is the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* of Pope Benedict XVI, published in 2007, as the fruit of the Synod of Bishops on the Holy Eucharist that was celebrated in the year 2005.

These documents have put together, summarized, very adequately and updated the ever constant main outlines of the doctrine of the Church on the Holy Eucharist. To put my reflection in order, I have borrowed the broad outlines of the Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*. Here, the Holy Eucharist is treated under three dimensions, namely:

- the Eucharist, a mystery to believe,
- a mystery to celebrate
- and a mystery to live by.

From this three dimensional approach, I will try to draw out a summary of the teachings that relate to the two points assigned to me in this catechesis, namely the Eucharist as summit of Christian life and as source of all our hope.

There is another triple dimension that I will keep in mind during this discussion, namely the Eucharist as real presence, as sacrifice and as Communion. This will be integrated into our reflection along with the already mentioned triple dimension of the Eucharist as a mystery to believe, a mystery to celebrate and a mystery to live by.

This is a catechesis, a teaching and instruction session about the doctrine of the Church. It is not a theological discourse. Therefore, my language will be largely simple and conversational. I will be talking about things that we all already know. This congress is an opportunity to remind us of what the Church has been teaching us from the beginning. May the Holy Spirit, which the Lord has sent to us to teach us all things, open our hearts to receive the whole truth about the love of God in the Holy Eucharist. Amen.

2. The Eucharist: The Mystery of Faith

In its origin, the word sacrament has very close link with the concept of mystery. Thus, the Eucharist, as a sacrament, is a mystery of faith. It is the sacrament par excellence, the sacrament of all sacraments, the mystery of all mysteries. When we speak of the sacrament of the Eucharist as a mystery, we are stressing the fact that in this sacrament, we see God working in our human existence. This work of God is what the early Church called mystery. Modern-day usage tends to stress the meaning of mystery as something hidden and not intelligible. But sacrament as mystery, even though there is an element of what we cannot understand, that is the mysterious, more importantly we stress the fact that in the Eucharist the action of God goes beyond our comprehension. His ways are not our ways. We have to keep this in mind in all that we shall be saying in this conversation.

I will open this conversation with a beautiful text from the Vatican Council II Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* art. 47, which gives us a very concise and comprehensive description of the doctrine of the Church on the Holy Eucharist.

“At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Saviour instituted the eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the ages 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, a paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us” (SC 47).

3. The Eucharist, a Mystery to Believe

First and foremost, the Eucharist is an object of our faith. We can only get to know anything about the sacrament if we are ready to submit our mind, will and heart to whatever the revelation of God has made known to us about his action of love for us in this sacrament.

A significant aspect of this mystery to believe is the fact that in the Eucharist we have the real presence of God in our midst. Of course, God is always present with us every time and everywhere. Jesus Christ, the Son of God made Man, is the physical visible historical presence of God in our world. This is the basis of the real presence of God in Christ in the Holy Eucharist. We are also reminded of at least three levels of the real presence of God in the Holy Eucharist:

- First and foremost of course is the presence of Jesus in his church and among his people. Jesus is the head of the mystical body of Christ whose members we all are. There is the presence of Jesus in the community of those who believe in him. Already he told us in the Gospels: “where two or three are gathered there I am in their midst” (Mt 18:20). Therefore especially during worship, Jesus the Son of God is present in the community, the Chief celebrant at every liturgy.
- Secondly, from among the community some are chosen and ordained as ministers of the sacraments to celebrate the Eucharist in the person of Christ, “in persona Christi”. Thus, it can be said that Jesus is present in the minister that we see officiating on the altar.
- Finally and in a more technical sense we speak of the real presence of Jesus in the eucharistic material elements of bread and wine. This is the aspect of the real presence that deserves to be particularly highlighted.

It all started at the Last Supper when Jesus took bread and broke it and gave it to his disciples saying: “This is my body” (Mt 26:26). He did the same thing when he took the chalice filled with wine and said: “This is my blood”. The church has always derived from this powerful statement of Jesus Christ the doctrine that in the bread and wine that has been consecrated during Holy Mass Jesus Christ is fully present in these material elements. Already in his earthly life, Jesus Christ once stated “Unless you eat the flesh the Son of Man and drink his blood you will not have life in you” (Jn 6:52). This statement was found completely impossible to grasp by his audience. But he further stated: “My flesh is food indeed and my blood is indeed a drink” (Jn 6:51), a profound doctrine difficult to accept. The apostles must have been reminded of these difficult words of Jesus when at the Last Supper he said the words to which we referred earlier: “This is my body” and “This is my blood”.

It is significant that Jesus celebrated this unusual ritual in the context of the Paschal Meal of the Jewish faith. He referred to a New and Eternal Covenant which replaced the Old Testament covenant that was celebrated during the Passover. We note that the Passover meal involved eating the flesh of a lamb that had been sacrificed for the purpose. The New Covenant was being established in the body and blood of Jesus, the Son of God, and not in the flesh and blood of an animal. The Letter to the Hebrews has a lot to say about this infinitely unequal comparison, of how much more excellent the body and blood of Christ is than the sacrifices of the Old Testament which were done with animals like bulls and goats (Heb 9:13-14).

Jesus also told his apostles: “Do this in memory of me”. By that statement and that command Jesus gave his apostles the spiritual power to do exactly what he had done. This ritual brings about the real presence of Jesus in the bread and wine that is consecrated on the altar, simply by repeating the word of Jesus: “This is my body; this is my blood”. The early Church took this matter very seriously. The Eucharistic ritual had different names but the most common was “The breaking of Bread”.

Because Jesus is truly present in the Eucharistic elements, it is not only to be eaten but also to be adored. Jesus is eminently present during the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. But the real presence of Jesus does not leave the Eucharistic elements after Mass. For as long as the mate-

rials of the elements are there, so also is the whole Body and Blood of Christ. This is the theological basis for the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, a holy practice with which we are all very familiar. It is also the reason why we treat the sacred species with great devotion, care and attention.

This is the Catholic faith given to us, by the grace of God who has freely given this faith as a gift to us. We know that there are some Christians who do not share the full faith in the real presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, even though many take seriously the memorial celebration of the Last Supper of Jesus.

It is also the doctrine of the church that only a validly ordained priest can consecrate the Holy Eucharist, because only a validly ordained priest can act in the person of Christ, “in persona Christi”. This means that ministers of other Christian denominations whose priestly ordination validity is not acknowledged by our Church, cannot validly consecrate the Holy Eucharist, even if they go correctly through all the motions and rituals. We also know that there are many Christians of other denominations who individually have the faith in the real presence of Jesus in the holy Eucharist. But this is more than a matter for individual personal conviction. It must be the faith of the Church. Some have actually decided to become Catholics because of this.

In this area, we share the same faith with our Orthodox brothers, because they have retained the old doctrines of the church from the early fathers and maintained a valid priesthood from the beginning until now. However, unfortunate disagreements in the course of history between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church for a long time negatively affected our sharing in Holy Communion. We thank God that there has been a recent rapprochement between the two sister churches, as a result of the final lifting of the historic mutual excommunications between them. This is thanks to the meeting between Pope Paul VI and the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras in 1965 in Jerusalem. From then on we thank God we are now able to open up to concelebrate and share the Holy Eucharist, under certain conditions, taking advantage of the faith that we share in the real presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

The real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist has implications not only for us who believe it and celebrate it. What become the Body and Blood

of Christ are “fruits of the earth, and work of human hands”. In some way, the entire creation is elevated by the fact these created objects, placed on the altar, by the invocation of the Holy Spirit, are turned into the body and blood of Christ. Catholic doctrine has a technical word for this process of change from ordinary bread to the body of Christ, and from wine to the blood of Christ. The Council of Trent called the process “transubstantiation”. This expresses the fact that the substance of the bread has become the substance of the Body of Christ just as the substance of the wine turns into the substance of the Blood of Christ. We should note that the presence of Christ is the presence of the whole Jesus, human and Divine and he is fully present in each of the two species of bread and wine.

4. Mystery to celebrate

We are all familiar with the celebration of the Holy Eucharist in the Holy Mass. This has practically become the distinguishing act of our Catholic worship. It is the summit and the apex of our liturgy as it was clearly taught in the Second Vatican Council Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*, 11). This celebration again goes back to the Last Supper, when Jesus shared bread and wine with his disciples. He declared that the bread and wine had become his Body and his Blood and gave them the command: “Do this in memory of me”.

The celebration of the Last Supper itself, as we have noted earlier, is in the context of the Paschal meal of the Israelite Faith, the Paschal Meal that was a commemoration of what we read about in the book of Exodus at the liberation of the people of Israel from the slavery of Egypt. They had a meal of a lamb that was slaughtered and shared in the family. This became an annual celebration in remembrance of the wonderful deeds of the Almighty God, the God of Israel, “passing over” the people of Israel during the plague that destroyed the firstborn of the Egyptians. This Passover festival was the most important religious celebration of ancient Israel. At the Last Supper, Jesus moved from the Passover meal of the Old Testament to the Eucharist of the New and Eternal covenant, from the Pascal lamb to the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. There is thus a movement from the Old Testament covenant,

established on Mount Sinai to the New Testament in the Blood of Christ on Mount Calvary.

We also note that the Eucharistic table of the Last Supper was a preparation for what happened later on the on the Cross of Calvary. This is why the Eucharist is not only a meal but also the memorial of the sacrifice of Christ that far outweighs the sacrifice of the lamb of the Old Testament. The celebration of the Eucharist therefore brings to us the Paschal Mystery, the mystery of the Passion Death and Resurrection of Christ, for our redemption, with the forgiveness of sins. St. Paul was very clear about this in his epistle to the Corinthians when speaking about the Eucharist. As often as we celebrate the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the blood of Christ, we are celebrating the redemptive act of Christ until he comes again (1 Cor 11:25-26). The church takes very seriously the actual celebration of the mystery of the Eucharist. It is the apex of the liturgical worship of the Church.

The form of the core of the celebration has remained the same from the beginning, everywhere down through the ages until now. It is the same celebration in its major elements, even though with the passage of time and with the expansion of the Christian community to different cultures, it has taken different forms. Thus, although we now have the celebration of the Eucharist according to a variety of rites, nevertheless the core of the Eucharist remains the same. By the same token, even today, while maintaining the core of the Eucharistic celebration, the Church encourages the adaptation of the celebration according to the diversities of culture and time. Thus, the Eucharistic celebration has become a very important object of the much-talked-about inculturation of the liturgy. But we should not forget that whatever we do with inculturation, it should not be simply or primarily to promote our culture, even though this is also very important. Rather, the primary objective is to ensure that the core of the message and the meaning of the Eucharist can be brought home more clearly to people of different cultures and times. The first visible aspect of the inculturation of the liturgy is precisely the language of the liturgy. Catholics of my own generation would still remember the change from Mass in Latin to Mass in the vernacular, and the great impact it made because people were able to

understand the liturgy better when it was celebrated in their own language.

The celebration of the Eucharist is the reenactment of what Jesus carried out at the Last Supper. When we gather around the table of the Eucharistic celebration it is Jesus that is celebrating the Eucharist. The priest is a human minister who celebrates in the person of Christ, provided he is validly ordained and properly commissioned to do it. But beyond the priest, the entire congregation also joins in celebrating the Eucharist, since the Eucharist is celebrated by the whole Christ, both in the Head and in its members. This is why the Second Vatican Council insists on the active participation of all those who are present at Mass. We do not go to Mass to watch a show as spectators. We go to mass to participate in a sacred action, in which the Eucharistic meal of Jesus at the Last Supper is re-enacted, fully and completely.

There are of course many kinds of celebrations of the Eucharist. Some are very simple, while others can be quite elaborate. Some are celebrated with a few people, while others are with large crowds. We have also cases of the special occasions like for example during this Eucharistic Congress or other similar occasions. Whatever the situation, the Eucharist is always the same; none is greater than the other.

Similarly it doesn't matter who is the minister. Whether he is the pope, a bishop or a newly ordained priest, it is Jesus that is celebrating. We should therefore beware of allowing any kind of discrimination among priests as ministers of the Eucharist. In some parts of the world we often hear about some priests who claim or are claimed to have special powers and whose Holy Mass is considered more powerful than others, not without some pecuniary implications for the devout but gullible faithful. All of this has nothing to do with our Catholic faith. Every Holy Mass has infinite value before God. This is why indeed whoever is saying Mass must observe the same ritual, especially in its core elements of the Eucharistic Prayer. The Catholic liturgy has no room for extravagant theatricals and creative performance often bordering on vulgar entertainment not worthy of Christian worship.

The celebration of the Holy Eucharist is in two parts; the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Sacrament, both of which form one single liturgical celebration. *Dei Verbum*, the Vatican II document on

Divine Revelation, stresses the unity of both parts. It teaches that the Eucharistic altar is ONE table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ, both of which are spiritual nourishment for the faithful who participate at the Eucharistic celebration (*Dei Verbum*, 21). The reading of the scriptures during Eucharistic celebrations is already the presence of God Himself in his saving Word.

5. The mystery to live by

In the Holy Eucharist, we have an intimate union with Jesus Christ the son of God the Father through the action of the Holy Spirit. In other words, we have an intimate union with the Holy Trinity. Through the Holy Eucharist, God not only comes to us but God lives in us and we in him. That is why St. Paul was able to declare: “I now live, not I but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). If through the Holy Eucharist, we attain this deep intimate union with Christ, then it follows that: “Whatever we do, we do it in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 10:31). The Eucharist is thus the Summit of our Christian life. We are in God not only as individuals but also as the community. God is in the community and the community is with God.

This intimate union between us and God is effected especially by Holy Communion, the reception of the Body and Blood of Jesus under the forms of bread and wine. Normally the reception of Holy Communion is essential for full participation in the liturgy of the Holy Eucharist. Where we participate in the Holy Eucharist, we should also receive the Holy Communion. Not to do so would be like attending a banquet without eating or drinking anything.

However this is not without condition, which we should all know very well. It is usually said that we go to Communion if we are in a state of Grace. But before that, we must also be a full member of the Catholic Church, baptized and normally also confirmed.

St. Paul already warned us not to eat and drink the Eucharist unworthily, because to do so would be to eat damnation unto ourselves (1 Cor 11:19) That warning should be taken very seriously. That is why we begin the celebration of Mass with a penitential rite in which we are given some little time to examine our conscience and then pray earnestly for forgiveness of our sins. Similarly, at the actual time of receiving

communion, the Sacred Host is shown to us, with the words: “Behold the Lamb of God. Behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those who are called to the supper of the lamb.” To this solemn announcement, we reply: “Oh God, I’m not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.”

From this, we can say first and foremost that strictly speaking nobody is worthy to receive the Holy Communion. We are all sinners before God. That is why when, at the beginning of Mass, we recite the Confiteor; “I confess to almighty God”, we must do it sincerely. It is not just a formality. So also, when we say before Communion, “Oh Lord I’m not worthy”, we must say it sincerely because we are really not worthy. St. John told us if we say we have no sin, we are lying and deceiving ourselves (1 Jn 1:8). Rather we should thank God for admitting us into union with himself, and making us worthy to celebrate the Eucharist with him, through his mercy.

It is part of the Catholic doctrine that actually the Holy Eucharist is also medicinal, as it cleanses us of venial sins and also protects us against serious mortal sins. Having said that, it is still the doctrine of the Church that anyone who knows himself or herself to be in a state of serious sin which distances him from the love of God should not move forward to receive the Holy Communion. He must first avail himself of the sacrament of reconciliation with God through confession. The doctrine of the church on this has not changed. But unfortunately, what we see is a general stream of people going for communion at mass without really bothering whether they are in the right spiritual state to receive it. It is the duty of pastors to remind the faithful about this, without introducing unnecessary exaggerations in the matter. It is also the duty of pastors to make access to confession easily available for the faithful. It is true that only God knows who is in a state of sin and who is in a state of Grace. However, since the reception of Holy Communion is also an external act of the Church, it is within the competence of the church to put down laws and rules to regulate who, because of their external disposition, should not be admitted to the Holy Eucharist. This is why we have situations where people are simply told: “Don’t come for Communion until you have changed your status.” Such admonition is best done in the general catechesis of the faithful, so that those who know themselves to be in

irregular situation, will regulate their behavior without waiting to be publicly pulled out of the communion rails.

The most common instance is with regard to marriage status. Considered by Church law as irregular and therefore should keep away from Holy Communion are for example, those who are living together in open, or even secret concubinage, without the sacrament of matrimony and those who have married, divorced and remarried without going through the process of canonical annulment. All such people, even though they may feel in their heart of hearts that they are at peace with God, are not supposed to come for communion. The Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis *Amoris Laetitia*, has very wonderful things to say about such circumstances. While recognizing the fact that only God judges the heart, he still insists that there are some objective situations over which the church can and must pass judgement and make rules and regulations. Otherwise it would mean that anybody who wants can come forward and receive the Holy Communion. This would be utter disorder that cannot be allowed in the Church of God (1 Cor 14:32-33, 40).

But we should realize that it is not only matters of irregular marriage that can make a Catholic not fit to receive communion. Anybody who is in a stable immoral way of life should decide to keep away until he can change his situation. Here we can cite as example those who are making money by immoral means. For as long as they are making a living in this way, they must keep away from Communion until they can change their way of life.

A recent situation that has generated a lot of discussion has to do with the responsibility of Catholic politicians to uphold the laws of the church in their political choices and decisions, especially with regard to the serious sin of abortion. Unfortunately, serious though the sin of abortion is, it has become generally legalized and considered as normal in many places, especially in the so-called “developed” nations. But nevertheless, the position of the Catholic Church resolutely insisting that abortion is “The Killing of Innocent Unborn Children” continues to hold. Any Catholic who commits abortion or who cooperates in the committing of abortion, should know that he has committed murder and should keep away from Holy Communion, unless and until he has gone for confession. That is what the moral law says. But like everything moral,

there is always the area of personal responsibility. Sometimes people have found themselves in a situation of abortion in a way that it may not be their fault. In fact they could even be victims of circumstances. God will judge that. While the Church will take note of such circumstances, we cannot keep making exceptions for the moral law.

More delicate and problematic is whether a Catholic politician must always necessarily vote against any law that is permitting abortion or any immoral action. The important issue here is that very often once it comes into the arena of party politics it is necessary that the Church be careful not to drag the Holy Eucharist into political wrangling, lest more damage is done than we try to avoid. The basic problem is that while we hold strongly to our moral principles, we live in a world where there are others who do not share those principles. Provided nobody forces us to go against our moral principles, we may at times be forced to take note of the fact that others see things differently. In these matters, our experience living with Muslims insisting on the Sharia law has taught us useful lessons on how not to impose the religious laws of a faith community in a multi-religious nation.

As a bishop, I will try my best to encourage my Catholic politicians to always stand out clearly and oppose any law that is against the law of God. The law of God, according to Catholic doctrine, is valid for everybody, not only for Catholics. St. Paul has made clear reference to this when he speaks of the law of God in the heart of every person (Rom 1:19-20). It is the duty of the Catholic politician to do his best to uphold good moral principles, even in the public domain. If for political reasons, he is unable to stop an immoral law, he should at least be on record as having opposed it.

There is a debate going on in some countries whether a politician who for political reasons votes for an immoral law should be stopped from Holy communion. If voting for an immoral law, even in a secular state, amounts to becoming an accomplice to the crime, then we would be dealing with a moral decision that is incompatible with receiving holy communion. But from a pastoral point of view, it is not so clear whether if such a person actually presents himself, we should publicly refuse to give him communion, thereby causing a major uproar and scandal. Both

St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas propose caution in handling such cases.

Therefore, the bottom line is this; we should check ourselves before we go for Communion. Otherwise, instead of receiving Jesus in our hearts we may eat damnation unto ourselves. This has to be preached in season and out of season. Whatever our condition, there is always a way back to repentance. This in fact, is one of the great merits of the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. When a Catholic is anxious to be a regular communicant, he will try his best to put himself in a situation whereby he can worthily and properly receive it. It does not mean that we will never go astray. But it means that whenever we go astray, we will find our way back as soon as possible through the sacrament of reconciliation in confession.

The word “communion” denotes that we are together. Another English word for it is “fellowship”, which in the old Greek is “koinonia”. Communion entails that we are together. It demands of us a sense of solidarity and sharing. Just as we share the same bread and the same cup of wine around the altar rails, so we must also be prepared to share our material bread and drink with our fellow brothers and sisters. It is not only the Bread of Heaven that we share. We should also share the bread of this earth. Therefore, in the world of today, where a few people are over eating and large numbers are dying of hunger, such should not be found among Catholics who receive Communion in the same church. The reception of communion challenges us to reach out to all those with whom we share the same bread and the same wine. We already heard about this kind of problem even in the letter of Saint Paul, how in his days, in the celebration of the Eucharist, the rich people brought their own meals, lavish meals, while the poor people were managing with very meager food, or even left in hunger. Saint Paul says this should not happen. (1 Cor 11:18-22, see also Jas 2:1-9).

Talking of communion and the importance of it in our life, we cannot forget that those of us who actually receive Communion compared to the population of humanity, are still a small minority. We should therefore not forget to think of the following categories of people who cannot receive communion for various reasons.

- We should think of Catholics who cannot receive Communion because there are no priests to celebrate the Eucharist. Many places have to make do with service without a priest. Such communities can still be eminently Eucharistic if they keep in mind the desire to receive Communion and wait patiently for when a priest will come around. We who are in the mission countries are quite familiar with this scenario where distant villages may be able to receive a priest only once in one month or twice a year. But experience has shown that such people can still be eminently Eucharistic in their spirituality and in their way of life.
- There are of course Catholics who cannot receive Communion because of the reasons already mentioned, namely moral or canonical irregularity. We should not disown or excommunicate them. They deserve pastoral attention and encouragement. Pope Francis has a lot to say about this in his carefully worded Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, especially nos. 196-301. The passage deserves careful study and reflection.
- But sometimes we have a situation of many people who, without any impediment, come to mass without serious devotion and don't bother about receiving communion. They should be encouraged to make their participation in the Holy Mass complete by receiving Holy Communion.
- Worst still are the many Catholics who should be attending Mass on Sunday and receiving Communion but spend the time shopping, strolling through the streets or swimming on the beach. This Eucharistic Congress is an opportunity to challenge ourselves and our fellow Catholics that the Eucharist is important. The early Church History tells us about the martyrs of North Africa who went to their martyrdom because they refused to stay away from Sunday Mass as was demanded of them. They said: "Without the Sunday Mass, we cannot live". It is a pity that many Catholics today don't even miss the fact that they are not attending Mass.
- We must also think about the rest of the world who have no direct access to the Holy Eucharist. They are not to be excluded from the grace of the sacrament.

- There are the large numbers of other Christians who are not Catholics, with whom we are not in full Communion. They however have some faith in the Holy Eucharist, and celebrate the Lord's Supper at least as a memorial of Christ's redeeming sacrifice on Calvary.
- Then there are the billions of people in the world who are not Christians, who simply have no idea of the Eucharist or are not interested in it.

I believe that we should not forget these people when we walk up to the altar and receive the great gift of the Holy Eucharist. We must know that this demands that we pray for all men and women. After all, the Blood of Christ "was shed for us and for many". Some texts even say "for us and for all", for the forgiveness of sins. Our prayer for all humanity through the Eucharist is our precious contribution to the healing of our world. We do not know how far our prayers will go. Only God himself can know that. It is therefore quite appropriate that during holy mass, we have the prayer of the faithful, when we pray not only for ourselves, for our Church and for the ministers and leaders of the Church. We also pray for the entire humanity and the needs of the human race. That is as it should be, because the Eucharist is the presence of God in our world.

Conclusion

The Eucharist is the summit of our Christian life, of our life in Christ. It makes us one with Christ. We should love him and keep his commandments and follow his own example of living in union with his Father. It is a matter of our intimate union with Christ at the Eucharistic celebration. That is why it is the summit of our life. In the Eucharist we become one with Christ at the highest level and that is why the Eucharist affects every aspect of our lives, if we celebrate it worthily and receive it in the right way.

Finally, the Eucharist is the source of all our hope. The hope of the Christian is both for this world and for the world to come. For this world, it is the hope of the Christian to live in accordance with God's will. The Eucharist helps us to do this. Through the Eucharist we can hope to have a measure of success in our pursuit of holiness. In this present world that is so hopeless we have so much need for the Eucharist to give us hope in

the world and to assure our humanity that God has not abandoned his world. The fact that Christ constantly comes into this world daily in the celebration of the Eucharist all over the world and at every moment every second of every day is a great sign that God’s love continues to bless his world.

The hope of the Christian goes beyond this world. The Christian hopes for the world to come. The Eucharist is called “a heavenly banquet”, it is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. As the priest shows the Communion before we receive it, he announces: “Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world; blessed are those who are called to the supper of the lamb”. This supper of the lamb will take place in the world to come, out there in paradise, our final home. Therefore the Eucharist is the foretaste of our eternal life with God. A very particular expression of this is the idea of the Viaticum, namely the Holy Communion given to the sick, especially at the point of death. In such occasions, the Holy Communion is received as food for the journey on our way to heaven. It is not only when we are about to die that the Eucharist nourishes us and strengthens us on our way to heaven. All along, every day of our lives as we celebrate the Eucharist and receive the Holy Eucharist, we are preparing for the world to come. Did Jesus not tell us at his Last Supper that we should celebrate this Eucharist until he comes again? Nourished daily as we journey through this earth, may the Holy Eucharist give us the spiritual energy to land safely at our heavenly destination, to live for ever with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I wish to conclude with the first and last stanzas of the famous Eucharistic hymn of St. Thomas Aquinas:

*Adoro te devote, latens Deitas,
Quae sub his figuris vere latitas,
Tibi se cor meum totum subjicit,
Quia Te contemplans totum deficit.*

*Jesu quem velatum nunc aspicio,
Oro fiat illud quod tam sitio:
Ut Te revelata cernens facie,
Visu sim beatus tuae gloriae. Amen.*