

**RENEWAL  
THROUGH  
THE  
EUCHARIST**

**UKRAINIAN MILLENNIUM**

**Rev. Michael Hrynychyn, CSSR.**

**MILLENNIUM SERIES #3**



***RENEWAL  
THROUGH THE  
EUCCHARIST***

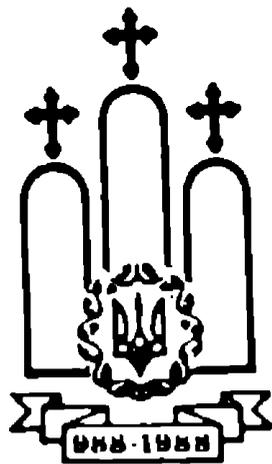
***Michael Hrynychshyn, CSSR.***

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# CONTENTS

Dear Reader

I. The Importance of the Liturgy .....	5
II. Do This in Memory of Me .....	7
III. In Behalf of All .....	18
IV. The Eucharist: A Paschal Banquet .....	23
V. Eucharist: A Sacrament of Love .....	27
VI. The Eucharist: Sign of Unity .....	31
VII. The Eucharist: Mystery of Faith .....	35
VIII. The Eucharist—The Pope—The Ukrainian Church .....	41
IX. Eucharist: The Heart of Christian Life .....	46
X. Metropolitan Sheptytsky and Frequent Communion .....	51
XI. The Bread of Life .....	55
XII. The Ukrainian Millennium .....	59
XIII. Prayers for Holy Communion .....	61



Dear Reader:

“After He had come and accomplished for us all that was appointed, on the night that He was betrayed or rather gave Himself up for the life of the world, He took bread into His holy, all-pure and immaculate hands and blessed, gave thanks, sanctified and broke it, He gave it to His holy disciples and apostles, saying: Take, eat, this is My body . . . Drink of this all of you; this is My blood . . .”

When He was about to leave this world, Jesus wished to give us a gift. He gave us a gift by means of which He remains with us even though He returned to the Father. In this gift, the Lord Jesus gave us everything; He gave us Himself. There is nothing more that He could give us.

This gift comes to us through the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice. It is obvious then, why the celebration of the Eucharist has always been such a central and focal action for the Christian people. With reason the Eucharist is described as the source and centre of our spiritual lives.

Consequently, in the preparation for the Millennium Jubilee, if we are going to experience a spiritual renewal, the Liturgy and the Eucharist must be central in the entire program. No spiritual renewal is possible without a deepening of our love and appreciation of the Eucharist.

In this booklet, we offer a series of reflections on the Liturgy, and in particular, the Eucharist: “a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, and 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.” These articles first appeared in Redeemer’s Voice, the “Millennium of Faith” series during 1982. It is my hope and prayer that this booklet will contribute in some way to our spiritual life.

Michael Hrynchyshyn, C.Ss.R.  
Secretary General



# *The Importance of the Liturgy*



Spiritual renewal is the most important part of the preparation of the Ukrainian community for the 1988 Millennium celebrations. We are trying to achieve this renewal of the heart and spirit by concentrating on certain themes or aspects of our religious faith. The program has to be gradual, but persistent and persevering. The bishops have decided that in 1982 we should concentrate on liturgical renewal.

Through the liturgy we pay homage to God: we worship God, we adore God, we thank God, we ask his forgiveness, and we ask for his continued blessings and graces. The liturgy is our lifeline to God. Liturgy is life. God

communicates his life to us through the liturgy. No other single element of our spiritual life is as important as the liturgy. Obviously, then, liturgical renewal should be at the top of our list in the Millennium spiritual renewal program.

The primary goal of the Millennium celebrations—spiritual renewal—cannot be achieved without prayer. Spiritual rebirth is a blessing that only God can confer. And our Lord told us very simply: “Ask and you shall receive.” The liturgy is the Church at prayer. The liturgy is the Church exercising her most fundamental charge.

The Servant of God, Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky, issued in 1934 a pastoral letter, “On Liturgical Life.” The letter begins with these thoughts: “Participation in the liturgy is the most important source of supernatural life. In the life of an individual the supernatural bond that unites him with Christ flows especially from his prayer life. A person’s prayer life is the essential precondition for the reception of the sacraments (particularly the Holy Eucharist), since the sacraments are divinely-established sources of grace for the Christian soul. Similarly, in the individual’s social and community life, the bond that unites the soul with Christ’s church, and through the church with Christ himself, depends mainly on the person’s participation in the liturgy—the prayer of the church. It follows that participation in the liturgy is the main source of growth in the spiritual life.”

“Participation in the divine services (the liturgy) enables people to partake of the sacraments. The divine services raise the heart to God, occasion acts of theological virtues and support the personal prayer life of the individual. Indeed, we find something more in the divine services (the liturgy)—the sharing of the soul of man in the life of the church—the Body of Christ.”

Developing this thought further, the Servant of God writes: “Liturgical divine services, to a greater degree than ordinary good works, are the works of the church and vital functions of her life. The faithful are united through good works, since essentially, they are inspired by the love of God and neighbour. Through love the faithful become one body enlivened by the one Spirit. Yet in the liturgical divine services this mutual bond of the faithful among themselves is even more clearly expressed—this union of the church in the one Body.”

“It can be said that liturgical divine services are the external bond of that unity which brings all into the oneness of the Body. That bond unites all the good works of Christian living, that is, the entire Christian life. That external bond is, likewise, a symbol and a sign of the inner union. It constantly reminds the faithful of that union. It leads to that union and actually brings about the union. It follows that liturgical divine services are the primary and most important action in the life of the Church, for its unity and for the entire Christian life.”

These thoughts of the great metropolitan expressed almost half a century ago were a clear anticipation of Vatican II. The Council, of course, began its deliberations with a thorough discussion of the liturgy and the liturgical life of the church. The fathers of the Council were charged with developing a plan for the spiritual renewal of the church. The Constitution on the Liturgy begins with this declaration: “It is the goal of this most sacred Council to intensify the daily growth of Catholics in Christian living. . . Hence the Council has special reasons for judging it a duty to provide for the renewal and fostering of the liturgy.”

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The bishops addressed themselves to the most important aspect of the church’s life—the liturgy. The first document that the Council produced, and this, only after two sessions of reflection and discussion, was the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. The liturgy—the prayer of the church—is the very heart of the Mystical Body of Christ. To adore the Father is the first task of the church.

The second paragraph of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy opens with this statement: “For it is through the liturgy, especially the divine Eucharistic Sacrifice, that the work of our redemption is exercised.” A thousand years ago, the “work of redemption” was officially and unambiguously brought to Ukraine. Our oldest historical chronicle, “Povist Vremennykh Lit” (The Tale of Bygone Years), informs us that the Grand Prince of Kiev, Volodymyr the Great, ordained that the citizens of his capital city and the surrounding areas receive the gift of the sacrament of baptism in the Dnipro River on August 1, 988. Our fathers and forefathers visibly and tangibly entered the work of redemption. For a thousand years now, that work of redemption has been carried out in the hearts of subsequent generations of our people “through the liturgy, especially the divine Eucharistic Sacrifice.”

Rus-Ukraine received the Christian faith, and the exercise and manifestation of that faith, in the form of the Byzantine Rite. The Ukrainian people adopted and adapted the rite. Over the centuries Ukrainians have given to that rite their artistic talents, their musical gifts, their character and temperament, their forms of artistic expression, their native spirit.

Conversely, as with many other peoples of Eastern Europe, the divine liturgy and the whole Byzantine Rite, had a profound impact on the life and culture of Ukrainians. The liturgy had a beneficent influence on the soul of the people. It ennobled their hearts. It refined their culture and their spirit. It purified their sentiments and emotions. It placed them in touch and in tune with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and its values. After a thousand years of this mutual exchange the Ukrainian form of the Byzantine Rite has become a recognizable characteristic, a distinguishing mark and identifying element of this people. This very significant dimension of the liturgy is clearly expressed by the Council: "The liturgy is thus the outstanding means by which the faithful can express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church. It is of the essence of the Church that she be both human and divine, visible and yet invisibly endowed . . ."(#2).

The Church is neither a purely divine entity nor a merely human association. It is a comingling of the divine and human. It is a continuation of Christ in time and in space. It is God's action incarnated and expressed in people. For this reason, "the liturgy is the outstanding means by which the faithful can express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church."

Making its own St. Augustine's thought, the Council teaches: "For it was from the side of Christ as He slept the sleep of death upon the Cross that there came forth the wondrous sacrament which is the whole Church"(#5). The Church is the sacrament—the visible sign—of Christ. It expresses and reflects Christ. The Church was born when Christ died. His sleep of death gave birth to the Body which is the Church. "His purpose was that they might exercise the work of salvation . . . by means of sacrifice and sacraments, around which the entire liturgical life revolves"(#6).

"To accomplish so great a work, Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations . . . especially under the Eucharistic species . . . He is present, finally, when the Church prays and sings, for He promised: 'Where two or three are gathered together for My sake, there I am in the midst of them' (Mt. 18:20), (#7). The work of redemption and salvation that Christ the Redeemer accomplished must endure till the end of time. The Church perpetuates this work and makes

Christ the Saviour visible. The Redeeming Christ is present in everything the Church does, but especially in the liturgical celebrations.

“It follows that every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ, the priest and of His Body the Church, is a sacred sign surpassing all others. No other action of the Church can match its claim to efficacy, nor equal the degree of it. . .”(#7). “The sacred liturgy does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church. Before men can come to the liturgy they must be called to faith and to conversion. . . Therefore the Church announces the good tidings of salvation to those who do not believe. . .”(#9).

“Nevertheless the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fountain from which all her power flows. For the goal of apostolic works is that all who are made sons of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of His Church, to take part in her sacrifice, and to eat the Lord’s supper”(#10).

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***“For a thousand years now, that work of redemption has been carried out in the hearts of subsequent generations of our people ‘through the liturgy, especially the divine Eucharistic Sacrifice.’ ”***

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A thousand years ago, our fathers and forefathers “were made sons of God by faith and baptism.” They “came together to praise God” and we do the same thing. Through the liturgy—the same liturgy that they celebrated—we are united with our fathers and forefathers in our praise to God.



# Do This in Memory of Me



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*“When the Eucharistic Sacrifice is celebrated we fulfil Christ’s wish: ‘Do this in memory of me.’ ”*

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“At the Last Supper, on the night when He was betrayed, our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of His body and blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again, and so to entrust to His beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of His death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us” (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #47).

With these rich and meaningful words Vatican II begins the second chapter of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, which bears the title: “The Most Sacred Mystery Of The Eucharist.” This richest of divine

gifts, which contains Christ himself, is so many different things: a memorial, a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity. . . Each of these titles is a vital dimension of the mystery of the Eucharist. And each of these aspects of the Eucharist has a profound impact on the church, its life and activity. The Eucharist nourishes the People of God, it unites them, it is the spiritual cement of the Body of Christ. Primarily, however, it is a memorial of Christ's death and resurrection. When the Eucharistic Sacrifice is celebrated we fulfil Christ's wish: **"Do this in memory of me."**

When the Divine Liturgy is celebrated in the Byzantine Rite, immediately after the words of consecration the priest prays: **"Remembering, therefore, this saving command, and all that was done for us: the cross, the tomb, the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven, the sitting at the right hand (of the Father), the second and glorious coming: We offer you your own from what is your own in behalf of all and for all."**

This important prayer is called the **anamnesis**. Anamnesis is a Greek word which means to call to mind, a remembering, a memorial. At the Last Supper, after Jesus changed the bread and wine into his body and blood, he added: "Do this in memory of me." The anamnesis prayer makes explicit reference to this expressed will of Christ to be remembered. The prayer begins by recalling that wish: **"Remembering, therefore, this saving command (of Christ). . ."** Then it enumerates, recalls to mind and remembers the most important salvific things Christ did for us: his death, resurrection and ascension into heaven.

A remembrance or commemoration, to be genuine, is linked with action of some kind. A true remembrance has to be expressed in action. So even before the liturgy proper begins, when the priest undertakes to prepare the gifts for the Eucharistic offering, he takes the bread, and with the liturgical lance traces the sign of the cross on the bread while saying: **"In memory of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ."** Three times he traces the sign of the cross on the bread and three times he repeats: "In memory of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Later, when the words of consecration have been pronounced, the very words that Jesus used to change the bread and wine into his body and blood, when the remembrance of Christ is real and actual through his personal presence on the altar, we make reference to his wish to be remembered: "Remembering, therefore, this saving command. . ." The anamnesis prayer concludes with the words: **"We offer you your own from what is your own in behalf of all and for all."** As he says these words the priest sets his hands in the form of a cross, at the same time raising the chalice with one hand and the discus with the other. Thus he

expresses in gesture and sign the meaning of the words: renewing the sacrifice of the cross and offering the gifts as a memorial for the graces of redemption.

To remember is a magnificent capacity of our nature. It is good to remember. Remembering is important. Without memory we would be incapable of learning from the past. With it we can build on the past and redeem the future. Without memory we become creatures without depth or quality. He who loses his memory loses himself. Without memory life becomes meaningless. The loss of one's memory is a terrible disease—amnesia. Those are pitiful creatures who suffer from this disease. It is impossible to carry on a meaningful human relationship with people who have lost the use of their memory.

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***“Tradition is the passing on of true and authentic past. Tradition is cultivating the past by making it present and alive. Tradition is live remembering.”***

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Memory is a most precious possession—particularly if our memories are pleasant. We erect monuments in order to preserve memory. That is why headstones are placed at the graves of those who have been loved. We take photographs in order to preserve memory. Artists paint pictures and authors write books in order to preserve memory. Modern technology uses computers to preserve memory. They are called memory banks.

Remembering has a direct relationship to tradition. Tradition is remembering. Tradition is the passing on of true and authentic past. Tradition is cultivating the past by making it present and alive. Tradition is live remembering. The liturgy is part of our Christian tradition. In the liturgy we remember the death and the resurrection of Christ. We do the liturgy in memory of Him. He is remembered in a personal and living fashion.

The remembrance of the facts of redemption is essential and fundamental for Christianity and for the entire Christian tradition. Christianity is entirely an historical religion. It builds upon this one historical fact, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into this world and redeemed us. He did this at a definite point in time and space. The thinking back to this fact, the constant looking and referring back, is therefore essential. This referring back takes place in two ways: by means of sacred signs, sacramentally, so that the past act of redemption becomes effective for us who are living at the present time. And secondly, through the psychological reflection and calling to mind of the Christian people. Ours should be a conscious and intelligent action of

drawing on the source of salvation opened to us. It should be a personal relationship to God.

In the fullness of time, God himself entered this world at a definite historical moment. The Word was made flesh and redeemed us by dying upon the cross. It is very important that we understand Christianity as an historical religion. Christ is both the Son of God and the Son of Man. He became our Saviour and Redeemer. His work of redemption was performed on the cross. This is the source of our salvation. Without Christ, and therefore without the church, there is no possibility of salvation. In him there is light and life for the Children of God. This historical and supernatural character of our religion is expressed through the anamnesis. In this important prayer that follows the words of consecration, with a few strokes of the pen, the whole work of salvation is described. Not only is the death on the cross mentioned as the efficient and meritorious cause of redemption, but also the resurrection, the ascension and the sitting at the right hand of the Father. Christ is the prototype of redeemed man. He is our model. We look up to him.

Our Lord's injunction is: "Do this in memory of me." These words seem to imply: "You ought to know what I am for you and what you have to thank me for." St. Paul is more precise: "As often as you shall do this, you shall show forth the death of the Lord." In St. Paul's mind Christ's triumph is inseparably linked up with the idea of death.

Thanksgiving and remembering are very closely connected. In prayer before God we call to mind what we have received and what is the basis of our hope—and for this we are thankful. We are thankful for the work of redemption and the history of redemption which climaxed in the death and resurrection of Christ. To the prayer-offering of the anamnesis the people respond: **"We praise you, we bless you, we thank you, O Lord, and we pray to you, our God."**

There is both a historical and psychological parallel between the anamnesis of the liturgy and the content of the Millennium celebrations. These celebrations are a recalling to mind and a remembering—a memorial. We are recalling the important event that took place in Kiev on the banks of the Dnipro River on August 1, 988. Our ancestors, our fathers and forefathers, received the grace and light of baptism and thereby entered fully and completely into the redemptive act of Christ that the anamnesis recalls and re-enacts sacramentally through the liturgy.

The Millennium celebrations should do more than evoke a merely historical remembering. These celebrations should also provide a spiritual and psychological identification. We share the joy and

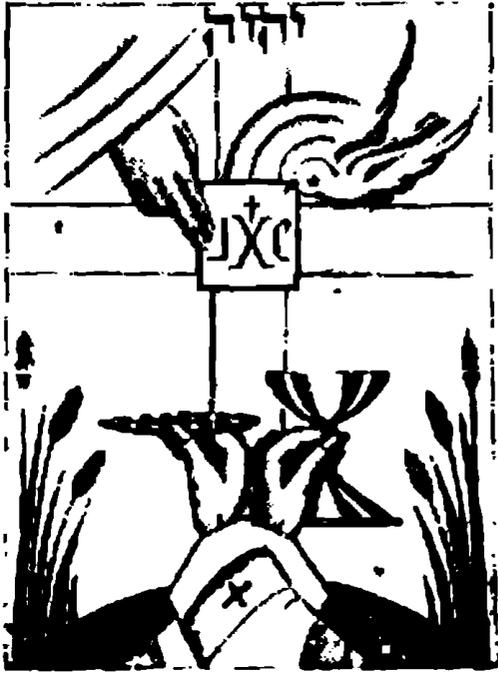
exaltation of that treasured historical moment. We appreciate its implications. We recall and enumerate the blessed consequences that that historical fact has had on the history of the Ukrainian people. At that moment we, too, became part of the People of God. We were then incorporated into the Mystical Body of Christ. The Gospel and the Christian faith we received at that time has had a profound influence on our culture and tradition over the past one thousand years.

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In the light of these truths, as we recall and relive the event of 988, our hearts are filled with gratitude to Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. With grateful hearts we pray: **“Remembering, therefore, this saving command, and all that was done for us: the cross, the tomb, the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven, the sitting at the right hand (of the Father), the second and glorious coming: We offer you your own from what is your own in behalf of all and for all. We praise you, we bless you, we thank you, O Lord, and we pray to you, our God.”**



# In Behalf Of All

*"We Offer You Your Own From What Is  
Your Own In Behalf Of All And For All."*

Plutarch, the ancient Greek biographer and moralist, wrote that if someone were to traverse the world he would find cities without walls, without theatres, without literature, without kings, but a city without a temple, a city without an altar, a city that did not offer sacrifices, no one has ever seen.

Knowingly or unknowingly the perceptive Greek historian expressed a very important psychological truth: the human heart instinctively tends to worship God. It does this spontaneously. This is an inborn inclination. That is the way we are made. Once the human heart is created and set into motion, the infallible result is worship and sacrifice.

History provides ample proof of this. All nations and all peoples have always had some sort of worship. They may have worshiped false gods or idols, but they worshiped. The instinct may have gone astray, but it was there. It is said that the American Indians who lived near the banks of the Niagara River would take the most beautiful daughter of the tribe, put her into a canoe and let her float to her death over the falls as a sacrifice to the lord of life and death.

The meaning of sacrifice is gift-giving. The community is offering a gift to its god. It is a religious form of gift-giving. The community expresses a message through the gift. Of course, a message can be expressed in words, but actions speak louder than words. Through the action of a religious sacrifice, men express as forcibly as they know how, that they adore their God. "We worship you, we thank you, we are sorry if we have done things you would not like, we want your favour, we want

to strengthen the friendship between you and us, we want to be at one with you." Even when the god is false—as in pagan religions—the worship is true. It is based and rooted in human nature.

The great master of epigrams, G. K. Chesterton, wrote: "How odd—of God—to choose—the Jews." Odd or not, that is the way it happened. God did choose the Jews. And God himself told them how to worship him—by sacrifices. These were minutely prescribed and described in the Old Testament. The **how** and the **when** and the **what** was spelled out for the Jews in great detail. The details differed from pagan sacrifices, but they were fundamentally the same thing, namely, the offering of gifts to God for the purpose of adoring him and seeking friendship and union with him. In the Book of Leviticus and the Book of Numbers we find chapter after chapter filled with the instructions which God gave through Moses about sacrifices—what things should be offered, how many of them, by whom, what for, when and how.

God had made a covenant with the Jews. They were his chosen people—the People of God. God and man were bound in a covenant. Blood was sprinkled on the altar and on the people to confirm this covenant. This Chosen People worshiped God by offering him many different kinds of sacrifices. And yet these sacrifices were imperfect. They did not offer true satisfaction for sin. For as St. Paul explains: "It is impossible that sin should be taken away with the blood of oxen and goats."

The human race was in need of a sacrifice that in truth and in justice would offer to God adoration, thanks, and, above all, reparation for sin. Not even a human life was enough for this.

That is why the Word was made flesh, uniting himself to us in order to offer the only worthy sacrifice to his Father. He did this not merely as a representative, but as part of us, as our Head. He paid the price not like a friend pays the fine for a friend in court, but as the hand pays the fine for the whole body. He suffered, not like a friend in sympathy, but as our head suffers the pain of a headache because of some disorder in the rest of the body.

On Calvary, a gift was offered to God. It was the most perfect of gifts. Jesus himself explained: "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10: 17-18).

On the road to Jerusalem from Bethany, knowing full well what was awaiting him, Jesus explained: "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I constrained until it is accomplished" (Luke 12:50). Christ offered to God the Father his very own life. He made his intention of

offering quite clear at the Last Supper when he spoke of his body “broken and given for you” and his blood “which shall be shed for you and for many.” He again manifested his sacrificial offering in his last words on the cross: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” On Calvary, a Man offered a gift to God. This was the greatest gift offered to God: the life and death of Christ, the God-Man.

Men are born into the world to live. With Christ it was the reverse. He was born into the world to die. His death, however, was not the collapse, but the crown of his life and work, for he came to give his life for the redemption of many. His death was a new beginning.

Christ’s death was his supreme moment—his life offered in sacrifice for the redemption of mankind. He wanted his death to be remembered. He did not ask that someone should write down what he had said, what he had preached. He did not ask that his kindnesses to the sick, the lonely, the blind, the hungry, the poor be recorded for the future generations of history. But he did ask that his death be remembered. God’s death for man is something too glorious and too holy to ever be forgotten.

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***“He did not ask that his kindnesses to the sick, the lonely, the blind, the hungry, the poor be recorded for the future generations of history. But he did ask that his death be remembered.”***

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It was Christ himself who instituted the precise way in which it should be recalled. He instituted his own memorial to recall his death on the cross. He did this at the Last Supper. After he had said, “This is my body which shall be given for you. . . This is my blood of the New Testament which shall be shed for many for the forgiveness of sins,” he added, “Do this in memory of me.”

When Christ died on the Cross, only a handful of people witnessed his death. The Blessed Mother was there, St. John the Evangelist, a few pious women and the blood-thirsty mob. Yet, this was the most important moment in the history of mankind. It was the moment of redemption and salvation. This moment meant everything to every human being that would ever live on this earth. Christ struck down the barriers of time and space and made that moment present to each generation through the Divine Liturgy—through the celebration of the Eucharist. Through the celebration of the Eucharist Christ’s sacrifice of himself on the cross is brought to our lives, to the personal sharing and experience of each one of us.

Vatican II explains this for us: "At the Last Supper on the night when He was betrayed, our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of His Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again" (#47 Liturgy Constitution). In the rest of the paragraph the Council teaches what else the Eucharistic sacrifice is—a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a memorial of his death...however, first and foremost, it perpetuates the sacrifice of the cross.

Many texts in the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom bring this truth to life. When the Liturgy of the Word is completed the priest begins the Liturgy of the Eucharist with this prayer: "We thank you, O Lord, God of Powers, for allowing us to stand before your holy altar and to fall down before your mercy, both for our sins and for the weaknesses and wrongdoings of the people. Accept, O God, our prayers and make us worthy to offer you prayers, petitions, and **bloodless sacrifices** for all your people."

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***"Christ struck down the barriers of time and space and made that moment present to each generation through the Divine Liturgy—through the celebration of the Eucharist."***

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In the priestly prayer of the Cherubic Hymn the priest begs, "Purge my soul and heart of an evil conscience and by the power of your Holy Spirit enable me, clothed with the grace of the priesthood, to stand before this your holy altar and to offer the **sacrifice** of your sacred and most pure Body and precious Blood...For it is you, O Christ our God, who offer and are offered, who receive and are received."

This sacrifice is consummated in the Anaphora, the Eucharistic prayer. Together with the angelic powers we sing the victorious hymn: Holy, holy, holy, Lord of Hosts...The prayer concludes with: "After he had come and fulfilled the entire plan for us, on the night he was betrayed, or rather gave himself up for the life of the world, he took bread into his holy, all-pure, and immaculate hands, gave thanks, and blessed, sanctified, broke, and gave it to his holy disciples and apostles, saying: "Take, eat, this is my Body which is broken for you...Drink of this, all of you, this is my Blood of the new testament which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins."

Finally, expressing the sacrifice of the cross in visible sacramental form, the priest, holding the discus with the consecrated blood in one hand and the chalice in the other, and making a cross with his

hands—the priest intones, “We offer you your own from what is your own in behalf of all and for all.” To which all join in by worshiping: “We praise you, we bless you, we thank you, O Lord, and we pray to you, our God.”

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***“Through the action of a religious sacrifice, men express as forcibly as they know how, that they adore their God.”***

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# *The Eucharist:*

## *A Paschal Banquet*



Jesus used many different analogies to provide us with concrete and visual images of the Kingdom of God. On one occasion he used this comparison: “The Kingdom of heaven is like this. Once there was a king who prepared a wedding feast for his son. . .” (Mt. 22:2). Later, as our Divine Liturgy explains, “On the night that he was betrayed or rather gave himself up for the life of the world, he took bread into his holy, all-pure and immaculate hands, gave thanks, and blessed, sanctified, broke and gave it to his holy disciples and apostles, saying: “Take, eat, this is my body. . . Drink of this, all of you, this is my blood. . .”

These words manifest Christ’s decision to be our Spiritual Nourishment. Following upon Christ’s decision to make himself our food and drink, Vatican II describes the Eucharist as “a paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us” (Const. Sacred Liturgy #47). As all food

nourishes and strengthens life, the Eucharistic food is designed to strengthen our life in Christ.

In the light of the comparison, "Once there was a king who prepared a wedding feast for his son" and Jesus' loving invitation, "Take, eat...drink of this all of you..." it is not surprising that Jesus performed his first miracle and initiated his public career at a wedding feast. "There he revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him" (Jn. 2:11).

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***"Holy Communion has to be seen in the context of sacrifice. Communion is the consummation, the end-result, of the Eucharistic Sacrifice of Christ in his church."***

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The evangelists describe for us in detail how Christ exercised his role as redeemer and saviour during meals that he partook of in the homes of different people. For example, in the house of Simon the Pharisee, during the course of the banquet, Jesus said to the penitent woman, "Your sins are forgiven... Your faith has saved you, go in peace" (Lk. 7:48, 50). We have another striking instance in the house of Zacchaeus. After the tax collector made a public disavowal of his sinful past, Jesus provided this reassurance: "Salvation has come to this house today... The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Lk. 19:9, 10). The case of Matthew, also a tax collector, is a similar instance. These meals were a time of forgiveness, of reconciliation, of pardon and salvation.

Of course, these meals that Jesus shared with people were also moments of great joy and happiness—for instance, when he visited Lazarus' home, not only after he had rescued Lazarus from the clutches of death when he called him forth from the grave, but on other earlier occasions as well (Jn. 11; Lk. 10).

When he returned the hospitality by multiplying loaves on two occasions, Jesus demonstrated the super-abundance and boundless generosity of his heart. Not only was the hunger of countless thousands alleviated, but there were numerous baskets of generous leftovers (Mt. 14:15-21). The multiplication of the loaves is, in fact, a unique miracle. It is the only miracle that all four evangelists describe for us. Not one of them neglected to mention it. The multiplication of the loaves not only affected immediately the lives of thousands, but even more importantly, it prefigured the Eucharist. It was a sign of a much greater gift that Jesus was to give us. Recognizing this symbolic importance of the

multiplication of the bread and the feeding of many thousands, all of the evangelists gave it the attention it deserved.

In the Eucharist there are three sacramental realities: sacrifice, meal and the real presence of Christ. These three realities should be kept together in practice, although for the sake of analysis, the three concepts may be examined separately. Holy Communion has to be seen in the context of sacrifice. Communion is the consummation, the end-result, of the Eucharistic Sacrifice of Christ in his church. In the Upper Room, Christ first pledged himself to death and resurrection. Committed to die and to rise again for sinful man, he thus made himself the sacrificial gift that visibly is embodied in the form of food. So it was, that during the Last Supper Christ offered the apostles a share in the Paschal Mystery by sharing with them his paschal banquet. By consuming the sacrificial food and drink, the apostles entered into the Lord's Paschal Sacrifice.

Christ paid the price of his own life in order to give himself to us in the Eucharist. St. Paul very diligently reminds us of this sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist. "This means that every time you eat this bread and drink from this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26).

In the Divine Liturgy, immediately after the words of consecration have been pronounced, the priest invokes the Holy Spirit to "make this bread the precious Body of Your Christ. And that which is in this chalice, the precious Blood of your Christ. . . So that for those who partake of them they may serve for a cleansing of the soul, the remission of sins, the communion of your Holy Spirit, the fulfillment of the heavenly kingdom, for confidence before you and not for judgment or condemnation." These words of the epiclesis clearly and meaningfully tell us what the Paschal Banquet does for those who receive these gifts with faith and love.

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***"The Eucharist calls for commitment. Communion is a challenge to grow more and more like Christ, to let ourselves be changed by him, to live a more selfless life—dedicated as he was to the good of others.***

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The Paschal Banquet is an invitation and a challenge. Receiving such a self-sacrificing Friend urges us to return the generosity. Jesus invites us: "Come to me all you who labour and are burdened and I will refresh you." However, this is not an invitation for parasites. It's an invitation for us to adapt as our own, as far as possible, the mind of Christ himself. Since, through baptism, we have been incorporated into Christ, we cannot stand idly by as detached observers. Like the Apostles, we accept

the challenge of joining Christ in his Passover when we eat his flesh and drink his Eucharistic blood.

When, as a result of their lack of faith many followers turned their backs on Christ and walked away, Simon Peter made this profession: "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life" (Jn. 6:68). The Eucharist calls for commitment. Communion is a challenge to grow more and more like Christ, to let ourselves be changed by him, to live a more selfless life—dedicated as he was to the good of others. It implies desire, love, loyalty and sincere friendship with Christ whom we receive in communion. Likewise, it implies an aversion and turning away from friendship-rupturing sin.

Besides approaching this sacrament in the state of grace, we should also approach the Eucharist with sincere faith and a genuine desire to let Christ's transforming action take effect in our life. To approach communion with a right and pure intention means to have an openness toward Christ as friend to Friend, a willingness to let Christ take over in our life. If friendships grow by a cultivation of mutual likes and interests, then it goes without saying that we must steadily put on the mind of Christ, make his interests ours, his zeal for the salvation of mankind our own overriding purpose in life.

Since the task of putting on the mind of Christ is of lifelong duration, granted the weakness of our human nature, the frequency of communicating in Christ's flesh and blood is clearly indicated. Christ's power to transform us is omnipotent. Unfortunately, our weak will tends to hold us back from authentic surrender to Christ. Our self-giving is always deficient. Too often we hold something back—a small attachment here, a petty selfishness there. In some way or other our faults tend to curb our freedom, the freedom of our growth in Christ's love.

Frequent communion, therefore, is a logical necessity if we are to grow in the mind of Christ. We need frequent communion, not as a reward for our goodness, but as a remedy for our weakness.



# *Eucharist: A Sacrament Of Love*

A story is told about a soldier's faith in the Eucharist. A certain priest noticed that one particular soldier would come to church and remain there for hours at a time. One time the priest approached the soldier and asked about his reasons for coming to church and remaining there for such long periods of time. His reply was: "I am keeping guard before the King of Kings. The king has guards; the general has guards, too. Is not my Eucharistic King greater than all earthly rulers? Yet, he has no guards. So when I am free, I go on duty before the throne of my King and God."

Many hundreds of years ago St. Augustine wrote about the love of Jesus for us in the Eucharist in this way: "Love called him back to his Father in heaven, love constrained him to remain with men, and by this wonderful means he satisfied both. All-powerful as he is, he could do no more; or all-rich as he is, he could not give us a greater proof of love. No tongue can describe, no heart can understand, the undying love of Christ for us."

Many of us are like spoiled children. We have received so much from God that we take his gifts as a matter of course, and fail to appreciate how wonderfully he has favoured us. This is especially true in regard to the gift of the Holy Eucharist.

In the Eucharist Jesus is our guest and companion. He comes to us to be the food of our soul in Holy Communion. In the Divine Liturgy he is offered as a victim just as truly as once he was offered victim on the cross. This is a mystery so vast and deep, that it requires a strong and unquestioning faith to accept it with all its implications simply on the

word of God. "Lord, I believe and profess that you are truly Christ, the Son of the living God, who came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the first."

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***"'Take. . . eat'—are the words he said during the Last Supper. . . These words were spoken lovingly in a tender voice to the Apostles and to all those who would come after them."***

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Christ instituted the Eucharist to be with us and to be united with us. Love is consummated in union. "Take. . . eat"—are the words he said during the Last Supper. The language of love demands union. These words were spoken lovingly in a tender voice to the Apostles and to all those who would come after them.

This spiritual food has a two-fold effect: it unites us with Christ and transforms us into Christ. Explaining the difference between ordinary bodily food and the Eucharist, St. Augustine makes Jesus say to us: "Nor do you change me into yourself, as you do food for your flesh, but you shall be changed into me. . . I am the food of the strong. . . Rise, and you shall eat me."

There is nothing we appreciate more than a sincere friend. Generally speaking, friendship depends on proximity. We make friends with those among whom we live and work. Jesus, our divine friend, has left us the Eucharist as a memorial of his love. During his public life he was styled as the friend of sinners. He even called Judas by the tender name of friend. He tells us how we are to show our friendship: "You are my friends if you do the things I command you" (Jn. 15:14). As a true and genuine friend he is constantly available to us in the tabernacle. Like Mary of Bethany, we can come and sit at his feet. As a close friend he suggests: "Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart" (Matt. 11:29). St. Alphonsus exhorts us to cultivate the friendship of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, for the moments we spend there are the most precious in our lives.

Christ is contained in the Eucharist under the form of bread and wine so that he may be our food and drink. The Eucharist rests on the altar and in the tabernacle, but the real reason for its existence is the human heart. Man is sanctified when he receives the body and blood of Christ. In the Book of Revelations Jesus says: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (3:20).

The Eucharist is real food, and yet, it is more than food—it is a **communion**. Christ's body is the instrument of this divine

communication. It communicates to us that substance of which the soul has been made since baptism, the very substance of God. In Holy Communion we feed upon God's very substance. Between the food which is Christ and the man who eats it, there is a **union**, a union of two persons, a union of two in one! There is reciprocal communication, for if Christ gives me his divinity, I freely and voluntarily give him my humanity to be changed by him.

The fathers of the church use strong expressions to describe such an unparalleled fusion. They speak of two pieces of wax melted, poured out and mingled together. They say that the body and blood of Christ passes into our body and blood. The writer Bossuet goes so far as to speak of the impossible desire to devour one another which true lovers experience. Of course, these are figures of speech, but they are an attempt to express the mystical union between Christ and the one who receives him in Holy Communion. In the Eucharistic banquet, Christ, who invites us to his table, gives us himself as our food, only so that he may become one with us far more intimately than is possible by means of any other kind of interchange.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (Jn. 6:53). Since the Eucharist is our food, it maintains and builds up our life, it helps it to develop. Because our nature is wounded and tends to be dragged down by its own weight towards death, it needs to be constantly maintained and rehabilitated in its spiritual and divine life.

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***“In the Eucharistic banquet, Christ, who invites us to his table, gives us himself as our food, only so that he may become one with us far more intimately than is possible by means of any other kind of interchange.”***

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Christ became our bread through an act of love. This same love compels him to come to us and to assimilate us into himself. This is why the pre-eminent effect of the Eucharist, the effect that is proper to it, is the fervour of love. In fact all the sacraments give us love. Yet Eucharistic communion gives love to the soul in its primary and essential act of unifying charity—of love for Christ.

The Eucharist does not produce its full effect on one single occasion, but by constant reception throughout life. Hence, each time we receive communion we acquire a state of greater love, of closer union with Christ.

In so far as it is a supreme union with Christ the Eucharist effects a state of permanent union with him. When he first announced the

**Eucharist Jesus made this very clear: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him” (Jn. 6:56).**

**Real union between two people produces a sense of mutual belonging, an increase of love which intensifies their desire to strengthen their real union. Although St. Paul declared that for him “to live was Christ,” still he pined, “I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ.” For Paul this sharing of life with Christ is so real that he did not hesitate to say that we are Christ’s members and spiritually incorporated into him. Hence, every increase of grace in us is an increase of this “incorporation.” “It is not you who change me into yourself, it is I who change you into myself.” Through Eucharistic Communion, Christ constantly assimilates us more and more to himself. The assimilation of the Christian to Christ and the union with him, the building up of the mystical body—are the ultimate spiritual realities to be achieved by the body of Christ really present and offered under the Eucharistic species.**

# *The Eucharist:*



## *Sign of Unity*

“Holy Father, keep those you have given to me true to your name, so that they may be one like us. . . I pray not only for these, but for those also who through their words will believe in me. May they all be one. . . in us, as you are in me and I am in you. . .” (Jn. 17: 11,20-21). Such is the prayer, the ardent desire, that welled in Jesus’ heart on the night he was betrayed, or rather gave himself up for the life of the world. . . After he had come and fulfilled the entire plan for us, after he had taken bread into his holy, all-pure, and immaculate hands. . . after he had said, “Take, eat, this is my Body. . . Drink of this, all of you, this is my Blood. . .”

After he had instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice, during the last few moments before the beginning of his passion, our Lord prayed for the enduring unity of his disciples, placing the Blessed Trinity as the model for that unity. In the supreme mystery of the Triune God there is a plurality of persons, but absolute unity of nature, of thought and of love. So also in God’s church we have a multitude of persons, of individual members, but unity of nature, unity of life—of sharing in God’s own life—which vivifies those members; a unity of thought—in teachings and beliefs; and thirdly, a unity of love. The same fire which burns in the bosom of the Blessed Trinity must glow also in the hearts of men. The church is unity in plurality, an image of the Trinity.

The principal means willed by Christ of achieving and sustaining this three-fold oneness is the Eucharist. The most ancient Eucharistic prayer of the Eastern Church, the Didache, underscores this truth. “As this

broken bread was scattered over the hills, and then, when gathered, has become one mass, so may thy church be gathered from the ends of the earth into thy kingdom." The Eucharist both symbolizes and creates the unity of the church. The bread and wine Jesus used were themselves symbols of unity. Just as many single grains of wheat are ground together to make bread and many grapes are brought together to make wine, so the family of God is to be gathered into one.

There is sometimes a temptation on the part of good Christians to forget that eating a meal together as a family is a sacramental with both physical nourishment and the outlet of charity. In monasteries, seminaries and other similar institutions the rule obliges the members to assemble at a common table not only because they are hungry but also because they love one another. Every Christian meal, whether in the monastery or in the world, reminds us of the Gospel. It reminds us of the Last Supper when Jesus said the words: "Take, eat, this is my Body . . . Drink of this, all of you, this is my Blood."

A person reveals whether or not he is a Christian not only by the way he gets out of bed in the morning and later retires, but even more profoundly does he reveal his Christian belief in the way he dines with his loved ones, eating and praying together like the disciples at the Last Supper. During that last farewell meal Jesus recommended to his friends: "I give you a new commandment: love one another; just as I have loved you, you also must love one another. By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples" (Jn. 13: 34-35).

St. Paul, too, very clearly points out for us the intimate connection between the Eucharist and the unity of the church. "The fact that there is only one loaf means that, though there are many of us, we form a single body because we all have a share in this one loaf" (1 Cor. 10:17).

The entire history of the church has been pervaded by the belief that the Eucharist is the sacrament of unity. The one bread and the one chalice bind the many into a unity, into the one Christ, so that they become one single body, His Body. Those who are part of this unity have been taken up into it not because of some mere extrinsic cause. Christ himself calls the partakers and includes them in his sacrifice, in the covenant he has established through his own blood. One theologian describes it this way: "The unity of the church does not grow from below; it is bestowed in Christ, in the contact with his body and blood, set forth first for sacrifice and now for our reception."

The recent Second Vatican Council several times repeated this important teaching, and underscored the interdependence between the Eucharist and the unity of the church. For instance in article 3 of the

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church we read: "In the Sacrament of the Eucharistic bread the unity of all believers who form one body in Christ is both expressed and brought about." Several pages beyond that, in article 11 of the same constitution we are reminded: "Strengthened anew at the holy table by the Body of Christ, they manifest in a practical way that unity of God's People which is suitably signified and wondrously brought about by this most awesome sacrament." Again in article 7 the Council reminds us of the inspiring truth: "Truly partaking of the body of the Lord in the breaking of the Eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion with Him and with one another." And again in article 26: "In any community existing around an altar...there is manifested a symbol of that charity and unity of the Mystical Body, without which there can be no salvation." The Eucharist is both the symbol and the cause of the mutual unity and charity of the faithful.

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***"Just as many single grains of wheat are ground together to make bread and many grapes are brought together to make wine, so the family of God is to be gathered into one."***

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The union that worthy reception of communion strengthens is first of all personal union with Christ. At the Last Supper Christ said: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me" (Jn. 15:4). Through union with Christ, through the sharing of his life we are bound together with one another. This makes it possible for us to help each other in works of love.

The Eucharist is the unifying centre of the life of the church. In ancient times, when a man sinned, and through his sin separated himself from the living community of the People of God, the church then forbade him to take part in the innermost life of the church, the celebration of the Eucharist. A special decree was issued excluding the sinner from sharing in the celebration of the Eucharist. He was demoted to the status of a penitent. He was allowed to attend only the Liturgy of the Word. Along with the catechumens he had to leave the church building before the celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The awareness that penitential action is directed towards the Eucharist has not been lost on the church. The present law of the church maintains that anyone guilty of serious sin is not allowed to receive Holy Communion. He must first repent and be reconciled both with God and with God's family through the sacrament of confession. The church must first re-admit the sinner into its own fellowship through the sacrament

of reconciliation. Prior to that the sinner may not participate fully in the Eucharistic celebration—he is not allowed to receive Holy Communion. Peace with the church is the pledge of restored communion with God. This, in turn, restores the privilege of receiving Holy Communion. Peace with the church coincides with the ability to take part in the Eucharistic celebration through reception of Holy Communion. The church knows itself to be realized in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the centre of its life. As such the Eucharist is the source of its unity.

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***“Through union with Christ, through the sharing of his life we are bound together with one another. This makes it possible for us to help each other in works of love.”***

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In his first letter St. Peter reveals and announces a very important truth. “Once you were not a people at all and now you are the People of God” (2:10). It is a rather striking alternative. Peter appeals to the self-consciousness of Christians as ‘People of God.’ What he presents to them as an alternative to the ‘People of God’ is not a ‘people of the devil’ or ‘people of the world.’ Rather he says: “Once you were not a people at all and now you are the People of God.” Therefore, when it ceases to be the ‘People of God,’ and that is the church, it is not a people at all. The church is the validating principle of our lives, and the centre of the church is the Eucharistic-sacramental celebration of Christ’s sacrifice. “Jesus was to die for the nation—and not for the nation only, but to gather together in unity the scattered children of God” (Jn. 11:52).

# *The Eucharist:*



## *Mystery of Faith*

In the year 1264 a priest from Northern Europe was on his way to Rome. During the course of his journey he was passing through BOLSENO, Italy, where he decided to celebrate the Divine Liturgy. As he was celebrating Mass he was tormented by doubts as to whether Christ is truly present in the Blessed Eucharist. His faith was being challenged regarding this mystery—regarding the reality of Christ's presence in this great sacrament. Naturally, the priest was very upset with these evil suggestions and bad thoughts. He prayed very fervently that he be relieved of these temptations. His prayers were answered. Just before Communion, as the priest took the consecrated host into his hands and was about to drop a particle into the chalice, all of a sudden the consecrated wine took on the appearance of real blood. That blood began to rise in the chalice until it poured over on the corporal, the little altar cloth upon which the chalice had been placed. Deeply moved, with his faith reassured in this great mystery of the faith, and with all doubts answered, the priest fell down on his knees and adored Jesus really and truly present in the Blessed Eucharist.

Pope Urban IV, who at the time was in the neighboring city of ORVIETO, asked that the blood-stained altar cloth be brought to Orvieto, where it was placed in the cathedral. One can see it there even today. Although more than seven hundred years have gone by since this miracle happened, this Eucharistic relic is still very well preserved. A number of years ago I myself was privileged to see with my own eyes

this altar cloth that had been stained with the blood of Jesus. The Lord performed this miracle not only to rid the priest of the temptations that were tormenting him, but also to help us accept the marvellous mystery of faith which the Eucharist is.

The Eucharist challenged the faith of believers the very first time Jesus announced it—when he first promised he would give us this bread of life. “I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats this bread he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh” (Jn. 6:51). As a matter of fact the faith of most of those who heard this challenge failed. “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” They turned their backs on Christ and walked away. They ungratefully rejected his gift.

Before making this promise—“I am the bread of life”—Jesus carefully prepared this announcement by several other very significant miracles and signs. The day before he multiplied bread and with five loaves he fed about fifteen thousand people. This is the only miracle that all four evangelists record for us. This unanimity of the evangelists is an indication of the uniqueness and importance of this miracle. First of all, it immediately affected the lives of fifteen thousand people. They were fed. Their hunger was relieved. Then, more importantly, the multiplication of the loaves was a pre-figure of the Eucharist—the bread which comes down from heaven. Jesus performed this sign in the springtime, a year before his passion and death on the cross. That memorable day countless thousands had gathered to hear Jesus proclaim the good news.

*When he had finished teaching the people, he turned to Philip and asked, “How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, “There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?” Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. And when they had eaten their fill they gathered up twelve baskets of fragments from the five barley loaves (John 6:1-13).*

The people were so impressed, so over-awed with this miracle, that they wanted to make Jesus their king. Jesus was aware of their intentions. So he ordered his disciples to go to their boat and return to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, while he dismissed the crowds. Then he went up on the hill alone to pray.

A powerful wind began to blow. The waves were frightening. The disciples were having a most difficult time crossing the lake. As dawn was beginning to break Jesus came towards the disciples walking on the water. They were frightened but he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." And when he got into the boat the wind ceased. The waters became calm and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going (Cfr. Jn. 6:16, Mk. 6:45).

Through these signs and miracles Jesus indicated that he was lord and master of all nature. He was not bound by its laws. He had the power to dispense from the laws of nature whenever it served a higher purpose. He performed these miracles—multiplied bread, walked on water, made the wind cease and in an instant reached the shore of the lake—to help the people to believe his words and to accept his promise, "I am the bread of life: he who comes to me shall not hunger and he who believes in me shall never thirst" (Jn. 6:35).

The following days, when Christ made this promise, most of his hearers failed the test. Their faith was too weak. They refused to accept the marvellous Mystery of the Eucharist—"The living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh" (Jn. 6:51).

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***"Just before Communion, as the priest took the consecrated host into his hands and was about to drop a particle into the chalice, all of a sudden the consecrated wine took on the appearance of real blood."***

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Down through the ages, not only for the followers of Jesus but for many others as well, the Eucharist—the Mystery of Faith—has been a challenge and a stumbling block. The problem lies in the fact that people try to grasp with their mind a reality that men can accept only by faith.

St. John Chrysostom gives us some sound advice: "Let us submit to God in all things and not contradict him, even if what he says seems contrary to our reason and intellect: rather let his words prevail over our reason and intellect. Let us also act in this way with regard to the (Eucharistic) mysteries, looking not only at what falls under our senses, but holding on to his words. For his words cannot lead us astray."

Another holy doctor, St. Bonaventure, explains: "There is no difficulty about Christ's presence in the Eucharist as in a sign, but that he is truly present in the Eucharist as he is in heaven, this is most difficult. Therefore to believe this is especially meritorious."

More recently, Paul VI, following the teaching of the Council of Trent, explained: "We desire to recall at the very outset what may be termed the very essence of this teaching, namely, that by means of the Mystery of the Eucharist the Sacrifice of the cross, which was once offered on Calvary, is marvelously re-enacted and its saving power is constantly recalled and applied for the forgiveness of those sins which we daily commit."

Then the Holy Father goes on to explain for us the nature and the content of this mystery of the faith: "To avoid misunderstanding this sacramental presence which surpasses the laws of nature and constitutes the greatest miracle of its kind, we must listen with docility to the voice of the teaching and praying church. The voice, which constantly echoes the voice of Christ, assures us that the way Christ is made present in this sacrament is non other than by the change of the whole substance of the bread into his Body, and that this unique and truly wonderful change the Catholic Church rightly calls transubstantiation. After transubstantiation has taken place, the species of bread and wine undoubtedly take on a new meaning and a new finality, for they no longer remain ordinary bread and ordinary drink, but become the sign of something sacred, and the sign of spiritual food."

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***"The multiplication of the loaves was a pre-figure of the Eucharist—the bread which comes down from heaven. . . That memorable day countless thousands had gathered to hear Jesus proclaim the good news."***

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However, the reason they take on this new significance and this new finality is simply because they contain a new "reality" which we may justly term onto-logical. Not that there now lies under those species what was already there before but something entirely different: and that not only because of the faith of the church, but in objective reality, since after the change of the substance or nature of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, nothing remains of the bread and wine but only appearances, under which Christ, whole and entire, in his physical "reality" is also bodily present, although not in the same way that bodies are present in a given place."

Many hundreds of years ago the prophet Isaiah wrote: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel," which means, God with us. When he announced the birth of Christ, the evangelist Matthew repeated these words and made them his own. That is his explanation of the incarnation: Jesus is God with us. In Jesus, God is with us in the flesh. When this Jesus completed God's

eternal plan, he returned to the Father, but before doing so he promised, "And lo, I am with you always—Emmanuel, God with us—to the close of the age."

As long as the Eucharist is kept in our churches, Christ truly is Emmanuel, God with us. Day and night he is in our midst. As St. John says, he dwells with us full of grace and truth. He strengthens the weak and consoles the afflicted. He proposes that we learn from him who is meek and humble of heart.

The Eucharist is the very heart of the Christian life. Like the Church itself, of which it is a sign, it is a profound mystery. It is the creation, and at the same time the presence, of the Word of God, revealing his infinite riches to simple faith. It uses the gestures and the language that people use, but cannot be contained or expressed in purely human forms or categories.

The Eucharist makes present to the world, in a unique and personal way, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning of all things and their end. It sums up the mystery of Christ, inserts it into the Church, and anticipates the full revelation of that mystery at the end of time, when Christ will come again in glory (Col. 3:4).



*The Eucharist—  
The Pope—  
The Ukrainian Church*



On March 24, 1980, Pope John Paul II presided over an extraordinary synod of the Bishops of the Ukrainian Catholic Church. The purpose of the synod was to select names of three candidates for the position of archbishop coadjutor to Major Archbishop Cardinal Slipyj with the right of succession. His deep pastoral concern for the Ukrainian Church prompted the Holy Father to convoke the synod. He wanted to provide for the uninterrupted continuation of the hierarchy of the Ukrainian Church in view of the advanced age of the Venerable Cardinal Joseph.

The synod was held in the Vatican. It began with a concelebrated Ukrainian Rite Divine Liturgy of which the Holy Father was the main celebrant. During the celebration the Vicar of Christ addressed the Ukrainian bishops; he spoke about the Eucharist as the activating source of unity in the church.

In the beginning of his talk the Polish Pope alluded to the similarity of historical destiny between his nation and the Ukrainian people: both have been counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name of Jesus (Acts 5:41). They have merited this grace because of their loyalty to Christ, the Church and the Chair of Peter.

Vatican II teaches that "the Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity of the bishops and of the multitude of the faithful" (LG #23). By concelebrating this Divine Liturgy with the Ukrainian bishops the Pope was sharing with them the supreme act of union with Christ, for it is through "the Eucharist that the unity of the Church is both signified and brought about" (U.R. #2). According to the mind of the Council the pope was performing a very important aspect of his pastoral charge. For "the Chair of Peter presides over the whole assembly of charity and protects legitimate differences while at the same time it sees that such differences do not hinder unity but rather contribute towards it" (LG #13).

The pope recalled Christ's ardent desire for unity among his followers and the fervent plea for this cause that he expressed in his priestly prayer, as well as his commandment that they love one another (John 17). The Church strives to achieve "the unity of spirit in the bond of peace." For we are called to the one hope which is Jesus Christ.

St. Paul reminds us: "There is one Body and one Spirit. . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:4-6). Consequently, there must be a constant striving "for building up the body of Christ until we attain to the unity of faith. . . to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12-13).

The pope reminded the bishops that the unity which was Christ's ardent concern is expressed and brought about by "the mystery of faith" that was being celebrated on the altar. For "in the sacrament of the Eucharistic bread the unity of all believers who form one body in Christ is both expressed and brought about" (LG #2). However, this unity should not be viewed as a mere material bond, but rather as a deeper spiritual communion with Christ, our paschal lamb. Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of Man, is the source and principle of a new unity of all men. "In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in

the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13). The Eucharist is a memorial of Christ. It is a sign of the grace of reconciliation obtained through Christ's death on the cross.

Christ is our peace. He establishes a unity to which all are called. During the Last Supper he offered to his disciples the body that was given up to death, and which established the unity. Thus "he has broken down the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph. 2:14), that was the result of sin. The Eucharist is the living mystery of the body offered and the blood shed to build up the unity. Herein is realized "the new and eternal testament" which brings about and strengthens this union with Christ. This union with Christ gives us a share in his life. "He who eats me will live because of me" (Jn. 6:57). Through the Eucharist we achieve our highest goal—to live for God.

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***"During the celebration the Vicar of Christ addressed the Ukrainian bishops; he spoke about the Eucharist as the activating source of unity in the church."***

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To live for God implies a union of prayer. It means that the will of the Father becomes our food. It means that we strive to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect—in forgiveness, in mercy, in kindness. The Eucharist is the source and centre of all Christian life. Through the Eucharist man achieves the fullness of union with the Father in the Spirit through Christ, priest and victim—the bread of life. This fullness is manifested in the bond of charity, in communion among the brothers.

In a privileged way a truly deep union among people is born of the Eucharist, the Holy Father teaches. In the Eucharist, Christ gave the church, his spouse, a memorial of his death and resurrection. "As Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2), so from him we learn to walk in love. We become capable of that life with Christ, who becomes our life. When we partake of the Eucharist, "we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (I Cor. 10:17). Thus, in Christ we achieve that communion which allows us to be "of one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32). From the Eucharistic Christ we receive the capacity to lay down our life for our friends (Jn. 15:13).

To illustrate this teaching the pope made reference to the history of the Ukrainian Church. That church has given God many confessors and martyrs. Such faith is born of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the source of this heroism. The charity that unites and binds the pastors and the faithful, flows from the Eucharist. Together they share and accept the

severe persecution that has been their lot for many decades. The Eucharist is the source of their strength, their hope and their faith.

“Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (I Cor. 10:17). In a particular manner this marvelous unity is being achieved at this celebration—the pope recalled—through which we solemnly begin this gathering of grace and love, which this synod is for your church. You have assembled here together with Peter “influenced by the fellowship of fraternal charity and by zeal for the universal mission entrusted to the apostles” (CD #36). It is precisely from the Eucharist that we here are celebrating, that we draw that indispensable Spirit. He binds us in Christ with God in the unity of the love of the Holy Spirit. He expands our heart for that deep sentiment and real concern, the preoccupation, the dedication, that apostolic love requires.

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***“We are the body of Christ! We are united with the whole Church of Christ. . . Our heart beats in unison with all the brethren, especially the brethren of our church. Through our deep communion we should give the world that witnessing that stirs up faith.”***

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The ardent desire that this synod be held near the Chair of Peter has as its goal this one purpose: to place into proper perspective this unity which we have received from the Apostles—collegial unity. In a certain sense, this unity was born at the table of the Lord on Holy Thursday. For it was at the Lord's table in the Upper Room that the Apostles received the commission to celebrate the Eucharist. The celebration of the Eucharist assures the communion of life with God and among the brethren. Likewise, it institutes the unity by which the church lives and which is a sign and sacred Sacrament for the world. For it was in the Upper Room, during the Eucharistic banquet that Christ prayed for the enduring unity of “his own,” for the apostles to whom he entrusted the burden and the honour of working for the salvation of the whole world.

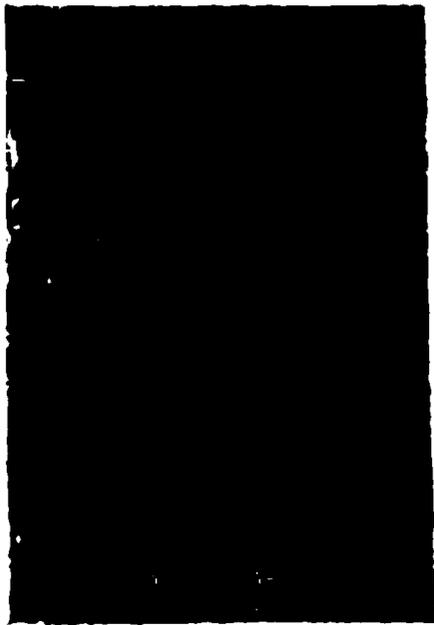
These days of grace, that are being celebrated with the offering of the Eucharist, should, therefore, be transformed into a particular experience of unity, of consensus, of cooperation. Through the Eucharist, we, “though many, are one body,” as St. Paul tells us. We are the body of Christ! We are united with the whole Church of Christ. Our eyes are centered upon him, our Head, our Teacher, our Redeemer. Our heart beats in unison with all the brethren, especially the brethren of our

church. Through our deep communion we should give the world that witnessing that stirs up faith.

In his remarks to the pastors of the Ukrainian Church the pope asked a rhetorical question: In what do we believe? We believe because we have faith in Christ. We believe because we have been overcome by his love. We believe because of our inseparable tie with the Gospel. We believe because of the pervading primacy of God and his action. We believe because we love God, and on his account we love the world and all people. We are happy to give them our service—ready, alert, in concert, complete. To serve unto death, even death on the cross.

It is the Eucharist that nourishes our Spirit. We are not distant to our brothers. They are present with us in the celebration of the Eucharist. They are with us and they pray for and with us. They are imploring for us the fullness of the Holy Spirit. With us and for us they are asking for the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace in order that we may recognize the most urgent needs of their church.

Only a synod that is the expression of unity will become a springtime of the Holy Spirit for the beloved Ukrainian Church. That church is present through its pastors. Likewise, in a unique way are present the past centuries of its history—centuries of martyrs and struggles, of profession of the faith and evangelical zeal, of dedication to the Gospel in union with the church and with Peter. May this real and profound and live spiritual presence be a source of strength to us and may it renew our apostolic spirit.



# *Eucharist: The Heart of Christian Life*

One of the great prophets of the Old Testament was Elijah. He insisted on the unique divinity of Yahweh and the repudiation of the cult of any other god. About himself he professed: "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away" (1 Kings 19:10).

Elijah had to contend with kings and the mighty of this world. The Lord enjoined on him the task of warning and admonishing. The Lord supported his admonitions with wonders and miracles. Elijah's life was threatened.

*Then he was afraid, and he arose and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree; and he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am no better than my fathers." And he lay down and slept under a broom tree; and behold, an angel touched him, and said to him, "Arise and eat." And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank, and lay down again. And the angel of the Lord came again a second time, and touched him, and said, "Arise and eat, else the journey will be too great for you." And he arose, and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the Mount of God (1 Kings 19:3-8).*

In the mind of the great St. Thomas Aquinas, the food that the prophet ate was a symbol of the Eucharist that provides the nourishment and the strength which people need to reach their eternal destiny, the Kingdom of God.

Vatican II reminds us of the importance and centrality of the Eucharist: "The other sacraments, as well as every ministry of the Church and every work of the apostolate, are linked with the Holy Eucharist and are directed toward it. For the most blessed Eucharist contains the Church's entire spiritual wealth, that is, Christ himself, our Passover and living bread. Through his very flesh, made vital and vitalizing by the Holy Spirit, he offers life to men...Hence the Eucharist shows itself to be the SOURCE and the SUMMIT of the whole work of preaching the gospel" (PO #5).

In the Eucharistic Liturgy, Jesus himself is the source of every sacrament, of every visible sign of salvation. Jesus is mankind's encounter with God. He is the Word made flesh. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). In him we see our God made visible. In him we have the God we cannot see. In Christ God gives his life to men. This giving of divine life is accomplished mostly through the sacraments, the chief of which is the Eucharist.

Sacraments are gifts of Christ by which he communicates divine life through expressive signs that people understand. In the sacraments Christ reaches out to all men in every place on the globe. During his lifetime, his action was restricted to one place and time. Now he has put aside these limitations and everywhere he draws people to eternal life.

On the eve of his death, Christ explained what he was about to do. He provided us with a visual image of the meaning of his death and resurrection. "The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:23-24). Jesus is the grain of wheat that dies in order to bear much fruit.

The Eucharist is at the heart of the church's life. In the Eucharist, Christ himself is present to his people. The Eucharist bears within itself the whole reality of Christ. The Eucharist mediates to us Christ's saving work, since he is "full of grace and truth." Through the Eucharist we share a new life—a life that binds us together as children of God and as sharers in the life of the Trinity. It is for this reason that the Eucharist is the centre and crown of Christian life. The Eucharist is not merely a symbol and ceremony. In the Eucharist, Christ gives himself to us. Through the Eucharist, the life and the gifts of God are made accessible to men.

The Eucharist is the most sacred presence of Christ and his paschal mysteries in the church. For that reason, it is the source and summit of all the church's ministries and apostolates. Furthermore, celebrating the Eucharist with and in Christ, men are not only offered a share in his life, but, as the Council teaches, they are "invited and led to offer themselves, their labours, and all created things together with him" (PO #5). This is an application of Christ's invitation, "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:25). The Eucharist is a way of life for the followers of Jesus. St. Paul provides this explanation: "For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh" (II Cor. 4:11). And then Paul articulates for us his own internal attitude: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church" (Col. 1:24).

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***"Jesus is mankind's encounter with God. He is the Word made flesh. . . In him we have the God we cannot see. In Christ God gives his life to men."***

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From the very beginning, the Eucharist was the essential celebration of the Christian community. We find this statement in the Acts of the Apostles: "They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers" (Acts 2:42). At Emmaus, the two disciples recognized the risen Christ "in the breaking of the bread" (Luke 24:35). For the first Christians, the Eucharist signified, and kept most real, the presence of Christ in the community. And today, too, the church remains the Eucharistic community. The celebration of the paschal mystery is reason for the Church's existence.

Jesus does not die and rise again every time the Eucharistic Liturgy is performed, but his one sacrifice is made present to men in every celebration of the Divine Liturgy. The Council of Trent teaches that Christ instituted the Mass so that "the bloody sacrifice which was once offered on the cross should be made present, its memory preserved to the end of the world, and its salvation—bringing power applied to the forgiveness of sins which are daily committed by us." At Mass, as upon the cross, Jesus is the chief priest and also the victim, giving unending praise and infinite satisfaction to the Father. However, in the Divine Liturgy, the Church joins Jesus in his sacrifice. With him, the church likewise performs the role of priest and victim, making a total offering of herself with him.

Since the Eucharistic Sacrifice is the supreme act of worship, it can be offered only to God. The Church offers the Divine Liturgy to the Father, with Christ, in the Holy Spirit, for the living and the dead, for the salvation of all, for the many needs of the people of God.

When the Eucharist is received sacramentally, it is called Holy Communion. "Communion" means that it is a sharing of a gift God gives to all. Christ communicates himself to us. It means entering into close union with Christ, and with all the members of his Body. Jesus himself stressed the need for us to receive Communion. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53).

To receive this sacrament worthily, one must be in the state of grace. St. Paul reminds us of the grave duty we have, to receive worthily. "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment unto himself" (I Cor. 11:27-29).

The most obvious sign of this sacrament is the image of food and nourishment. The Eucharist brings about the nourishing effect it symbolizes. This is achieved through the presence of Christ and the bestowal of grace on those who receive him. "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. . . For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed" (John 6:35,55).

During the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, after the priest pronounces the words of consecration, he recalls Christ's command to be remembered. He then offers the sacred gifts to God: "We offer you your own from what is your own, in behalf of all and for all." The worshipping community responds by saying, "We praise you, we bless you, we thank you, O Lord, and we pray to you, our God." For the completion of the offering, the priest invokes the Holy Spirit and then expresses the purpose of the Eucharistic sacrifice: "So that for those who partake of them, they may serve for a cleansing of the soul, the remission of sins, the communion of your Holy Spirit, the fulfillment of the heavenly kingdom, for confidence before you and not for judgment or condemnation."



# Metropolitan Sheptytsky and Frequent Communion

Frequent communion is such a common and normal part of our present-day celebration of the Eucharist that we can hardly imagine that it could be otherwise. Yet, it was not always so. A hundred years ago, there was no such thing as frequent and regular communion. The prevalent feeling was that people were not worthy of communion; so they did not dare to receive frequently this august sacrament.

It was Pope St. Pius X (1903-1914) who started the "frequent communion" revolution that would gradually spread throughout the Catholic world. On December 20, 1905, he ordered that a special decree be issued, in which it was explained that frequent and daily communion is totally in accord with the wishes of our Lord Jesus and of the Catholic Church. The decree likewise asked theologians and spiritual writers to discontinue their discussions and debates on the issue of what disposition is required for frequent and daily communion.

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***"Our Byzantine Rite has retained this wholesome ancient tradition. In every Eucharistic celebration, the priest clearly and solemnly invites the people to come forward to receive communion."***

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Following the appearance of this important apostolic decree the Servant of God Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky wrote two lengthy pastoral letters on this very important matter of frequent communion. One letter was addressed to all his faithful, to his entire flock, and the other was directed to the clergy. He ordered his priests to conduct with their people a three-day spiritual preparation for the Feast of the Holy Eucharist. They were to celebrate these Eucharistic preparations annually for a period of ten years. The metropolitan considered this such an important

and sacred matter, that in his letter to the clergy he said that if the Lord should call him within that ten-year period, it was his last will and testament that his successor should continue the practice. The purpose of these annual Eucharistic celebrations, of course, was to persuade and dispose the people to receive communion more frequently.

The Servant of God reminded his flock that in the beginning, when the faith of the people was lively, they received communion ordinarily every time they participated in the Divine Liturgy. Our Byzantine Rite has retained this wholesome ancient tradition. In every Eucharistic celebration, the priest clearly and solemnly invites the people to come forward to receive communion. And when the priest prepares the gifts of the Eucharistic Celebration during the proskomedia of the Divine Liturgy, he puts bread on the discus with the assumption that there will be communicants who will receive the body and blood of Christ.

“Approach with the fear of God and with faith”—is a clear and unambiguous invitation that is extended to all present at a celebration of the Divine Liturgy. Anyone who has the fear of the Lord in his heart, may come forward and approach the altar. It is presumed that all true Christians have this respectful attitude of fear and faith. This reverential and loving fear will not allow them to approach the altar in the state of sin.

The metropolitan tried to disabuse his people of the false notion that it is necessary to go to confession each time they wanted to receive communion. Obviously, the true ideal is to receive Holy Communion as often as possible, and of course, we should try to avoid sin and live in the state of grace. This calls for vigilance and discipline.

The only other thing necessary to qualify to receive Holy Communion, apart from being free of any serious sin, is to have a correct intention. This means that the one who receives does it not out of any vain reason, but out of love of God. In other words, we receive the Blessed Sacrament with true faith as the church invites us to do: “Approach with the fear of God and with faith.” In the light of faith the Divine Chalice is such an inexhaustible source of heavenly blessings that anyone who develops a taste for this bread of life will continue to partake of it always. Jesus Christ, the living God-man, is present in the Eucharist to become our spiritual food.

Jesus promises us: “Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it. . .If you ask anything in my name, I will do it. . .Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, he will give it to you in my name” (Jn. 14:13-14;16:23). It is this very same Christ that we receive in Holy Communion. Certainly he will hear and answer our prayers. He gives us the greatest proof of his love, for he said: “Greater love has no man than

this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn. 15:13). In the Eucharistic sacrifice, he demonstrates this kind of love for us; he offers his life for us, and then, in addition, he becomes our spiritual nourishment.

The rejection of a gift offered in love is one of the most hurtful pains we may ever be called to bear. It is this pain that Christ experiences when people fail to appreciate the greatest gift of his love—the Holy Eucharist. To the Samaritan woman, Jesus said: “If you only knew the gift of God” (Jn. 4:10). The same remark could be addressed to many Christians in reference to the Blessed Eucharist. If they were only more aware of its inexhaustible riches, its divine content, its strength, its blessings. It is Christ himself who suggests: “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well” (Matt. 6:33). In the Eucharist, we find it all—in the Eucharist we find Christ who is God.

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***“In the light of faith the Divine Chalice is such an inexhaustible source of heavenly blessings that anyone who develops a taste for this bread of life will continue to partake of it always.”***

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The person who frequently receives communion not only intensifies the life of grace in his soul, but perhaps, even more importantly, develops a relationship of love and friendship with Jesus Christ. After all, Christian life is a life of divine grace. It is interior life. This life is the result of the bonds that unite a soul with Christ. For it is the person of Christ that is the center of all spiritual life. This life is the result of our union with Christ. Just as the cells of the body are nourished and sustained by the blood that flows from the heart, in a similar manner, a Christian, a member of Christ’s body, is influenced by the power and sustaining nourishment of his person. Jesus himself reassures us: “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me, you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5).

Among the sacraments, the Blessed Eucharist is the holiest and most noble. It is the holiest for the obvious reason that it contains Christ himself. All the other sacraments give us God’s grace, but in Holy Communion we receive Christ himself—body and soul, humanity and divinity.

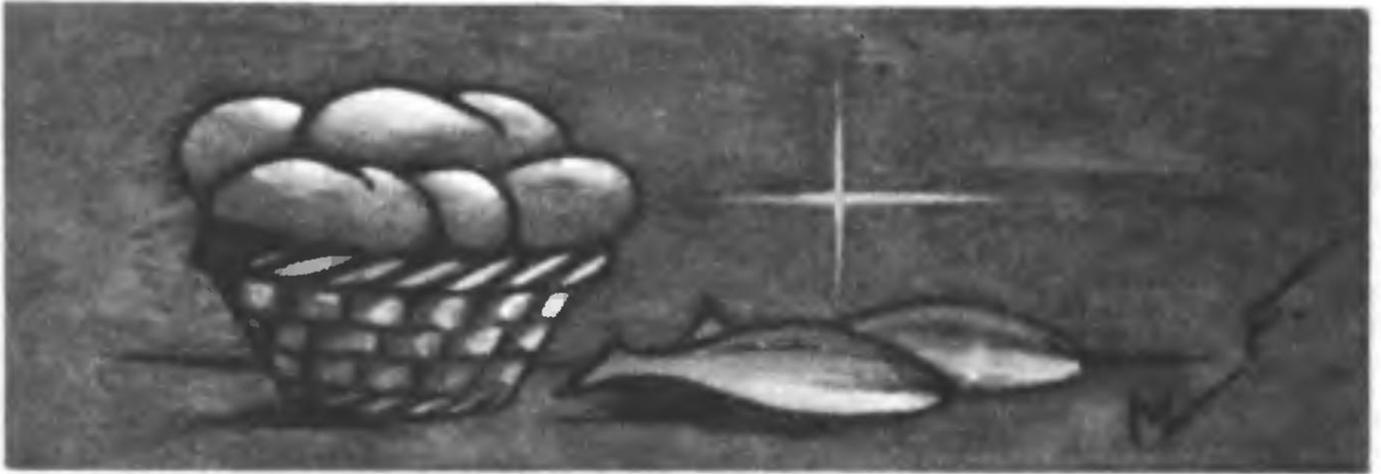
The Eucharist is the greatest of the sacraments also because it serves the highest virtue—love. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, you shall love your

neighbour as yourself” (Mt. 22:37-39). Precisely, that we may grow in this virtue of love, Christ instituted the Eucharist.

This sacrament is meant to take care of the positive side of our spiritual life—the side of sanctity. While the sacrament of penance has been given to us to care for the negative side of our life—the sin side. The Eucharist increases our sanctity. It intensifies our love for God. Consequently, we become more closely united with God. Through grace, we participate in the very nature of God. Grace binds us to God—in a certain sense, it identifies us with God. This explains how the Blessed Virgin Mary was so closely united with God—because of the fullness of grace that had been given to her. She was so intimately united with God that no power could draw her away from him, not even to the extent of ever committing the smallest imperfection. She led such a holy life that she did not commit the least imperfection. With us, too, the more grace we have, the more closely do we become united with God. Now, **communion intensifies grace** in our souls.

Christ himself calls this sacrament the food of our soul. “I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats this bread, he will live forever” (Jn. 6:41, 51). This explains its absolute necessity for our spiritual life. Food is something we cannot get along without. We consume food every day—several times a day. And Holy Communion is our spiritual food.

# The Bread Of Life



On the first page of the Bible, we read of God saying:

*“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness”...So God created man in his own image...male and female he created them...And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit, you shall have them for food”...“And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food...” (Genesis 1:26-27, 29; 2:9).*

This biblical narrative reveals that God created man with an appetite and a hunger that was meant to be satisfied. Man has an innate need of food and nourishment. This craving is part of man’s nature. Man’s need for food and nourishment is as natural as the law of gravity. It is the Creator who placed this desire and craving in the heart of man.

The tragedy of the fall of man lies in the mis-direction of this natural appetite to a fruit that was forbidden by God. As a result of this aberration, a penalty was meted out against man. “Because you...have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed be the ground because of you...In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:17-19).

Hunger is part of the instinct of self-preservation that has been implanted in man by the Creator. The prime object of this inclination is God himself. This instinct suggests to man to turn to God who alone fully and completely satisfies the deepest craving of the human heart. Man lives when God satisfies his deepest desires. Conversely, death follows when man seeks to satisfy them beyond God.

During the prolonged and extensive forty-year wandering to the Promised Land, the Old Testament Jews experienced intense pangs of hunger. In their pain and discomfort the Jews complained and threatened. "The whole congregation of the people of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and said to them, 'Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.' Then the Lord said to Moses: 'Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you' " (Exodus 16:2-4). In giving Israel manna as means of subsistence, God, in effect indicated his efficacious presence among his people. "In the morning you shall be filled with bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God" (Exodus 16:12). The manna was such a meaningful sign that the Jews were to preserve its memory by placing in the ark a vessel of manna along with the Tables of the Law. "This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness when I brought you out of the land of Egypt' " (Exodus 16:32).

Man must eat to live. Man experiences hunger. God is the ultimate object of this craving. Only God can satisfy man's deepest longings. This was one of the important truths that the Jews learned in the Old Testament as they wandered across the desert. During his desert experience, Jesus taught the same truth: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Mt. 4:4). Later, Jesus renewed this teaching when he fed the people of God with miraculous bread. When he fed the multitudes, Jesus sought a response of faith. Yet, the bread which satisfied the people stirred up an enthusiasm that had nothing to do with faith. Even the disciples did not understand the meaning of the gift. While the unbelieving Pharisees and Sadducees at that very moment demanded "a sign coming from heaven" (Mt. 16:1).

In the Scriptures, hunger has a deeper meaning than just satisfying man's physical cravings. In fact, Jesus promised his disciples: "You will eat and drink at my table in my kingdom" (Lk. 22:30). Even centuries of secularism have not reduced human eating to a merely

physical function. Sharing food with another is a kind of sacrament—there is something sacred about it. It is no mere accident, then, that the fall of man is related to the use of food. The first man and woman ate the forbidden fruit.

The fall of man lies in the abuse of food. Death resulted from this misuse of God's gift. In turn, the Saviour of the world gave us his farewell gift in the form of food—the Bread of Life, which is the Blessed Eucharist. In this gift, Christ gives us his very self as the bread of our souls.

Jesus himself experienced hunger. He promised: "Blessed are those who hunger...for they shall be satisfied" (Mt. 5:6). And he assessed his own need in these words: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me" (Jn. 4:34).

Following the multiplication of the loaves, Jesus promised the bread of life. "I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh...He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn. 6:48-56).

The Servant of God, Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky, frequently exhorted his faithful to partake of the Bread of Life. Many times he addressed special pastoral letters "to those who did not receive Communion at Easter time." The last exhortation of this sort was written in 1943, a year before he died. In fact, this letter appears as a Last Testament. "This letter of mine—perhaps, is the last letter that I will address to my dear Brothers and Sisters, the faithful Christians of the Lviw Archeparchy. It may be that the hour of my death is near at hand...I implore you by the living God, the Judge of man's conscience: Repent; sincerely confess your sins and receive Holy Communion."

In this letter the holy metropolitan provides this explanation: "Bread is necessary to sustain the life of the body. But, man lives not only in his body; he has an immortal soul. To live, a soul requires food. That food is the Blessed Eucharist. That is why Christ said: 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you' (Jn. 6:53). It is Christ himself who is the life of the soul. The soul lives by being united with Christ. For just as a branch partakes of the life of the tree, but separated from the tree, it withers and dies, in a similar way also the soul of man dies when it is

not united with that sacred tree, which is Christ. Jesus says, 'I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned' (Jn. 15:5-6). There he says, 'You have no life in you,' while here he says the same thing, using different words: 'cast forth...withers...and burned.' This is what awaits those who do not abide in Christ."

Pursuing this thought, the metropolitan asks the question: "But who abides in Christ? He who eats this sacred Bread and drinks this Wine, he, who receives the precious Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion? Clearly, a most important matter! The issue here is eternal life, eternal salvation. This is such an obvious truth! He who does not eat, cannot live. This is as true for the body as for the soul. The body requires bread, or ordinary food, and the soul requires bread—but not ordinary bread, rather the angelic bread of the Blessed Eucharist. This sacred bread is indeed baked out of wheaten flour; it is baked in the same way as ordinary bread, but it does not remain ordinary bread. Through the marvelous transformation of Christ's words this bread is changed into the Body of Christ. The physical eye does not perceive this divine transformation and the human mind is unable to comprehend how this miracle takes place. Faith, however, teaches that during the Divine Liturgy, wheaten bread is transformed; it becomes the Bread of Eternal Life; it becomes the Body of Christ the Saviour. The mind does not perceive this change, but it can experience its miraculous effects. For when a person receives Holy Communion with faith and love, sublime heavenly life is born in his soul. Here on earth this life can be man's joy and happiness, and after death, it will be his boundless happiness in the eternal kingdom."

The spiritual life of Metropolitan Andrew bore a very definite eucharistic imprint. In his daily celebration of the Divine Liturgy and in his prayers before the altar, he was always deeply recollected. While saying his prayers of thanksgiving following the Divine Liturgy, he would almost pass into another world. His external demeanor revealed that he was as though in direct communication with Jesus Christ, his God. His was a live and vibrant faith in the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Eucharist. This live faith was reflected in his conversations. One time the metropolitan told his niece, that in his opinion, the Blessed Eucharist was such a wonderful expression of Divine Love, that the Lord will find a way to continue the eucharistic mystery even in heaven.



## The Ukrainian Millennium

*The most ancient Ukrainian Chronicle, "Povist Vremennykh Let—A Tale of Bygone Years," informs us that the Grand Prince of Kiev, St. Volodymyr the Great, ordered that the citizens of his imperial city and the surrounding areas appear on the banks of the Dnipro River to be baptized. This happened on August 1st, 988. Hence, in a few years, in 1988, we will be celebrating the Millennium, i.e. the one thousandth anniversary of that historic event. In fact it is the most important event in the history of the Ukrainian people. It had a profound influence on our history and culture. It made us what we are—a Christian people. We are part of the family of Christian nations. Ours is a Christian culture. The values of the Gospel and of the Christian faith have permeated our whole culture—our way of living, our customs, our traditions, our way of thinking, of acting and reacting. Our numerous carols, our music, our liturgy, our icons and many other forms of art are a reflection of our belief in God. They are the incarnation and expression of the gift of faith in Jesus Christ that our forefathers received a thousand years ago.*

*In the Millennium we are celebrating an event that is spiritual in nature—our original incorporation in the Body of Christ by means of the Sacrament of Baptism that our forefathers received during the reign of St. Volodymyr the Great. This event calls for a spiritual response. To properly celebrate this religious anniversary we should put ourselves through a spiritual and psychological process of prayer, reflection, meditation, a process of repentance and conversion, a process of learning and studying to deepen and intensify our commitment to Christ. We need to rediscover our spiritual roots. We should study what our church teaches and believes, and to hold firmly to the true faith which lasts through changing times. We need a fresh appreciation of the truth that Christ is with his church always and that his Spirit guides it. Our church has a unity of baptism, a unity of doctrine, a unity under the Pope. In our celebration of the Millennium, we should deepen our sacramental life and strengthen our relationship with God through prayer and spiritual endeavours.*

*As Ukrainian Catholics we have a priceless heritage to cherish. Many of our brothers and sisters are enduring an intense persecution for the faith that has been handed down to them. Many have laid down their lives rather than betray that gift of faith. In the Ukraine sacristies have been looted, altars have been desecrated, chalices auctioned, sacred books have been burned, pulpits have been destroyed, churches have been converted into museums, warehouses, stables, barns. It is with mingled feelings of pride and sorrow that we reflect upon the persecutions and sufferings of our brothers and sisters—and this in a century that boasts of religious freedom. To identify with these brothers and sisters as well as with those who lived in bygone years when the seed of faith was first planted, we need to affirm and re-affirm in our hearts that faith which we received a thousand years ago during the reign of St. Volodymyr the Great.*

**Father Michael Hrynchyshyn, C.Ss.R.  
Secretary General**

# PRAYERS AFTER COMMUNION

## PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Glory be to You, O God. (*three times*)

I thank you, O Lord my God, that You have not rejected me, a sinner, but made me worthy to share in Your Holy Mysteries. I thank You for having granted that I, unworthy as I am, receive the communion of these pure and heavenly gifts. O Lord and Lover of men who died and rose for us, and graciously bestowed upon us these awe-inspiring and life-giving Mysteries for the sanctification and good of our souls and bodies: make them serve also for the healing of my soul and body, that they may set to flight every foe, enlighten the eyes of my heart, give peace to my spiritual powers, make my faith invincible, my love sincere. Fill me with Your wisdom and make me obedient to Your commandments, so that they increase in me Your divine grace to attain Your Kingdom. Being preserved by them in Your holiness, I will remember Your grace at all times, and from now on I will not live for myself, but for You, our Lord and Benefactor. And thus having ended this life in the hope of life everlasting, may I one day attain that eternal rest where the sound of rejoicing never ceases, and where endless is the delight of those who behold the inexpressible beauty of Your face. For You are the true desire and the inexpressible joy of those who love You, O Christ our God, and all creatures glorify You forevermore. Amen.

## A PRAYER OF ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

O Christ God, having been deemed worthy to partake in the Mysteries of Your most holy Body and precious Blood, I glorify and bless You, I adore and praise You, and I extol the work of Your Redemption, O Lord, now and always and forevermore. Amen.

## **PRAYER OF ST. BASIL THE GREAT**

O Master, Christ our God, the king of the ages and the creator of all things, I thank you for all the favors you have graciously granted me, and for the communion of your pure and life-giving mysteries. Now I turn to you prayerfully, o gracious God who loves mankind: shelter me under your protection and keep me in the shadow of your wings; grant that I may continue to receive your holy mysteries with a clear conscience until my last breath, for the forgiveness of my sins and for life everlasting. You are the Bread of Life, the Fountain of Holiness, the Granter of Graces; and we glorify you, together with your Father and your Holy Spirit, now and always and forever. Amen.

## **A PRAYER TO THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD**

O most holy Lady, Mother of God, the light of my darkened soul, my hope, my shelter, my refuge, my consolation and my joy: I thank you that you have made me, unworthy as I am, a partaker of the most pure Body and precious Blood of your Son. Having brought forth the true light, enlighten the eyes of my heart; having given birth to the Fountain of Immortality, save me from the death of sin. O tender and loving Mother of a merciful God, have mercy upon me, and grant me a repentant and contrite heart, a humbleness of mind, and deliver me from the bondage of evil thoughts. Make me worthy, until my last breath, to receive without condemnation the most pure and sanctifying Mysteries, for the healing of my soul and body; and grant me tears of contrition and repentance, that I may chant and praise you all the days of my life, for you are blessed and extolled forevermore. Amen.

O Lord Jesus Christ, our God, may Your holy Body give me life everlasting, and Your precious Blood be for the remission of my sins. May this Thanksgiving be for my joy, health and gladness; make me worthy, although a sinner, to stand at the right hand of Your glory through the prayers of Your most pure Mother and of all the saints. Amen.

