

SACRAMENTUM CARITATIS (2007)

EXERPTS

PART I: THE EUCHARIST, A MYSTERY TO BE BELIEVED

6. "*The mystery of faith!*" With these words, spoken immediately after the words of consecration, the priest proclaims the mystery being celebrated and expresses his wonder before the substantial change of bread and wine into the body and blood of the Lord Jesus, a reality which surpasses all human understanding. The Eucharist is a "mystery of faith" par excellence: "the sum and summary of our faith." (13)

The blessed Trinity and the Eucharist

8. The Eucharist reveals the loving plan that guides all of salvation history (cf. *Eph* 1:10; 3:8- 11). There the *Deus Trinitas*, who is essentially love (cf. *1 Jn* 4:7-8), becomes fully a part of our human condition. In the bread and wine under whose appearances Christ gives himself to us in the paschal meal (cf. *Lk* 22:14-20; *1 Cor* 11:23-26), God's whole life encounters us and is sacramentally shared with us. God is a perfect communion of love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Eucharist: Jesus the true Sacrificial Lamb

10. This leads us to reflect on the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. It took place within a ritual meal commemorating the foundational event of the people of Israel: their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. This ritual meal, which called for the sacrifice of lambs (cf. *Ex* 12:1-28, 43-51), was a remembrance of the past, but at the same time a prophetic remembrance, the proclamation of a deliverance yet to come.

11. Jesus thus brings his own radical *novum* to the ancient Hebrew sacrificial meal. For us Christians, that meal no longer need be repeated. As the Church Fathers rightly say, *figura transit in veritatem*: the foreshadowing has given way to the truth itself. The ancient rite has been brought to fulfillment and definitively surpassed by the loving gift of the incarnate Son of God.

The Holy Spirit and the Eucharist

[The Spirit came down upon the Church at Pentecost and since then has been continually in her and in her central act of worship, the worship of the Eucharist. The Spirit is seen in the providential development and unfolding across the ages of the various Catholic liturgical rites. The role of the Spirit in the liturgy is also seen in the Epiclesis which is an essential part of the Eucharistic Liturgy. The Epiclesis was therefore highlighted by the post-conciliar liturgical reforms.]

The Eucharist and the Church

14. In the striking interplay between the Eucharist which builds up the Church, and the Church herself which "makes" the Eucharist (33), the primary causality is expressed in the first formula: the Church is able to celebrate and adore the mystery of Christ present in the Eucharist precisely because Christ first gave himself to her in the sacrifice of the Cross. The Church's ability to "make" the Eucharist is completely rooted in Christ's self-gift to her. Here we can see more clearly the meaning of Saint John's words: "he first loved us" (*1 Jn* 4:19).

The Eucharist and the Sacraments

I. The Eucharist and Christian initiation

18. Attention needs to be paid to the order of the sacraments of initiation. Different traditions exist within the Church. There is a clear variation between, on the one hand, the ecclesial customs of the East (50) and the practice of the West regarding the initiation of adults, (51) and, on the other hand, the procedure adopted for children. (52) Yet these variations are not properly of the dogmatic order, but are pastoral in character. Concretely, it needs to be seen which practice better enables the faithful to put the sacrament of the Eucharist at the centre, as the goal of the whole process of initiation.

19. In this regard, I would like to call particular attention to the relationship between Christian initiation and the family. In pastoral work it is always important to make Christian families part of the process of initiation. Receiving Baptism, Confirmation and First Holy Communion are key moments not only for the individual receiving them but also for the entire family, which should be supported in its educational role by the various elements of the ecclesial community.

II. The Eucharist and the sacrament of reconciliation

20. An authentic catechesis on the meaning of the Eucharist must include the call to pursue the path of penance (cf. *1 Cor* 11:27-29). We know that the faithful are surrounded by a culture that tends to eliminate the sense of sin and to promote a superficial approach that overlooks the need to be in a state of grace in order to approach sacramental communion worthily. (56) The loss of a consciousness of sin always entails a certain superficiality in the understanding of God's love. Bringing out the elements within the rite of Mass that express consciousness of personal sin and, at the same time, of God's mercy, can prove most helpful to the faithful. Furthermore, the relationship between the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation reminds us that sin is never a purely individual affair; it always damages the ecclesial communion that we have entered through Baptism.

III. The Eucharist and the anointing of the sick

22. If the Eucharist shows how Christ's sufferings and death have been transformed into love, the Anointing of the Sick, for its part, unites the sick with Christ's self-offering for the salvation of all, so that they too, within the mystery of the communion of saints, can participate in the redemption of the world. The relationship between these two sacraments becomes clear in situations of serious illness: "In addition to the Anointing of the Sick, the Church offers those who are about to leave this life the Eucharist as viaticum."

IV. The Eucharist and the Sacrament of Holy Orders

23. No one can say "this is my body" and "this is the cup of my blood" except in the name and in the person of Christ, the one high priest of the new and eternal Covenant (cf. *Heb* 8-9)...As a result, priests should be conscious of the fact that in their ministry they must never put themselves or their personal opinions in first place, but Jesus Christ. Any attempt to make themselves the centre of the liturgical action contradicts their very identity as priests. The priest is above all a servant of others, and he must continually work at being a sign pointing to Christ, a docile instrument in the Lord's hands. This is seen particularly in his humility in leading the liturgical assembly, in obedience to the rite, uniting himself to it in mind and heart, and avoiding anything that might give the impression of an inordinate emphasis on his own personality.

V. The Eucharist and matrimony

27. Pope John Paul II frequently spoke of the nuptial character of the Eucharist and its special relationship with the sacrament of Matrimony: "The Eucharist is the sacrament of our redemption. It is the sacrament of the Bridegroom and of the Bride." (84) Moreover, "the entire Christian life bears the mark of the spousal love of Christ and the Church. Already Baptism, the entry into the People of God, is a nuptial mystery; it is so to speak the nuptial bath which precedes the wedding feast, the Eucharist."

The Eucharist and Eschatology

30. Man is created for that true and eternal happiness which only God's love can give. But our wounded freedom would go astray were it not already able to experience something of that future fulfillment. Moreover, to move forward in the right direction, we all need to be guided towards our final goal. That goal is Christ himself, the Lord who conquered sin and death, and who makes himself present to us in a special way in the Eucharistic celebration.

32. The Eucharistic celebration, in which we proclaim that Christ has died and risen, and will come again, is a pledge of the future glory in which our bodies too will be glorified. Celebrating the memorial of our salvation strengthens our hope in the resurrection of the body and in the possibility of meeting once again, face to face, those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith. In this context, I wish, together with the Synod Fathers, to remind all the faithful of the importance of prayers for the dead, especially the offering of Mass for them, so that, once purified, they can come to the beatific vision of God.

The Eucharist and the Virgin Mary

33. Although we are all still journeying towards the complete fulfillment of our hope, this does not mean that we cannot already gratefully acknowledge that God's gifts to us have found their perfect fulfillment in the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our Mother. Mary's Assumption body and soul into heaven is for us a sign of sure hope, for it shows us, on our pilgrimage through time, the eschatological goal of which the sacrament of the Eucharist enables us even now to have a foretaste.

PART TWO: THE EUCHARIST, A MYSTERY TO BE CELEBRATED

34. The Synod of Bishops reflected at length on the intrinsic relationship between Eucharistic faith and Eucharistic celebration, pointing out the connection between the *lex orandi* and the *lex credendi*, and stressing the primacy of the *liturgical action*...Our faith and the Eucharistic liturgy both have their source in the same event: Christ's gift of himself in the Paschal Mystery.

35. God allows himself to be glimpsed first in creation, in the beauty and harmony of the cosmos (cf. *Wis* 13:5; *Rom* 1:19- 20). In the Old Testament we see many signs of the grandeur of God's power as he manifests his glory in his wondrous deeds among the Chosen People (cf. *Ex* 14; 16:10; 24:12-18; *Num* 14:20- 23). In the New Testament this epiphany of beauty reaches definitive fulfillment in God's revelation in Jesus Christ: Christ is the full manifestation of the glory of God. In the glorification of the Son, the Father's glory shines forth and is communicated (cf. *Jn* 1:14; 8:54; 12:28; 17:1). Yet this beauty is not simply a harmony of proportion and form; "the fairest of the sons of men" (*Pis* 45[44]:3) is also, mysteriously, the one "who had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him" (*Is* 53:2). Jesus Christ shows us how the truth of love can transform even the dark mystery of death into the radiant light of the resurrection. Here the splendor of God's glory surpasses all worldly beauty. The truest beauty is the love of God, who definitively revealed himself to us in the paschal mystery.

The beauty of the liturgy is part of this mystery; it is a sublime expression of God's glory and, in a certain sense, a glimpse of heaven on earth. The memorial of Jesus' redemptive sacrifice contains something of that beauty which Peter, James and John beheld when the Master, making his way to Jerusalem, was transfigured before their eyes (cf. *Mk* 9:2). Beauty, then, is not mere decoration, but rather an essential element of the liturgical action, since it is an attribute of God himself and his revelation. These considerations should make us realize the care which is needed, if the liturgical action is to reflect its innate splendor.

The eucharistic celebration, the work of "Christus Totus"

36. The "subject" of the liturgy's intrinsic beauty is Christ himself, risen and glorified in the Holy Spirit, who includes the Church in his work.

37. Since the Eucharistic liturgy is essentially an *actio Dei* which draws us into Christ through the Holy Spirit, its basic structure is not something within our power to change, nor can it be held hostage by the latest trends.

Ars celebrandi

38. The *ars celebrandi* is the fruit of faithful adherence to the liturgical norms in all their richness...

40. The Eucharistic celebration is enhanced when priests and liturgical leaders are committed to making known the current liturgical texts and norms, making available the great riches found in the *General*

Instruction of the Roman Missal and the *Order of Readings for Mass*. Perhaps we take it for granted that our ecclesial communities already know and appreciate these resources, but this is not always the case. These texts contain riches which have preserved and expressed the faith and experience of the People of God over its two-thousand-year history.

42. In the *ars celebrandi*, liturgical song has a pre-eminent place. Saint Augustine rightly says in a famous sermon that "the new man sings a new song. Singing is an expression of joy and, if we consider the matter, an expression of love" (127). The People of God assembled for the liturgy sings the praises of God. In the course of her two-thousand-year history, the Church has created, and still creates, music and songs which represent a rich patrimony of faith and love. This heritage must not be lost. Certainly as far as the liturgy is concerned, we cannot say that one song is as good as another. Generic improvisation or the introduction of musical genres which fail to respect the meaning of the liturgy should be avoided. As an element of the liturgy, song should be well integrated into the overall celebration. Consequently everything – texts, music, execution – ought to correspond to the meaning of the mystery being celebrated, the structure of the rite and the liturgical seasons. Finally, while respecting various styles and different and highly praiseworthy traditions, I desire, in accordance with the request advanced by the Synod Fathers, that Gregorian chant be suitably esteemed and employed as the chant proper to the Roman liturgy.

The structure of the eucharistic Celebration

44. There is an intrinsic bond between the word of God and the Eucharist. From listening to the word of God, faith is born or strengthened (cf. *Rom* 10:17); in the Eucharist the Word made flesh gives himself to us as our spiritual food.

47. The Synod Fathers also drew attention to the presentation of the gifts. This is not to be viewed simply as a kind of "interval" between the liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the Eucharist...in the bread and wine that we bring to the altar, all creation is taken up by Christ the Redeemer to be transformed and presented to the Father. In this way we also bring to the altar all the pain and suffering of the world, in the certainty that everything has value in God's eyes.

48. The Eucharistic Prayer is "the centre and summit of the entire celebration"...the basic elements of every Eucharistic Prayer: thanksgiving, acclamation, epiclesis, institution narrative and consecration, anamnesis, offering, intercessions and final doxology.

50. Another moment of the celebration needing to be mentioned is the distribution and reception of Holy Communion. I ask everyone, especially ordained ministers and those who, after adequate preparation and in cases of genuine need, are authorized to exercise the ministry of distributing the Eucharist, to make every effort to ensure that this simple act preserves its importance as a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus in the sacrament. For the rules governing correct practice in this regard, I would refer to those documents recently issued on the subject (end-note references *Redemptionis sacramentum*). All Christian communities are to observe the current norms faithfully, seeing in them an expression of the faith and love with which we all must regard this sublime sacrament. Furthermore, the precious time of thanksgiving after communion should not be neglected: besides the singing of an appropriate hymn, it can also be most helpful to remain recollected in silence.

51. After the blessing, the deacon or the priest dismisses the people with the words: *Ite, missa est*...In antiquity, *missa* simply meant "dismissal." However in Christian usage it gradually took on a deeper meaning. The word "dismissal" has come to imply a "mission." These few words succinctly express the missionary nature of the Church. The People of God might be helped to understand more clearly this essential dimension of the Church's life, taking the dismissal as a starting-point. In this context, it might also be helpful to provide new texts, duly approved, for the prayer over the people and the final blessing, in order to make this connection clear.

Actuosa participatio

53. It is helpful to recall that active participation is not *per se* equivalent to the exercise of a specific ministry.

55. In their consideration of the *actuosa participatio* of the faithful in the liturgy, the Synod Fathers also discussed the personal conditions required for fruitful participation on the part of individuals. One of these is certainly the spirit of constant conversion which must mark the lives of all the faithful. Active participation in the Eucharistic liturgy can hardly be expected if one approaches it superficially, without an examination of his or her life. This inner disposition can be fostered, for example, by recollection and silence for at least a few moments before the beginning of the liturgy, by fasting and, when necessary, by sacramental confession. A heart reconciled to God makes genuine participation possible. The faithful need to be reminded that there can be no *actuosa participatio* in the sacred mysteries without an accompanying effort to participate actively in the life of the Church as a whole, including a missionary commitment to bring Christ's love into the life of society.

Clearly, full participation in the Eucharist takes place when the faithful approach the altar in person to receive communion. Yet true as this is, care must be taken lest they conclude that the mere fact of their being present in church during the liturgy gives them a right or even an obligation to approach the table of the Eucharist. Even in cases where it is not possible to receive sacramental communion, participation at Mass remains necessary, important, meaningful and fruitful. In such circumstances it is beneficial to cultivate a desire for full union with Christ through the practice of spiritual communion, praised by Pope John Paul II and recommended by saints who were masters of the spiritual life (See, for example, Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. LXXX, a. 1, 2; Saint Teresa of Jesus, *The Way of Perfection*, Chapter 35. The doctrine was authoritatively confirmed by the Council of Trent, Session XIII, c. VIII).

Interior participation in the celebration

64. Given the close relationship between the *ars celebrandi* and an *actuosa participatio*, it must first be said that "the best catechesis on the Eucharist is the Eucharist itself, celebrated well." (187) By its nature, the liturgy can be pedagogically effective in helping the faithful to enter more deeply into the mystery being celebrated. That is why, in the Church's most ancient tradition, the process of Christian formation always had an experiential character. While not neglecting a systematic understanding of the content of the faith, it centered on a vital and convincing encounter with Christ, as proclaimed by authentic witnesses. It is first and foremost the witness who introduces others to the mysteries.

Adoration and eucharistic devotion

66. Eucharistic adoration is simply the natural consequence of the Eucharistic celebration, which is itself the Church's supreme act of adoration. Receiving the Eucharist means adoring him whom we receive. Only in this way do we become one with him, and are given, as it were, a foretaste of the beauty of the heavenly liturgy. The act of adoration outside Mass prolongs and intensifies all that takes place during the liturgical celebration itself. Indeed, "only in adoration can a profound and genuine reception mature. And it is precisely this personal encounter with the Lord that then strengthens the social mission contained in the Eucharist..."

PART THREE: THE EUCHARIST, A MYSTERY TO BE LIVED

70. Here the Eucharistic celebration appears in all its power as the source and summit of the Church's life, since it expresses at once both the origin and the fulfillment of the new and definitive worship of God, the *logiké latreía*... Catholic doctrine, in fact, affirms that the Eucharist, as the sacrifice of Christ, is also the sacrifice of the Church, and thus of all the faithful.

71. Christianity's new worship includes and transfigures every aspect of life: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31). Christians, in all their actions, are called to offer true worship to God. Here the intrinsically Eucharistic nature of Christian life begins to take shape.

72. Saint Ignatius' phrase – "living in accordance with the Lord's Day" – also emphasizes that this holy day becomes paradigmatic for every other day of the week... "Living in accordance with the Lord's Day" means

living in the awareness of the liberation brought by Christ and making our lives a constant self-offering to God, so that his victory may be fully revealed to all humanity through a profoundly renewed existence.

The eucharistic form of the christian life

76. The Eucharistic mystery helps us to understand the profound meaning of the *communio sanctorum*. Communion always and inseparably has both a vertical and a horizontal sense: it is communion with God and communion with our brothers and sisters...Secularization, with its inherent emphasis on individualism, has its most negative effects on individuals who are isolated and lack a sense of belonging. Christianity, from its very beginning, has meant fellowship, a network of relationships constantly strengthened by hearing God's word and sharing in the Eucharist, and enlivened by the Holy Spirit.

77. It must be acknowledged that one of the most serious effects of the secularization just mentioned is that it has relegated the Christian faith to the margins of life as if it were irrelevant to everyday affairs. The futility of this way of living – "as if God did not exist" – is now evident to everyone. Today there is a need to rediscover that Jesus Christ is not just a private conviction or an abstract idea, but a real person, whose becoming part of human history is capable of renewing the life of every man and woman. Hence the Eucharist, as the source and summit of the Church's life and mission, must be translated into spirituality, into a life lived "according to the Spirit" (*Rom 8:4ff.*; cf. *Gal 5:16, 25*).

78. It follows that we must be committed to promoting the evangelization of cultures, conscious that Christ himself is the truth for every man and woman, and for all human history.

79. The Church's pastors should unfailingly support, guide and encourage the lay faithful to live fully their vocation to holiness within this world which God so loved that he gave his Son to become its salvation (cf. *Jn 3:16*).

82. Pope John Paul II stated that the moral life "has the value of a 'spiritual worship' (*Rom 12:1*; cf. *Phil 3:3*), flowing from and nourished by that inexhaustible source of holiness and glorification of God which is found in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist: by sharing in the sacrifice of the Cross, the Christian partakes of Christ's self-giving love and is equipped and committed to live this same charity in all his thoughts and deeds".

83. Here it is important to consider what the Synod Fathers described as *eucharistic consistency*, a quality which our lives are objectively called to embody. Worship pleasing to God can never be a purely private matter, without consequences for our relationships with others: it demands a public witness to our faith. Evidently, this is true for all the baptized, yet it is especially incumbent upon those who, by virtue of their social or political position, must make decisions regarding fundamental values...

The Eucharist, a mystery to be proclaimed

84. The love that we celebrate in the sacrament is not something we can keep to ourselves. By its very nature it demands to be shared with all. What the world needs is God's love; it needs to encounter Christ and to believe in him. The Eucharist is thus the source and summit not only of the Church's life, but also of her mission: "an authentically Eucharistic Church is a missionary Church."

The Eucharist, a mystery to be offered to the world

89. In discussing the social responsibility of all Christians, the Synod Fathers noted that the sacrifice of Christ is a mystery of liberation that constantly and insistently challenges us. I therefore urge all the faithful to be true promoters of peace and justice: "All who partake of the Eucharist must commit themselves to peacemaking in our world scarred by violence and war, and today in particular, by terrorism, economic corruption and sexual exploitation." (245) All these problems give rise in turn to others no less troubling and disheartening. We know that there can be no superficial solutions to these issues. Precisely because of the mystery we celebrate, we must denounce situations contrary to human dignity, since Christ shed his blood for all, and at the same time affirm the inestimable value of each individual person.