



The Year of the Eucharist

At this year's national convention in London, I was pleased to have the opportunity to share a luncheon with many members who are actively involved in fostering the spiritual development of their sisters at all levels of the League. We shared with one another accounts of the various initiatives undertaken by councils to aid growth in holiness and faith: prayer, retreats, scripture study and so on. At the same time, there emerged from our discussions an awareness of the need for common reference points to ensure that our diversity of action would have, as its context, singleness of purpose.

I suggested to those gathered for the luncheon – and by means of this article I extend the suggestion to all in the League – that two necessary reference points for our pastoral activity have been given to the church by the Holy Father. The first is his apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, and the second is his declaration of the Year of the Eucharist, which began in October 2004.

Novo Millennio Ineunte is the document from which we received our most recent theme for study and reflection: *cast out into the deep*. Because it sets out the Holy Father's pastoral vision for the church, the letter bears continual study. I shared my hope that this will be the principal point of reference to which we refer all initiatives in spiritual development for years to come. Pope John Paul II outlines the path that we must tread if we are to grow in holiness. Such growth involves prayer, regular celebration of the Eucharist and Reconciliation, and attentiveness to God's word. It will take time to absorb this document, and its implementation in the life of the League will require planning and the establishment of priorities from year to year.

By calling for a special Year of the Eucharist, the pope is inviting us to make this great sacrament our priority. Therefore, I propose that this year's common point of reference, giving unity of purpose to the variety of our endeavours, ought to be the effort to grow in our appreciation of the mystery of the Eucharist and of its centrality in the life of the church.

Contemplation of the mystery of the Eucharist fills us with gratitude and summons us to offer our lives in union with Christ to the Father. According to the scriptural accounts of the Last Supper, Jesus gave the Eucharist to His church as an everlasting memorial of Him and of His love for all God's people. St. John, in his portrayal of that final meal, accentuates this love of Jesus for His disciples: "Now

before the festival of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." (John 13:1) The "institution narratives" of the other Gospel writers, as well as that of St. Paul, record that Jesus left to the church a ritual meal, in which bread and wine are consumed, to be enacted in memory of that love: "Do this in remembrance of me" (cf. Mark 14:22-24; Matthew 26:26-28; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25). At mass, in obedience to this command of the Lord, we do as Jesus did at the Last Supper: bread and wine is blessed, broken and poured, and given to the gathered assembly.

Of course, the bread and wine are not merely symbolic reminders of the death of the Lord. The ritual action of taking, blessing and consuming bread and wine in memory of the self-sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross is of an entirely different order. By the word of Christ spoken by the priest and by the power of the Holy Spirit, these gifts are transformed. What were once bread and wine are now the body and blood of Jesus Christ. We enact a ritual meal in memory of Jesus Christ, and the church's Beloved Lord, risen and glorified, truly becomes present in our midst in His saving act, offering himself to the Father for the salvation of the world (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §47). When we give our "Amen" to the truth of His presence and receive from the altar His body and blood, we signify both our union with Christ in His gift of self to the Father, and our union with one another, called as members of Christ's body to offer our lives as "...spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 2:5) Thus, the Eucharist is the supreme sign of the unity of the church. In it, the essence of the church as a communion in Christ is manifest in an unsurpassable manner.

We now have announced a new theme to study for the next two years: *companions on the journey*. We are established as companions in faith by our common baptism, and are strengthened for the journey to the Father by frequent celebration of the Eucharist. Relating the theme to the great mystery of the Lord's abiding presence in the Eucharist will bear great fruit for the League.



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