

48th INTERNATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS

FROM 10 TO 17 OCTOBER 2004

*“The Eucharist, Light and Life
of the New Millennium”*



PRESENTATION

1 Jesus is the creative Word and giver of life who exists from the beginning; (cf. Jn 1:1.3-4). This Life was the light of all people: *“the true light that enlightens every person coming into this world”* (Jn 1:9; cf. Jn 1:4 –Scripture texts from Revised Standard Version, Catholic edition). And the Word was made flesh, precisely in order that we could contemplate and touch him (cf. Jn 1:14), and that we would receive the fullness of life, which he has in abundance (cf. Jn 1, 4.16). Jesus communicates to us life through his flesh and blood, as he emphatically taught in his discourse at Capernaum (cf. Jn 6:51-58).

2 At the dawn of a new millennium, just after it has celebrated with joy and gratitude the Great Jubilee of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Lord, “the same yesterday, today and for ever” (cf. Heb 13:8), the Church, which he founded, continues to experience his renewed presence in diverse ways: through his Word, a light illumining its path, in the liturgy and in one’s brothers and sisters, especially among those who are poor, since they show the human face of the suffering Christ (cf. EA 12); however, above all, in the Eucharist, which is a sacrifice, memorial, banquet and presence (cf. SC 7). Truly here in the Eucharist Christ, who is here present bodily, [II](#) offers as food for the new life the same body that he assumed from the Virgin Mary 2000 years ago (cf. TMA 55), namely, his flesh that gives life to all people since it is enlivened and made life-giving by the Spirit (cf. PO 5).

3 Entrusting ourselves to this presence that the same Risen Lord promised: *“I am with you always, to the close of the age”* (Mt 28:20), we have been motivated and impelled to go forward on our journey by the call of Peter’s successor, a call that echoes the words the apostle heard from his Master: *“Put out into the deep!”* (Lk 5:4; cf. NMI 1). The Church launches out into the sea of a new millennium and knows that it will be able to reach a sure haven because it does not venture forth alone nor trust in its own strength, but rather, because its Lord is ever-present, bestowing on it his Spirit and nourishing it with his sacraments, particularly with the Eucharist.

4 This pilgrim Church, looking gratefully towards the eucharistic Jesus Christ, will gather in contemplation at the 48th International Eucharistic Congress at the city of Guadalajara, in Mexico, a land of recently canonised martyrs, who discovered in the Eucharist the power and courage to give up their lives for their people and their faith as they shouted: *“Long live Christ the King, and our Lady of Guadalupe!”* [“*Viva Cristo Rey, y Santa María de Guadalupe!*”]. Gathered in prayer, contemplation and celebration at the *Statio orbis* of this Congress, the Church plunges into the new millennium with renewed hope, adoring the eucharistic Jesus, who is the light and life of humanity’s pilgrimage in pursuit of better living conditions, while yearning for its ultimate fatherland.

5 The next International Eucharistic Congress should be for the Church a wonderful opportunity to glorify Jesus Christ, present in it, worshipping him publicly in the bonds of charity and unity. This will be a magnificent event at which the Church will manifest its faith in the eucharistic presence. It will enable a deepening of some aspects of this mystery. It will highlight the central place of the Eucharist in the Church’s life and mission in the world today, as new commitments regarding evangelisation are undertaken. To achieve these objectives a painstaking preparation is required.

6 Thus, the purpose of the present text consists in providing local churches with some points for reflection, which could serve as a basis for further development and deepening in study circles and prayer groups, both while preparing for and during the celebration of the Congress. The text begins with an invitation to feel a yearning to contemplate Jesus Christ, true God and true man, and to allow oneself to come under his gaze and experience his presence: **We want to see your face, Lord** (chapter I). Through contemplation, which “in no way distances us from our contemporaries, but on the contrary, makes us attentive and open to the joys and endeavours of other persons,

widening the capacity of our hearts to embrace all aspects of the world”^[2], we prepare a vision of faith concerning our present condition in the certitude that **“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it”** (Jn 1:5), (chapter II). Being “‘the apex of all evangelisation’ and the most outstanding witness of the Resurrection of Christ.”^[3], **the Eucharist is the light and life of the new millennium** for the Church that is on pilgrimage and is committed to the task of a new evangelisation (chapter III). Finally, at the outset of this new millennium, we need a forthright and joyous proclamation of our faith in Jesus Christ, who enlightens this new phase of history: **Prayer before Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.**

+ Juan Cardinal Sandoval Iñiguez
Archbishop of Guadalajara.

I. WE WANT TO SEE YOUR FACE, LORD

The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharistic Mystery

Contemplatives of the face of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist

7 Just as those Greek pilgrims, who went to Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover, told Philip that they wanted to see Jesus, so people of our time, even though perhaps not always explicitly, ask Christians today not only to tell them about Jesus, but to show him to them clearly. This is precisely the task of the Church! To reflect the light of Christ in every epoch of history and also to manifest his face resplendently before people of the new millennium. However we shall not be able to fulfil such a task if we are not the first contemplatives of Christ’s face (cf. NMI 16). Hence, it is indispensable that we first have that living experience of him spoken of by the apostle John: *“what we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us”* (1 Jn 1:3).

8 How can we, today, see and contemplate this Life, the light of all people (cf. Jn 1:4) that has been manifested? Thanks to the Incarnation of God’s Son (cf. NMI 22), Christ has made himself visible, has established his dwelling place among us (cf. Jn 1:14). Thanks to him, the apostles were able to behold in the human appearance of Jesus the face of the Father, above all in being witnesses of his many signs and promises (cf. Jn 20:30-31; cf. NMI 24). They also contemplated the face of the suffering Christ, exposed on the Cross, a Mystery in the mystery; before this mystery human beings must prostrate themselves in adoration (cf. NMI 25). And above all they contemplated the face of the Risen One (cf. NMI 28), who restored to them all the peace and joy they had lost (cf. Lk 24:36-43). The Church experiences all this in contemplating the eucharistic mystery. Here is where we daily encounter this Jesus, true God and man; here his passion and his death itself is realised, though in an unbloody manner; finally, here we encounter the Risen Jesus, bread of eternal life, pledge of our resurrection.

9 Jesus is light and life (cf. Jn 8:12). Therefore adequate measures are to be sought for the proclamation of his word and the celebration of his Eucharist in ecclesial communities, from which he transcends all the circumstances of society as the leaven of a new civilisation.

We believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist

10 Can we really meet Jesus in the Eucharist? Since the Last Supper (cf. Mt 26:17ss; Lk 22:15), the Church believes in the real presence of Christ’s body and blood with his soul and divinity under the appearances of bread and wine: “At the heart of the celebration are the bread and wine that, by the words of Christ and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, become Christ’s Body and Blood” (CCC 1333). Certainly Christ makes himself present in many ways in his Church, but above all, as the Church teaches, under the eucharistic species of the bread and wine (cf. CCC 1373).

11 Recalling a chain of witnesses from Tradition, the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that “the mode of Christ’s presence under the Eucharistic species is unique. It raises the Eucharist above all the sacraments as ‘the perfection of the spiritual life and the end to which all the sacraments tend’ (CCC 1374). The Church has always understood the realism of Jesus’ words at the time of the institution of the Eucharist, because of which the Council of Trent summarised the Catholic faith in the Real Presence by declaring: “Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was truly his body that he was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the conviction of the Church of God, and this holy Council now declares again” (CCC 1376).

12 Jesus' discourse at Capernaum after the multiplication of the loaves (cf. Jn 6:1-71), brings out the realism of his words, which reveal to us that he is the bread come down from heaven (v. 51). Because of this, we must eat his body and drink his blood (v. 53) in order to be able to enjoy the life that is offered to us by the bread of life (v. 48). So struck by the realism of Jesus' words people began to argue: "how can he give us his flesh to eat?" (v. 52). And in the face of Christ's insistence on the literal truth of his statements: "because my flesh is real food and my blood real drink" (v. 55), many of his disciples were scandalised to such a degree that they left him (v. 66). At the end of the discourse he even asked his disciples if they too wanted to depart. Peter's words show Jesus that they believed in the truth of his words: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (v. 68). Sadly, many have not and do not believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the eucharistic bread (v. 64). At the beginning of the Third Millennium the Church has to ask: Why is it difficult to discover the face of Jesus in the Eucharist? What has to be done in order that more people may appreciate and enjoy this Christ who handed himself over to us? What must be done so that people may adore him in silence before the tabernacle or solemnly acclaim him at the feast of *Corpus Christi*?

"The disciples rejoiced to see the Lord" (Jn 20:20): the journey of the spirit

13 The face that the apostles contemplated after the Resurrection was the same that Jesus had shown them during their three years in his company; and now he convinced them of the amazing truth of his new life in showing them his hands and his side. Indeed it was not easy to believe. The disciples of Emmaus believed only after undertaking the difficult journey of the spirit (cf. Lk 24:13-35). The apostle Thomas believed only after having been invited to touch the Risen Lord (cf. Jn 20:24-29). Indeed, even though one were to see and touch his body, only faith could break through to the mystery. This was the experience that the disciples should have already had during Christ's mortal life, when they daily had been struck by the wonderful things he did and by his words. No one really comes to Jesus except through faith, along the steps of a path that the Gospel presents to us in the well-known scene at Caesarea-Philippi: " 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven'" (Mt 16:16-17; cf. NMI 19).

14 St Peter could express his faith in the eucharistic Jesus because it did not spring from a human source, but received as a gift from God (cf. NMI 20). Thus, 'It is not by the senses that we perceive him or are close to him. Faith and love enable us to recognise the Lord under the appearances of bread and wine'^[4]. Today more than ever before it is important to point out that "only the experience of silence and prayer offers the proper setting for the growth and development of a true, faithful and consistent knowledge of that mystery"(NMI 20).

"Lord, I seek your face"(Ps 27:8): the eucharistic face of Jesus

15 The ancient longing of the Psalmist could receive no fulfilment greater and more surprising than the contemplation of the face of Christ. God has truly blessed us in him and has made 'his face shine upon us' (Ps 67:1). At the same time, God and man that he is, he reveals to us also the true face of man, 'fully revealing man to man himself'. (NMI 23; cf. GS 22). This yearning of the psalmist is present in the heart of every human being, but especially in a person who by faith has already been touched by God. This yearning to contemplate the face of God is not in vain because Christ has not departed, but has fulfilled his promise: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20).

16 Aware of this presence of the Risen Lord in our midst, thanks to the Eucharist, "two thousand years after these events, the Church relives them as if they had happened today. Gazing on the face of Christ, the Bride contemplates her treasure and her joy. "*Dulcis Iesus memoria, dans vera cordis gaudia*": how sweet is the memory of Jesus, the source of the heart's true joy! Heartened by this experience, the Church today sets out once more on her journey, in order to proclaim Christ to the world at the dawn of the Third Millennium: he 'is the same yesterday and today and for ever' (Heb 13:8)" (NMI 28).

17 Following the invitation of his Holiness John Paul II, to "open more widely than ever the living Door that is Christ" (NMI 59), we fittingly reflect on the manner of sharing the experience of eucharistic contemplation that illumines our communities and transforms them into communities filled with joy and hope.

II. "THE LIGHT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS AND THE DARKNESS HAS NOT OVERCOME IT" (Jn 1:5)

Lights and shadows in the world today

18 Jesus is the light and life. These words sum up everything worthwhile that he offers us and that embrace the mystery of the Eucharist. Bread and wine are the means necessary for natural life. Analogously, if we do not eat the eucharistic bread we cannot nourish the life received at Baptism. It is a life that goes on developing to fulfilment, because through the Eucharist we grow in the life of virtue and all the gifts of the Spirit are fostered so that they lead us to salvation, thus realising the purpose for which the Eucharist was instituted. As distinct from natural life, the life of grace has no limits. On the horizon of this new millennium there appear questions and hopes, lights and shadows – there is the eternal struggle of the darkness seeking to extinguish the light. The Saviour has already come and his presence in the Eucharist guarantees salvation for us and history.

Lights

19 His Holiness Pope John Paul II frequently asks us to turn our gaze to the lights that make this world loveable, worthy of affection, despite its miserable condition, since the Son of God became flesh in a beautiful world, which his Father had created as good in every one of its tiniest details (cf. Gen 1:10.12.18.21.25). In the New Testament, Luke contrasts the children of light against those of this world; John tells us that God is the fullness of light; Christ as the revelation of the Father is the light that is revealed to all people; however, this world, which is darkness, does not receive the light. As children of the light we are called to give the world meaning, so that the rays of light are clearly evident. We point out some of these here:

20 It is a joy to notice the increase of Catholics in recent years, the growth of many ecclesial movements, a hopeful awakening of the spiritual life. The following of Jesus continues to answer the restlessness of so many men and women in the world. Likewise we perceive a growth in the number of vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life, which is a reason to hope for a better future.

21 Defence of the dignity and rights of human beings in the name of the Gospel is a central aspect in the mission and work of many Christians. Pope Paul VI stated: "The Church describes itself throughout the whole of the [Second Vatican] Council, in a sense, as the servant of humanity"^[5]. A great light for this world comes from beholding how the Lord's Glory has been manifested "down the age, and especially during the century which we have just left behind, by granting his Church *a great host of saints and martyrs*. [...] an eloquent message that needs no words, holiness is a living reflection of the face of Christ" (NMI 7). There are even other signs of hope: the fall of atheistic totalitarian regimes, new room for freedom and the development of democracy in many nations.

22 All people seek truth, they do not want to live in lies; hence the Pope rightly suggested to young people a magnificent task: to become "sentinels of the morning" (cf. NMI 9; Is 21:11-12). The Eucharist will always be for them the sun illuminating and warming their lives, in it they encounter he who is Life. In the Eucharist it is not just a person who is seeking God, but God who is seeking and waiting for us.

23 The Church has often spoken of the culture of life, presenting us with the incomparable value of the whole human person and how "*the Gospel of God's love for humanity, the Gospel of the dignity of the person and the Gospel of life are a single and indivisible Gospel*" (EV 2). The Eucharist, Bread of eternal life, leads us to proclaim again that the value of human life is sacred from its conception unto its natural term of death. In every encounter with the Eucharist, Jesus reminds us: "*Respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life!*" (EV 5).

24 The Christian community and secular society have proposed, and continue encouraging, many endeavours for the care of the weakest and defenceless. Children are valued as a gift of God. Centres are opened for the support of life. A great importance is given to scientific progress, technology and medicine, as contributing always to the service and dignity of the human person and the promotion of the common good of nations. A strong opposition is evident in regard to the death penalty and to war as a solution to conflicts (cf. EV 26-27).

25 Likewise, a respect for nature is given more serious consideration since as human beings we have received it as a gift and have the responsibility of being the stewards of creation. Indeed, the eucharistic bread and wine, fruit of the

earth and the work of human hands, signify a yearning to bring to its fullness all creation, which groans in giving birth, awaiting redemption (cf. Rom 8:22).

26 Grateful for the lights that we have pointed out, we may ask: how can the positive aspects be further developed in the present world, as we ask for the grace of God and commit our efforts in a responsible manner?

Shadows

27 We are facing most grave problems: we live in an environment of ambivalent globalisation, that at times is exclusive. Fierce economic systems are springing up that do not take into account human beings, powerful cultures that do not include the weak; so the gap between the rich and the poor, instead of being reduced, is broadening.

28 We regret the coming about of a darkening of moral awareness, loss of the capacity to love unto the end, terrorism, death and suffering occasioned by violence, an indifference towards truth, the break-up of families, an anguish in living a meaningless existence, abortion that results from insensitivity towards the most indefensible, precarious conditions of employment that slowly suffocate the lives of many individuals and families.

29 Darkness seems to overshadow the journey of Christians: “Among these social sins crying out to heaven must be mentioned: ‘the drug trade, the recycling of illicit funds, corruption at every level, the terror of violence, the arms race, racial discrimination, inequality between social groups and the irrational destruction of nature’. These sins are the sign of a deep crisis caused by the loss of a sense of God and the absence of those moral principles that should guide the life of every person. In the absence of moral points of reference, an unbridled greed for wealth and power takes over, obscuring any Gospel-based vision of social reality” (EA 56).

30 We draw attention to a sense of the absence of God, who becomes excluded for both private and social life. While, on the other hand there abounds a flourishing of a certain type of sectarian and fanatical religiosity, at times fundamentalist, or the spread of a vague spirituality without reference to God or requiring no commitment to moral values.

31. These and other lights and shadows, characteristic to our times, makes us ask ourselves:What must be done in order that the members of our communities in following out their Christian vocation as children of the light may offer the world evidence of the light: goodness, holiness and truth? (cf. Eph 5:8).

III. THE EUCHARIST LIGHT AND LIFE OF THE NEW MILLENIUM

“The Eucharist, source and summit of the Christian life” (LG 11)

1. THE EUCHARIST ACCOMPANIES OUR PILGRIMAGE

32 At the beginning of the Third Millennium the Church will be celebrating the 48th International Eucharistic Congress, confident because of the Lord’s presence always anew in its midst. The Church, a pilgrim people, encounters in the Eucharist the food of life that sustains it along its journeying, aware that its course leads to the fatherland (cf. Heb 11:13-16). The Church “celebrates the memorial of the Risen Lord, while it looks forward to that Sunday without end in which all humanity will enter into your rest” (Preface for Sunday, X).

Sacrifice of the New Covenant

33 The Eucharist is a sacrifice: the sacrifice of Redemption and at the same time the sacrifice of the New Covenant^[6]. At the Last Supper Jesus instituted the eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood, through which he perpetuated for all time his sacrifice on the cross and gave his Church the memorial of his death and Resurrection (cf. SC 47).

34 Jesus in the Eucharist is the victim that the Father gives us to be immolated; a victim who hands himself over to purify and reconcile us with the Father. This surrender of himself in sacrifice is prefigured in the Old Testament in the sacrifice of Abraham (cf. Gen 22:1-14), which is sung in the poetic sequence of the Feast of *Corpus Christi*: “*In figuris praesignatur, cum Isaac immolatur*” (Sequence “*Lauda Sion*”). The sacrificial character of the Eucharist is

clear in the very words of the Institution: “body that is given up” and “blood that is poured out” (cf. Lk 22, 19-20; CCC 1365). Christ’s sacrifice and that of the Eucharist are one unique sacrifice: the victim is the same, the only difference begin the manner of offering it (cf. Trento DH 1743; CCC 1367). Christ’s sacrifice is also the sacrifice of the members of his body, in such a way that “the lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value” (CEC 1368).

35 Likewise, “The Eucharist is the memorial of Christ’s Passover, the making present and the sacramental offering of his unique sacrifice, in the liturgy of the Church which is his Body” (CCC 1362). This is a memorial that is a proclamation of the wonderful deeds accomplished by God for humankind, and that makes Christ’s Passover present. The sacrifice that he offered once and for ever on the cross is actualised by the celebration (cf. Heb 7:25-27). Actualising the past in the present, the memorial impels us towards the future in the hope of the Lord’s return: “When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim your death, Lord Jesus, until you come in glory” (Acclamation 2 after the consecration).

36 From its origins the Church has celebrated the Eucharist in obedience to the Lord’s command: “*Do this in remembrance of me*” (1 Cor 11:24-25). Thus, we proclaim in the central part of the Eucharistic Prayer, immediately after the Institution Account: “Father, calling to mind the death your Son endured for our salvation, his glorious resurrection and ascension into heaven, and ready to greet him when he comes again, we offer you in thanksgiving this holy and living sacrifice” (Eucharistic Prayer III).

Bread that transforms.

37 Holy Scripture presents the Eucharist also as food. The eucharistic figures of the Old Testament announce and highlight this perspective. One of these figures is the sacrifice of Melchizedek who offered to Almighty God bread and wine (cf. Gen 14:18). Also the Paschal Lamb and the unleavened bread prefigure the Eucharist as food (cf. Ex 12:1-28): before the people were freed from slavery there was a meal in which the lamb is a sign of God’s saving action; after that the people undertook the long pilgrimage that brought them to the promised land. A figure of the Eucharist itself is contained in the banquet that Moses celebrated with the seventy elders after the sacrifice that sealed the covenant (cf. Ex 24:11).

38 The significance of the pilgrim banquet, which the Eucharist has, is found in the figure of the Manna (cf. Ex 16:1-35; Dt 8:3); this was a miraculous food that God sent the Hebrew people and lasted forty years as their sustenance during their desert wanderings; and it is the food that Christ referred to explicitly when he spoke of his eucharistic body as the bread of life come down from heaven (Jn 6:49-51.58).

39 Another figure of the Eucharist as a banquet that nourishes pilgrims is the bread which was cooked under ashes and eaten by Elijah: “*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 Kg 19, 5-8).

40 The condition of the Eucharist as food of pilgrims is recalled poetically in the sequence of the Solemnity of *Corpus Christi*: “*Ecce panis angelorum, factus cibus viatorum*” [*Behold the bread of angels, become food for wayfarers*] (Sequence “*Lauda, Sion*”). The bread of the Eucharist is the strength of the weak: “As we eat his body which he gave for us, we grow in strength” (Preface of the Eucharist I); it is the comfort of the sick, *viaticum* of the dying for whom Christ “makes himself spiritual food and drink in order to feed us in our journey to the eternal Passover” (Preface of the Eucharist III); it is the substantial food that sustains so many Christians in their bearing witness in favour of the truth of the Gospel which they manifest in a variety of situations.

41 “*He who eats me will live because of me*” (Jn 6:57), Jesus tells us in order to emphasise the necessity for Christians to be nourished by him who is the Bread come down from heaven. Participation in this sacred Banquet builds us up as the Mystical Body of Christ. Jesus in the Eucharist is, then, the centre of the Church’s life.

42 The Church has in the Eucharist the food that sustains it and transforms its inner life. In this regard St Leo the Great states: “Our participation in the body and blood of Christ do not lead to anything other than that of changing us into what we eat”^[7]. We are assimilated by Christ, we are transformed into being a new people, united intimately to him who is the head of the Mystical Body.

43. The new life that Christ gives us in the Eucharist becomes for us “the medicine of immortality, our antidote to ensure that we shall not die but live in Jesus Christ for ever” (St Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Ephesians* 20, 2). Those of us who are living from Christ, who desires that all may have life in abundance, must proclaim the sacred character of human life, from the moment of conception unto its natural term and oppose the recent influences of the culture of death.

2. THE EUCHARIST, MYSTERY OF COMMUNION AND CENTRE OF THE CHURCH’S LIFE

44 The Eucharist is the sacrament of the Church’s unity, as St Paul proclaims: “*Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread*” (1 Cor 10:17). In the prayer that he addressed to the Father for his disciples after having instituted the Eucharist, Christ himself expressed his yearning that all may be one and remain in him, just as he remains in the Father (cf. Jn 17:20-23). The *Acts of the Apostles* bears witness to the coming about of the community of life and attitude, which comes about by the breaking of the bread (cf. Acts 2:42-47). This unity is signified and brought about by the Eucharist.

45 Participation at one table is already itself a symbol of brotherhood and communion of attitudes. The outward sign of the food that is consumed also recalls, as the *Didaché* (9,4) states, that the grains of wheat, which were dispersed over the hills, become gathered into one loaf as a symbol of the Church’s unity, brought together from the ends of the earth. The Fathers since the beginning of the Church have copiously referred to this eucharistic symbolism related to the Church’s unity. The Council of Trent recalled this truth when it declared that Christ gave the Eucharist to his Church “as a symbol of his unity and charity, in which he desired that all Christians be united and bonded among themselves” (DH 1628). It went on to see this eucharistic symbolism as referring to that one Body whose head is Christ. Likewise the Second Vatican Council describes the Eucharist as “a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity” (SC 47 – referring to St Augustine).

46 Now, if the Eucharist is the source of unity, it is also the centre of the Church’s life. This is because we have in it a unique and transcendent principle. In virtue of this principle what is impossible for people, because of their sinfulness and disunity, can be attained. This same principle of unity is the physical Body of Christ, given up for his Church to build it up as his Mystical Body, of which he is the Head and we are his members.

47 The Church makes the Eucharist and the Eucharist makes the Church (cf. RH 20). Because of this fact the Eucharist is the centre of the Church’s life and all the other sacraments are ordered to it (cf. SC 7), as are likewise the ecclesial ministries and apostolic works. The Holy Eucharist is the source and summit of the preaching of the Gospel. In the Eucharist the whole spiritual good of the Church is contained, namely, Christ himself, our Passover and the living Bread, through his flesh that is enlivened and life-giving through the Holy Spirit, who gives life to people” (PO 5).

48 It follows that the eucharistic mystery should be also the centre of the local church. Christ’s Church is truly present in every legitimate gathering of the faithful united with their pastors; these gatherings are called “churches” in the New Testament. Here the faithful are gathered together by the preaching of the Gospel, and the mystery of the Lord’s Supper is celebrated so that by means of his Body and Blood the whole brotherhood is united. In these communities even though some are often insignificant and poor, or are scattered about, because of Christ’s presence the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church is congregated. For participation in the Body and Blood of the Lord enables us to become what we receive. (cf. LG 26).

49 The Eucharist as a mystery of communion is for the salvation of the world. Despite what is defective in them the separated Churches and communities, are, as the Second Vatican Council states, “means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church” (UR 3). These Churches do not enjoy that unity that Christ conferred on his Church, because they do not benefit from the fullness of the means of salvation with which Christ enriched it. Among the various means of salvation, the celebration of the Eucharist holds a particular importance because this celebration symbolises and realises the unity of all believers in Christ.

50 The Eastern Churches, as the same Vatican Council states, have maintained the sacrament of Orders and the same eucharistic faith as we have (cf. UR 15). On the other hand, the separated Churches in the West have not preserved the proper and integral nature of the eucharistic mystery, since they lack above all the sacrament of Order, “nevertheless, when they commemorate the Lord’s death and Resurrection in the Holy Supper, they profess that it

signifies life in communion with Christ and await his coming in glory (UR 22). For this reason the celebration of the sacrament of unity itself spurs us on to discover the positive values existing in the Churches and ecclesial communities that are not in full communion with the Catholic Church, and to guide them to their fulfilment in an approach that recognises that unity, just as the Eucharist, is God's work, in which we are called to co-operate actively and responsibly "with love for the truth, with charity, and with humility" (UR 11).

51. A living parish means that it is a eucharistic community: "No Christian community, however, is built up unless it has its basis and centre in the celebration of the most Holy Eucharist; from this, therefore, all education to the spirit of community must take its origin" (PO 6). Therefore, the planning and realisation of pastoral programmes must be begun by and properly related to the Eucharist as celebrated and contemplated in adoration, in order to bear fruits, especially in the field of the vocation apostolate.

3. THE EUCHARIST, NEED FOR SHARING

52 "The authentic sense of the Eucharist becomes of itself the school of active love for one's neighbour." (*Dominicae Cenaе*, 6). We understand the relation between the Eucharist and Light in keeping with the Apostle John's statement: "He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in the darkness still" (1 Jn 2:9).

53 To offer Christ's sacrifice truly implies that we continue this same sacrifice in a life committed to others. Just as he is offered in sacrifice under the form of bread and wine, so too we must give ourselves in fraternal and humble service to our brothers and sisters, taking into account of their needs rather than whether they are deserving of our help, and offering them bread, that is, the basic necessities for a living in a way befitting human dignity.

54 The notions of food or banquet for religious rituals pre-date Christianity. These are basic elements and vital needs pertaining to human existence. The richness of their significance is shown not so much in the physical act of eating and drinking, but rather in the experience of communicating, sharing and fraternal exchange. For Christians, who are aware of being members of Christ's Mystical Body, the opportunity for celebrating the "eucharistic Banquet" is a privilege, but also a challenge. The bread and wine that we present at the altar refer us to the food or drink that should be on the table of every human being. For there are many people who are unable to enjoy such a basic human right, either because they do not have food or because they do not have someone with whom to share it. This is a sign of outrageous injustice!

55 Such a situation is radically opposed to that which Jesus spoke about and realised during his life, and also which the primitive Christian community paid attention to and lived in accordance with Christ's teachings. Hence, when it is celebrated and shared as a banquet, the Eucharist invites us to realise the coherence between the breaking of bread and the following human dimensions: a sharing of material goods (cf. Acts 2:42.44; 4:34); a collection taken up for the benefit of those in need (cf. Acts 11:29; 12:25); service of the tables (cf. Acts 6:2); an overcoming of all divisions and discrimination (cf. 1 Cor 10:16; 11:18-22; Ja 2:1-13). All these dimensions have direct implications concerning evangelisation in the world and, concretely, in developing countries.

56 The Eucharist makes real the *Diakonia* or service of Christ, and it is the place of the renewal of the Church's mission, above all for the most needy. Thus the Eucharist is a school, fountain of love and *Diakonia*, the significance of which must be expressed in living. This implies that in the Eucharist and because of the Eucharist the following values will be fostered: fraternal acceptance, solidarity, sharing of goods, as well as preferential care of the most needy. A fitting witness of love is an indispensable dimension of true evangelisation.

4. Jesus Christ Evangeliser and the Eucharist, fount of evangelisation

57 At the centre of Jesus Christ's saving mission is the task of evangelisation. Nevertheless, Jesus did not only proclaim the Kingdom only in words, but "by the total fact of his presence and self-manifestation [...] but above all by his death and glorious resurrection from the dead" (DV 4). Most truly we can say that Jesus himself is the Kingdom.

58 As Paul VI himself mentioned, evangelisation "is begun during the life of Christ and definitively accomplished by his death and resurrection. But it must be patiently carried on during the course of history, in order to be realised fully on the day of the final coming of Christ" (EN 9). Because of this the Church has as her first duty the

responsibility of continuing the mission of Jesus. Regarding this we must take the apostle Paul's words to heart, "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1 Cor 9:16).

59 The Eucharist is a fount of evangelisation because it is in a certain manner the "centre of the Gospel", since it appears related to the Passover according to the narratives of the Institution of the Eucharist (cf. Mt 26:17-25 & parallel.), and in keeping with the most important themes of the Gospel itself, such as: the proclamation of the word of God, conversion and faith, charity and *koinonia*, reconciliation and forgiveness, and even eternal life (cf. Jn 6; Acts 2:42-46; 1 Cor 10:14-22; 11:17-26).

60 The Eucharist is, moreover, the summit of the sacramental journey because it synthesises and refers us to the different stages of sacramental living: baptism, confirmation, reconciliation, matrimony. By means of these Christians express their incorporation into the mystery of Christ and his Church. Through this the Eucharist involves the whole Church and every Christian, as members of Christ's Mystical Body, to become not only more deeply identified with Christ, but also committed to the task of evangelising others.

61 Finally, the Eucharist is an impulse for evangelisation in this Third Millennium because it is not only its centre, but also the fount from which the evangelising action flows and is moved ahead in the contemporary world (cf. NMI 36).

62 A particular feature of the liturgical and popular devotion to Jesus present sacramentally is seen in the following traditions: watching before the Reserved Sacrament on Holy Thursday, the Solemnity of *Corpus Christi* with its processions, the custom of Visits to the Blessed Sacrament, adoration during the Forty Hours, the Shrines of expiation with continuous exposition, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, communion on the first Fridays of the month, nocturnal adoration and Eucharistic Congresses. All these, among other devotions, are expressions of a simple and profound faith in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. They indicate a deep-felt love for him who has desired "to dwell among us". It is undeniable that the Church's task of evangelisation finds in all these practices a terrain for purification and growth, above all in our time so that in confronting "the darkness and shadow of death" (Lk 1:79) that enfold this world the Eucharist may be in its fullness the light and light for the whole of humanity.

63 The evangelising power of the Eucharist is such that it invites Christians to become wholly involved in a generous missionary commitment, that responds to the circumstances of each region and country. For, as Jesus told us at the Last Supper "do this in memory of me" (Lk 22:19), we cannot ignore his invitation to be, like him, bread that is broken and shared; blood that is poured out for the life of the world; if not, the celebration of the Eucharist without commitment will not be fully a "proclamation of the Gospel", as Paul warned the community of Corinth (cf. 1 Cor 11:17-34).

64. Likewise, participation in the Eucharist is the centre of Sunday for all Christians. Sanctification of the Lord's Day is a privilege that cannot be given up; it must be experienced not only as a precept to be observed, but as a need, that is truly recognised and consistent with Christian living (cf. NMI 36). Therefore, to encourage participation in the Eucharist, especially the Sunday celebration, should be an integral part in drawing up pastoral programmes of the New Evangelisation.

5. Mary, "Mother of the true God for whom one lives" (*Nican Mopohua*)

65 Mary told Juan Diego and now repeats to each Christian: "Know that I am the ever Virgin Mary, Mother of the true God for whom one lives"; and also: "Am I not here, I who am your Mother?"^[8]. The Virgin was showing herself as the Mother of Jesus and of all people. The Lady of Guadalupe is today still the sign of Christ's nearness, as she invites us to enter into communion with him, who leads us to the Father. Relying on Mary's help, the Church wishes to guide people to encounter Christ, who is the starting point of authentic conversion and renewed communion and solidarity.

66 The Virgin Mary for the indigenous people of these lands, with her maternal and merciful face, is the great sign of the nearness of the Father and Christ, with whom she invites us to enter into communion. Thus, the particular characteristic of the religious piety of the American peoples throughout their history and culture has been a profoundly maternal and Marian aspect; this expression can be seen in the *mestizo* [mixed race] face of the Virgin of

Guadalupe, who being the Mother of Christ made herself also the Mother of the Indians, of the oppressed poor and of all who need her. In fact, the first missionaries who came to America from lands with a strong Marian tradition taught love for the Virgin, the Mother of Jesus and of all people, as part of the rudiments of Christian faith. The apparition of Mary to Blessed Juan Diego, on the hill of Tepeyac, Mexico, had a decisive effect for evangelisation (cf. EA 11). Referring to this, Pope John Paul II stated that “in the American continent, the *mestiza* face of the Virgin of Guadalupe was from the start a symbol of the inculturation of evangelisation, of which she has been the lodestar and the guide” (EA 70).

67 Mary’s presence in the cenacle is reference point of the entire ecclesial community as it prepared to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit in order to go out from there to evangelise (cf. AG 4; LG 49; EN 82). The Marian experience of the Christian communities can be regarded as a permanent reality. This is a well-known fact evident in the eucharistic celebration of the early Christian communities and likewise in the widespread expressions of Marian popular piety. St Ephrem highlights in his poetical hymns the profound relationship that exists between the Virgin Mary and the Eucharist: “Mary gives us the Eucharist, in contrast to the bread given by Eve. Mary is also the tabernacle where the Word made flesh dwelt, symbol of the dwelling place of the Word in the Eucharist. The same body of Jesus, born of Mary, was born to become Eucharist.”[\[9\]](#).

Mary, “star of evangelisation”

68 At the end of his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI gives the title of “star of evangelisation” to the Mother of God: “On the morning of Pentecost she watched over with her prayer the beginning of evangelisation prompted by the Holy Spirit: may she be the Star of the evangelisation ever renewed which the Church, docile to her Lord’s command, must promote and accomplish, especially in these times which are difficult but full of hope!” (EN 82). So, Mary is the sure way to find Christ. Authentic piety towards the Mother of the Lord always encourages us to direct our life according to the Spirit and the values of the Gospel (cf. EA 11).

69 Mary is the “star of evangelisation” in different senses: because she maternally shared in the Church’s beginnings by her prayer together with the apostles in obtaining the grace of the Holy Spirit; because it is through her maternity that she is the model and image of the Church; because of her disposition of faith and her maternal intercession she makes the Church’s faith grow. She is the one who accompanies the Church’s evangelising activity, which through the word and the sacraments stimulates faith, leads to conversion from sin and bestows life on the children of God. In this way the part she plays is truly maternal.

70. Let us entrust to the most holy Virgin Mary the preparation and realisation of the 48^o International Eucharistic Congress, so that it may be an event of faith and an impulse towards evangelising in the new millennium – an impulse that is much required for acknowledging the true light and life, that is Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

PRAYER BEFORE JESUS CHRIST IN THE EUCHARIST

1. God our Father, we believe that you are the creator of all things and that you have made us for yourself close to the face of your Son, who was born of the Virgin Mary by the work of the Holy Spirit, to be our means and guarantee of eternal life.

2. We believe, provident Father, that by the power of your Spirit bread and wine become transformed into the body and blood of your Son, the finest wheat that eases the hungers of our journey.

3. We believe, Lord Jesus, that your Incarnation is continued in the wheat-grain of your eucharistic body, in order to nourish our yearning for light and life, love and forgiveness, grace and salvation.

4. We believe that in the Eucharist you inserted yourself into history in order to sustain pilgrims in their weakness

and all who dream to reap the fruits of their toil.
We know that at Bethlehem, the “house of Bread”,
the eternal Father prepared in the womb of the Virgin Mary
the Bread that he offers those hungering for the infinite.

5. We believe, Jesus in the Eucharist, that you are really and truly
present in the consecrated bread and wine,
extending your saving presence
and offering to your flock abundant pastures and fresh water.

6. We believe that eyes are deceived in seeing bread
and our tongue mistaken in tasting wine,
because it is all your entire self
offered in sacrifice and giving life to the world,
paradise for which it is always starved.

7. That night in the Cenacle,
Lord, in taking bread and wine in your hands,
you offered these gifts to all
for all time and infinite ages.

8. With you, Lamb of the Covenant,
there is raised up on every altar on which you offer yourself to the Father,
the fruits of the earth and the work of human hands,
the life of the believer, the doubt of the seeker,
the laughter of children, the plans of youth,
the pain of those who suffer
and the offering of the giver and the one who gives himself to his brethren.

9. We believe, Lord Jesus, that your goodness has prepared
a table for the great and little ones,
and that at your table we become brothers and sisters
by giving our lives for one another,
as you did for us.

10. We believe, Jesus, that on the altar of your sacrifice,
we receive strength for our weak flesh,
which does not always respond to the yearnings of the spirit,
but which you will transform into the image of your body.

11. We believe that at the table prepared for all,
there will always be a place for those who seek,
room for those at the fringes of our society,
the signs of death being overcome,
a new heaven and a new earth opening up.

12. We believe, Jesus, that you have not deserted your brethren,
you remain discretely present in the sanctuary of conscience
and in the bread and wine of your table,
as light and strength for the weak pilgrim.

13. We believe, indeed, that at the dawn of the Third Millennium
you make yourself a companion for our journey.
“*Put out into the deep*” is the mandate
at this moment to your Church,

so that, filled with hope, it takes
a new step forward in history.

14. Thank you, Jesus in the Eucharist, for impelling us
to undertake a new evangelisation strengthened by you.
May your Mother accompany those who are willing
to live and announce your word,
and, through her intercession, bring its seed to fruition.
Amén.

*Translation from the Spanish
by the Pontifical Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses.*

PRAYER FOR THE 48° INTERNATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS

Lord, Holy Father,
in Jesus Christ, your Son,
truly present in the Eucharist,
you give us the light that enlightens every person
coming into this world,
and the true life that fills us with joy;
we ask you to grant that we, your people,
who are entering the Third Millennium,
may celebrate with confidence
the 48th International Eucharistic Congress,
so that we may be strengthened at this sacred banquet
to become in Christ a light in the darkness,
and to live closely united to him who is our life.
May the presence of the Blessed Virgin Mary,
Mother of the true God for whom we live
truly support and accompany us always.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever and ever.
AMEN.

[\[1\]](#)Cf. *Myst Fid*: AAA 57 (1965) 766.

[\[2\]](#)John Paul II, *Letter on Eucharistic Adoration* sent to the Bishop of Liège on the occasion of the 750th Anniversary of the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, May 28 1996, n. 5.

[\[3\]](#)Ibid n.8 – citing LG 28.

[\[4\]](#)John Paul II, *Letter on Eucharistic Adoration*, n. 3.

[\[5\]](#)BIFI F, *Il magistero del Papi*: Seminarium 35 (1983) 347.

[\[6\]](#) Cf. John Paul II, *Dominicae Cena*, 9.

[\[7\]](#)Sermon 12 on the Passion, 7: CCL 138^a, 388.

[\[8\]](#)LAMADRID J.G., *Nican Mopohua*, ed.Jus p., 45.

[\[9\]](#)BACK E., CSCO, 218-219, Louvain, 1961.