



The Holy See

HOLY MASS FOR THE SOLEMNITY OF CORPUS CHRISTI

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Basilica of Saint John Lateran

Thursday, 7 June 2012

[Video]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This evening I would like to meditate with you on two interconnected aspects of the Eucharistic Mystery: worship of the Eucharist and its sacred nature. It is important to reflect on them once again to preserve them from incomplete visions of the Mystery itself, such as those encountered in the recent past.

First of all, a reflection on the importance of Eucharistic worship and, in particular, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. We shall experience it this evening, after Mass, before the procession, during it and at its conclusion. A unilateral interpretation of the Second Vatican Council penalized this dimension, in practice restricting the Eucharist to the moment of its celebration. Indeed it was very important to recognize the centrality of the celebration in which the Lord summons his people, gathers it round the dual table of the Word and of the Bread of life, nourishes and unites it with himself in the offering of the Sacrifice.

Of course, this evaluation of the liturgical assembly in which the Lord works his mystery of communion and brings it about still applies; but it must be put back into the proper balance. In fact — as often happens — in order to emphasize one aspect one ends by sacrificing another. In this case the correct accentuation of the celebration of the Eucharist has been to the detriment of adoration as an act of faith and prayer addressed to the Lord Jesus, really present in the Sacrament of the Altar.

This imbalance has also had repercussions on the spiritual life of the faithful. In fact, by concentrating the entire relationship with the Eucharistic Jesus in the sole moment of Holy Mass one risks emptying the rest of existential time and space of his presence. This makes ever less perceptible the meaning of Jesus' constant presence in our midst and with us, a presence that is tangible, close, in our homes, as the "beating Heart" of the city, of the country, and of the area, with its various expressions and activities. The sacrament of Christ's Charity must permeate the whole of daily life.

Actually it is wrong to set celebration and adoration against each other, as if they were competing. Exactly the opposite is true: worship of the Blessed Sacrament is, as it were, the spiritual "context" in which the community can celebrate the Eucharist well and in truth. Only if it is preceded, accompanied and followed by this inner attitude of faith and adoration can the liturgical action express its full meaning and value. The encounter with Jesus in Holy Mass is truly and fully brought about when the community can recognize that in the Sacrament he dwells in his house, waits for us, invites us to his table, then, after the assembly is dismissed, stays with us, with his discreet and silent presence, and accompanies us with his intercession, continuing to gather our spiritual sacrifices and offer them to the Father.

In this regard I am pleased to highlight the experience we shall be having together this evening too. At the moment of Adoration, we are all equal, kneeling before the Sacrament of Love. The common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood are brought together in Eucharistic worship. It is a very beautiful and significant experience which we have had several times in St Peter's Basilica, and also in the unforgettable Vigils with young people — I recall, for example, those in Cologne, London, Zagreb and Madrid. It is clear to all that these moments of Eucharistic Vigil prepare for the celebration of the Holy Mass, they prepare hearts for the encounter so that it will be more fruitful.

To be all together in prolonged silence before the Lord present in his Sacrament is one of the most genuine experiences of our being Church, which is accompanied complementarily by the celebration of the Eucharist, by listening to the word of God, by singing and by approaching the table of the Bread of Life together. Communion and contemplation cannot be separated, they go hand in hand. If I am truly to communicate with another person I must know him, I must be able to be in silence close to him, to listen to him and look at him lovingly. True love and true friendship are always nourished by the reciprocity of looks, of intense, eloquent silences full of respect and veneration, so that the encounter may be lived profoundly and personally rather than superficially. And, unfortunately, if this dimension is lacking, sacramental communion itself may become a superficial gesture on our part.

Instead, in true communion, prepared for by the conversation of prayer and of life, we can address words of confidence to the Lord, such as those which rang out just now in the Responsorial Psalm: "O Lord, I am your servant; I am your servant, the son of your handmaid. / You have loosed my

bonds./ I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving /and call on the name of the Lord” (Ps 116[115]:16-17).

I would now like to move on briefly to the second aspect: the sacred nature of the Eucharist. Here too so we have heard in the recent past of a certain misunderstanding of the authentic message of Sacred Scripture. The Christian newness with regard to worship has been influenced by a certain secularist mentality of the 1960s and 70s. It is true, and this is still the case, that the centre of worship is now no longer in the ancient rites and sacrifices, but in Christ himself, in his person, in his life, in his Paschal Mystery. However it must not be concluded from this fundamental innovation that the sacred no longer exists, but rather that it has found fulfilment in Jesus Christ, divine Love incarnate.

The Letter to the Hebrews, which we heard this evening in the Second Reading, speaks to us precisely of the newness of the priesthood of Christ, “high priest of the good things that have come” (Heb 9:11), but does not say that the priesthood is finished. Christ “is the mediator of a new covenant” (Heb 9:15), established in his blood which purifies our “conscience from dead works” (Heb 9:14). He did not abolish the sacred but brought it to fulfillment, inaugurating a new form of worship, which is indeed fully spiritual but which, however, as long as we are journeying in time, still makes use of signs and rites, which will exist no longer only at the end, in the heavenly Jerusalem, where there will no longer be any temple (cf. Rev 21:22). Thanks to Christ, the sacred is truer, more intense and, as happens with the Commandments, also more demanding! Ritual observance does not suffice but purification of the heart and the involvement of life is required.

I would also like to stress that the sacred has an educational function and its disappearance inevitably impoverishes culture and especially the formation of the new generations. If, for example, in the name of a faith that is secularized and no longer in need of sacred signs, these *Corpus Christi* processions through the city were to be abolished, the spiritual profile of Rome would be “flattened out”, and our personal and community awareness would be weakened.

Or let us think of a mother or father who in the name of a desacralized faith, deprived their children of all religious rituals: in reality they would end by giving a free hand to the many substitutes that exist in the consumer society, to other rites and other signs that could more easily become idols.

God, our Father, did not do this with humanity: he sent his Son into the world not to abolish, but to give fulfilment also to the sacred. At the height of this mission, at the Last Supper, Jesus instituted the Sacrament of his Body and his Blood, the Memorial of his Paschal Sacrifice. By so doing he replaced the ancient sacrifices with himself, but he did so in a rite which he commanded the Apostles to perpetuate, as a supreme sign of the true Sacred One who is he himself. With this faith, dear brothers and sisters, let us celebrate the Eucharistic Mystery today and every day and adore it as the centre of our life and the heart of the world. Amen.

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