



# The Holy See

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JOHN PAUL II

## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday 11 October 2000*

### ***Eucharist is perfect sacrifice of praise***

1. *"Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is yours, almighty Father"*. This proclamation of Trinitarian praise seals the prayer of the Canon at every Eucharistic celebration. The Eucharist, in fact, is the perfect *"sacrifice of praise"*, the highest glorification that rises from earth to heaven, *"the source and summit of the Christian life in which (the children of God) offer the divine victim (to the Father) and themselves along with it"* (*Lumen gentium*, n. 11). In the New Testament, the Letter to the Hebrews teaches us that the Christian liturgy is offered by "a high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens", who achieved a unique sacrifice once and for all by "offering up himself" (cf. *Heb 7: 26-27*). "Through him then", the Letter says, "let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God" (*Heb 13: 15*). Today let us briefly recall the two themes of sacrifice and praise which are found in the Eucharist, *sacrificium laudis*.

2. *First of all the sacrifice of Christ* becomes present in the Eucharist. Jesus is really present under the appearances of bread and wine, as he himself assures us: "This is my body ... this is my blood" (*Mt 26: 26, 28*). But the Christ present in the Eucharist is the Christ now glorified, who on Good Friday offered himself on the cross. This is what is emphasized by the words he spoke over the cup of wine: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (*Mt 26: 28*; cf. *Mk 14: 24*; *Lk 22: 20*). If these words are examined in the light of their biblical import, two significant references appear. The first consists of the expression "blood poured out" which, as the biblical language attests (cf. *Gn 9: 6*), is synonymous with violent death. The second is found in the precise statement "for many", regarding those for whom this blood is poured out. The allusion here takes us back to a fundamental text for the Christian interpretation of Scripture, the fourth

song of Isaiah: by his sacrifice, the Servant of the Lord "poured out his soul to death", and "bore the sin of many" (*Is* 53: 12; cf. *Heb* 9: 28; 1 *Pt* 2: 24).

3. The same sacrificial and redemptive dimension of the Eucharist is expressed by Jesus' words over the bread at the Last Supper, as they are traditionally related by Luke and Paul: "This is my body which is given for you" (*Lk* 22: 19; cf. 1 *Cor* 11: 24). Here too there is a reference to the sacrificial self-giving of the Servant of the Lord according to the passage from Isaiah already mentioned (53: 12): "He poured out his soul to death...; he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors". "The Eucharist is above all else a sacrifice. It is the sacrifice of the Redemption and also the sacrifice of the New Covenant, as we believe and as the Eastern Churches clearly profess: 'Today's sacrifice', the Greek Church stated centuries ago [at the Synod of Constantinople against Sotericus in 1156-57], "is like that offered once by the Only-begotten Incarnate Word; it is offered by him (now as then), since it is one and the same sacrifice" (Apostolic Letter *Dominicae Cena*e, n. 9).

4. The Eucharist, as the sacrifice of the New Covenant, is the development and fulfilment of the covenant celebrated on Sinai when Moses poured half the blood of the sacrificial victims on the altar, the symbol of God, and half on the assembly of the children of Israel (cf. *Ex* 24: 5-8). This "blood of the covenant" closely united God and man in a bond of solidarity. With the Eucharist the intimacy becomes total; the embrace between God and man reaches its apex. This is the fulfilment of that "new covenant" which Jeremiah had foretold (cf. 31: 31-34): a pact in the spirit and in the heart, which the Letter to the Hebrews extols precisely by taking the prophet's oracle and linking it to Christ's one definitive sacrifice (cf. *Heb* 10: 14-17).

5. At this point we can illustrate the other affirmation: the Eucharist is a sacrifice of *praise*. Essentially oriented to full communion between God and man, "the Eucharistic sacrifice is the source and summit of the whole of the Church's worship and of the Christian life. The faithful participate more fully in this sacrament of thanksgiving, propitiation, petition and praise, not only when they wholeheartedly offer the sacred victim, and in it themselves, to the Father with the priest, but also when they receive this same victim sacramentally" (Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, n. 3e).

As the term itself originally says in Greek, Eucharist means "thanksgiving"; in it the Son of God unites redeemed humanity to himself in a hymn of thanksgiving and praise. Let us remember that the Hebrew work *todah*, translated "praise", also means "thanksgiving". The sacrifice of praise was a sacrifice of thanksgiving (cf. *P*s 50 [49]: 14, 23). At the Last Supper, in order to institute the Eucharist, Jesus gave thanks to his Father (cf. *Mt* 26: 26-27 and parallels); this is the origin of the name of this sacrament.

6. "In the Eucharistic sacrifice the whole of creation loved by God is presented to the Father through the death and the Resurrection of Christ" (*CCC*, n. 1359). Uniting herself to Christ's

sacrifice, the Church in the Eucharist voices the praise of all creation. The commitment of every believer to offer his existence, his "body", as Paul says, as a "living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (*Rom 12: 1*), in full communion with Christ, must correspond to this. In this way, one life unites God and man, Christ crucified and raised for us all and the disciple who is called to give himself entirely to him.

The French poet Paul Claudel sings of this intimate communion of love, putting these words on Christ's lips: "Come with me, where I Am, in yourself, / and I will give you the key to life. / Where I Am, there eternally / is the secret of your origin ... / .... Where are your hands that are not mine? And your feet that are not nailed to the same cross? I died and rose once and for all! We are very close to one another / .... How can you separate yourself from me / without breaking my heart?" (*La Messe là-bas*).

*The Holy Father called for an end to the violence in the Middle East and asked believers to pray that the path of dialogue would be resumed:*

With great anguish we are following the very tense situation in the Middle East, once again shaken by events that have claimed numerous victims and have not even spared several holy places.

In view of this critical situation, I can only urge everyone to put an immediate end to this spiral of violence, as I invite all believers to pray to God that the peoples and leaders of that region will return to the path of dialogue in order to find again the joy of being children of God, their common Father.

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I extend a special greeting to the English-speaking visitors, especially to the Jubilee pilgrims from the Archdiocese of Saint Andrew's and Edinburgh in Scotland led by Archbishop O'Brien, and from the Diocese of Leeds in England, led by Bishop Constant. I greet the pilgrims from the Archdiocese of Washington led by Cardinal Hickey, to whom I offer my cordial good wishes for his Eightieth Birthday, which he is celebrating today. I also greet the pilgrim groups from Indianapolis led by Archbishop Buechlein, from Metuchen led by Bishop Breen, from Lincoln led by Bishop Bruskevitz, and from Nashville led by Bishop Kmiec. I welcome the winners of the Worldwide Jubilee Writing Contest, and the Delegates to the Thirteenth International Workshop being held at the *Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore*. Upon all of you and your families I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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