



Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish

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Lent 2005

My dear brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus,

I cannot believe that Lent is already upon us! I have just now finished putting away the last of my own Christmas decorations. How quickly our focus changes from the joy of Christ's birth in Bethlehem to his suffering and death in the season of Lent.

As your pastor and spiritual father, I find it my pastoral duty and joy to guide and facilitate your (and my own) growth and maturity in the Lord. To that end, I once again come to you – not asking for anything but your reflection and prayer as we enter this great season. So, I offer to you my pastoral reflections and a focus for this year's celebration of Lent.

Our new Bishop has several times already spoken of the great joy it is for him to have been ordained a bishop during this Year of the Eucharist. For us, the parish family of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, it is our own special joy and privilege to celebrate our 175th anniversary as a parish during this Year of the Eucharist. Thus, it seems so fitting and appropriate that our Lenten reflection and focus should be on the Eucharist.

Our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, wrote an encyclical letter in 2003 entitled *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, which focuses our attention on the Eucharist and its relationship to the Church. In this, our anniversary year, this is certainly a wonderful theme for our Lenten journey, for our parish's beginnings in 1830 we founded in and on the Eucharist.

Pope John Paul begins his letter with, "The Church draws her life from the Eucharist...The Second Vatican Council rightly proclaimed that the Eucharistic sacrifice is 'the source and summit of the Christian life'" (EDE 1, LG 11, PO 5). Indeed, this is the reality for us! He continues, "For the most Holy Eucharist contains the Church's entire spiritual wealth: Christ Himself." He emphasizes that "the Eucharist, as Christ's saving presence in the community of the faithful and its spiritual food, is the most precious possession that the Church can have in her journey through history" (EDE 9).

It is a sad commentary that today, the understanding and the practice regarding the Eucharist is so misunderstood and so under appreciated by so many Catholics. Bishop Rhoades, at the Mass of Thanksgiving for our deanery on January 31 said, "If Catholics knew who was present on our altars and in our tabernacles, the church would not be large enough to accommodate all who would want to come and worship and receive Christ's gift of Himself in the Eucharist." We have a wonderful opportunity, now, at this moment in our parish's history, to take up our Holy

Father's and new Bishop's theme of the New Evangelization and to be renewed in appreciation and love for this most special Sacrament of the Eucharist. I pray that we, as a parish family, may experience this New Evangelization, in particular, throughout this Lent and Anniversary Year.

The Sacrifice of the Mass

It begins, I believe, with an appreciation of the Mass and its truly sacrificial nature. While fellowship and community are important aspects of the Church, we cannot fail to recognize that none of this would be possible were it not for the gift of the Eucharist, central to all that we are and all that we do. "The Eucharist is a sacrifice in the strict sense, and not only in a general way, as if it were simply a matter of Christ's offering Himself to the faithful as their spiritual food. The gift of His love and obedience to the point of giving his life is in the first place a gift to His Father. Certainly it is a gift given for our sake, and indeed that of all humanity, yet it is first and foremost a gift to the Father," says John Paul (EDE 13). It is in the Eucharist that Christ's sacrifice is made sacramentally present so that we could unite ourselves to His self-sacrifice.

This is so key to every aspect of our Christian lives. We are called to be a self-gift to God, first, and to one another because of our love for God. I often remind people that when the priest says, "This is my body...this is my blood," we must say the same words – offering to the Father, in union with Christ, our very lives as a complete and total sacrifice and gift. We hold nothing back for ourselves, but give totally to God and to our brothers and sisters in our community and around the world.

The Real Presence

We must strive, as a parish, to heed this past weekend's Gospel reading and be "salt of the earth," bringing flavor to this world and preserving the Truth and our Catholic Faith – most particularly our doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The Pope comments that "The sacramental re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice . . . in the Mass involves a most special presence that—in the words of [Pope] Paul VI—is called "real" not as a way of excluding all other types of presence as if they were "not real," but because it is a presence in the fullest sense: a substantial presence whereby Christ, the God-Man, is wholly and entirely present" (EDE 15; cf. *Mysterium Fidei*, 39). Recall that, at the consecration, the bread and wine cease to exist, leaving only their appearances, cloaking the Real Presence of Christ. All that remains is the "adorable body and blood of the Lord Jesus...under the sacramental species of bread and wine" (EDE 15).

Adoration and Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament

In this Year of the Eucharist and of Anniversary celebration, we are striving to grow in our love for Christ, truly present in the Holy Eucharist. We have begun extended periods of weekly Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, in addition to our normal celebration of the Stations of the Cross. Worship of Christ in the Holy Eucharist is a practice that has declined so much over the years – but at the same time it is a devotion from which we can derive so much spiritual fruit. To spend time with Christ, truly present...what greater blessing could there be? "...the worship of the Eucharist outside of the Mass is of inestimable value for the life of the Church" (EDE 25)

and for our own spiritual growth and well-being. The Pope exclaims, “It is pleasant to spend time with Him, to lie close to his breast like the beloved disciple and to feel the infinite love present in his heart. If in our time Christians must be distinguished above all by the ‘art of prayer,’ how can we not feel a renewed need to spend time in spiritual converse, in silent adoration, in heartfelt love before Christ present in the Most Holy Sacrament? How often, dear brother and sisters, have I experienced this, and drawn from it strength, consolation, and support!” (EDE 25).

Remember that Christ, during his agony in the garden, “wanted His disciples to keep him company, yet he had to experience loneliness and abandonment: ‘So, could you not watch with me only one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation’” (EDE 4, Mt 26:40-41). It is truly a sacrifice for us to take time away from our normal, daily activities to spend time with the Lord. Yet, I think His question to His disciples is also addressed to us, and to me! “Could you not watch with me only one hour?” Can we not *make* the time in our schedules to be with the Lord and spend time with him? What better time than now to spend time with Christ in the Eucharist and be in the presence of His Paschal Mystery – His suffering and death on the Cross as well as His resurrection on Easter morning. Present there in the Eucharistic Host “...is the whole *Triduum Paschale* [Paschal Triduum], but this is as it were gathered up...and ‘concentrated’ for ever in the gift of the Eucharist. In this gift Jesus Christ entrusted to His Church the perennial making present of the Paschal Mystery. With it he brought about a mysterious ‘oneness of time’ between [the first Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter] and the passage of the centuries.

Receiving Communion

We have, in the last year, welcomed back to the Church many who had fallen away. We have, as the Lewistown Sentinel quoted me as saying, come to experience a new springtime, a new time of growth in our parish and community. This is, indeed, only by the grace of God shared so freely with us in the Holy Eucharist. Yet, so many more are nominal Catholics only. Communion with the Church is both visible and invisible, and both are needed to receive the Eucharist. Visible communion with the Church “entails communion in the teaching of the apostles, in the sacraments, and in the Church’s hierarchical order” (EDE 35) – in other words, accepting Catholic doctrine, receiving the Church’s sacraments, and being subject to her governance. In short, it is being a faithful Catholic, not in name only, but in practice.

Have so many forgotten the privilege and grace of receiving Holy Communion frequently or weekly or even daily? Do we remember with whom we are united in this Sacred Meal? “The Eucharistic Sacrifice is intrinsically directed to the inward union of the faithful with Christ through communion; we receive the very One who offered Himself for us, we receive His body which He gave up for us on the Cross and His blood which He ‘poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’” (EDE 16, Mt 26:28).

Invisible communion with the Church, “in Christ and through the working of the Holy Spirit, unites us to the Father and among ourselves.” Union with God is achieved through the state of grace, which is thus indispensable to receiving eucharistic Communion. Thus the pontiff states that “along these same lines, the Catechism of the Catholic Church rightly stipulates that ‘anyone

conscious of a grave sin must receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to communion. ' I therefore desire to reaffirm that in the Church there remains in force, now and in the future, the rule by which the Council of Trent . . . affirmed that, in order to receive the Eucharist in a worthy manner, 'one must first confess one's sins, when one is aware of mortal sin'" (EDE 36; cf. CCC 1385).

In regard to such cases, the Pope stresses: "The judgment of one's state of grace obviously belongs only to the person involved, since it is a question of examining one's conscience. However, in cases of outward conduct that is seriously, clearly, and steadfastly contrary to the moral norm, the Church, in her pastoral concern for the good order of the community and out of respect for the sacrament, cannot fail to feel directly involved. The Code of Canon Law refers to this situation of a manifest lack of proper moral disposition when it states that those who 'obstinately persist in manifest grave sin' are not to be admitted to eucharistic communion" (EDE 37; cf. CIC 915).

During the season of Lent, our parish will once again offer ample opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of God's healing love in Penance (or confession). In addition to Saturday afternoons, a priest will be available each Sunday morning from 9:30 – 10:30 am for the celebration of this Sacrament. There will also be a Lenten Penance service on March 13 with visiting priests assisting in the celebration of the Sacrament.

Conclusion

I invite you, during this most special of times, to "Catch the Spirit" and "Come Home to the Heart," to Christ's Sacred Heart awaiting for a personal encounter with you in the Sacraments, and most especially in the Eucharist.

Enclosed you will find a schedule of Lenten activities as they are now scheduled. Please post this calendar on your refrigerator or some other easily accessible place in your home. Refer to it often, and "Come Home to the Heart" and find Christ's Heart opened for you!

Please know of my constant prayers for you – but most especially during this Year of the Eucharist and 175th Anniversary. We have much to celebrate – a long Catholic presence in our community, and Christ's Presence in the Eucharist.

Sincerely yours in our Eucharistic Lord, I am



Rev. John Bateman