

CATHOLIC CHURCH. POPE, 1963-
(PAULUS, VI). ADDRESS ON THE
HOLY EUCHARIST.

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Address
of
Pope Paul VI
on the
Holy Eucharist

June 10, 1965





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National Catholic Welfare Conference
1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N. W. Washington 5, D. C.



*Address given by Pope Paul VI
at the Italian National Eucharistic Congress
at Pisa, Italy*

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My lord cardinals, among them our cardinal legate, the archbishop of Florence; venerable brothers, among them the revered and beloved archbishop of this ancient and illustrious Pisan See; ecclesiastic, civil, academic and military authorities, among them my lord the president of the council of ministers of Italy and those who represent here the Italian government as well as the town of Pisa; all the faithful of Pisa, Rome and Italy who have gathered here for the celebration of this 17th National Eucharistic Congress, we greet you all and we bless you with gratitude, knowing that you have come here to join your homage to ours to the august mystery of Christ present in the Eucharist, we greet you in the joy of being able to meet you, to pray with you, to prophesy new spiritual fortunes for this privileged land where history, art and culture have merged with faith for centuries and have expressed themselves in monuments of incomparable beauty and wisdom.

We owe a special greeting to all the beloved priests who have come here. The congress reserves this day for them in a particular way. We have come here to share with you, brothers in the vocation which Christ gave us all, in the totality of His love and dedication to His ministry.

Beloved and venerated priests, let us be aware of the twofold representation which is attributed to us—that of being God's representatives among men and that of being men's representatives to God. Let us exult and tremble at being made, if not worthy,

suitable to work at that twofold task “in the person of Christ” by His power as agents of the great Eucharistic mystery. Christ, who is present in us with His divine and human power, makes Himself present in His sacramental reality through our humble and sublime ministry. We are the operators, the ministers, the distributors of the Eucharist. Let us not forget it because of the holiness we owe to Christ and to God. Let us not forget it because of the charity we owe our brethren.

A greeting and a blessing to which we will not now add more, in order to confine the present brief homily to a consideration of the lofty religious theme we are celebrating and for which we reserve the fullness of our sentiment, translating both the greeting and the blessing into the piety and charity of the sacred liturgical rite.

Brothers and beloved sons, we have come to this congress to make our own the testimony which the congress has made its program: “God with us! for Christ is with us!” For the sacrosanct signs of the Eucharist are not only symbols and figures of Christ or modes indicating an affection or an action of His toward the guests at His supper. They contain Christ living and true. They show Him present as He is in eternal glory, but represented here in the act of His sacrifice, to demonstrate that the Eucharistic sacrifice reflects in an unbloody way the bloody immolation of Christ on the Cross and makes those participate in the benefits of redemption who worthily nourish themselves with the Body and the Blood of Christ clothed in those signs of bread and wine. So it is, so it is.

Oh, we know that by pronouncing such a reality we are pronouncing a mystery. Indeed, we see that by affirming the truth which the Catholic Church professes regarding the Eucharist we also pronounce an extremely involved—and extremely wonderful—complex of other truths essentially linked with the Eucharistic mystery, equally mysterious but equally founded on reality. Suffice it to recall first of all the priesthood, with its prodigious powers of realizing by divine power the mysterious presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the essential relationship of the Eucharist with the Mystical Body of Christ,¹ that is to say with the Church which has in the Eucharist the sign—now for us the supreme sign—of its

¹ cfr. *St. Th.* III, 73, 3

unity and the most effective principle, Christ Himself in an act of extreme charity, of its composition and of its sanctification.

Moreover, this real and hidden presence, veiled in signs as devoid of their real nature—bread and wine—as they are full of the specific spiritual significance of the Eucharist, the spiritual food of the wayfarer on the road to eternal life, carries with it such depths of theological implications as to constitute the heart of the Church. Think of the analogy between the word and its identical and multiplied resonance in those who listen to it; of evangelical references—think of the speeches of Christ at Capharnaum and at the Last Supper; of liturgical derivation—the Mass first of all; of devotional applications—think of the silent and wonderful mystery of the innumerable tabernacles which spangle the face of the earth with lights visible only to angels, saints and believers; of spiritual fruitfulness—think of the liturgical fullness of the assemblies of the faithful around the altar, and of the personal conversations which individual souls, nourished by Christ or enraptured by faith or charity, in adoration and prayer entertain with the Divine Presence. It carries with it, as we said, such religious, spiritual, moral and ritual implications as to constitute the heart of the Church. It is Jesus who speaks: I am in the midst of them.²

So it is. We repeat: we know that we speak of a mystery. But so it is. This is our testimony, which coincides with that of this congress, and we give it the full confirmation which our apostolic ministry authorizes and indeed obliges us to profess. So it is. Christ is really present in the Eucharistic sacrament. We say this in order to rejoice with you, faithful sons, who make of the Eucharist your spiritual nourishment, and to strengthen your piety in that true worship, nourished on the Gospel and on theological doctrine, toward which the recent Council decree on the Sacred Liturgy exhorts us and for which it paves the way.

We say this also in order to dispel some uncertainties which have arisen during these past few years from an attempt to give elusive interpretations to the traditional and authoritative doctrine of the Church in a matter of such importance. And we say it in order to ask you all, men of our century, to center your attention on this ancient and ever new message, which the Church still re-

² *Matt.* 18, 20

peats: Christ, living and hidden in the sacramental sign which offers Him to us, is really present. This is no vain word, no superstitious delusion or mythical fantasy; it is the truth no less real, though on a different plane, than those which all of us who are schooled by modern culture, seek to explore, conquer and affirm regarding the things which surround us and which, once known, give the sense of certain, positive truths, and, what is more, useful scientific truths.

Men, brothers and sons of our time, we believe we understand the perplexity and also the opposition which some of you feel at the proclamation of the Eucharistic mystery, which the Church continues to proclaim, and which we ourselves, taking advantage of such a propitious and solemn occasion, here confirm.

How can it be, how can it be—we seem to hear some of you whisper—a thing so foreign to ordinary experience, to all usual knowledge of the physical world, to all possibility of proof by the senses? The mental training of our time accustoms the mind to certainties that are concrete, within the grasp of its power to know.

The art of doubt then, and of a negative criticism, the accommodation of the mind to agnosticism and scepticism, the facility for speculative as well as for practical negation regarding religion, perhaps even a certain secret sloth deep in the souls of many men once endowed with proper religious information and some happy experiences of who Christ is and of what His word is worth, a sloth which paralyzes at a given moment an act of honest and courageous meditation—all these characteristics of modern mentality and culture at times cause the man of the world to bring himself to a standstill before the proclamation which we here repeat: “Christ is with us.” Once more they place on his lips the negative comments of the hearers of Christ’s great Eucharistic speech at Capernaum: “This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it?”³

Well, then, men of our time, whom we believe also to be sons of the Church and our brothers, because you were christened and therefore eligible for the ineffable communion, we cannot illustrate to you now the reasons which render acceptable the great Eucharistic truth. We prefer to restrict ourselves to saying to you what

³ *John* 6, 60

we say to ourselves: It is a mystery, that is to say a truth of another order than that of ordinary logic and of the knowledge gained from the experience of the senses.

But it is a truth guaranteed by the word of the Master, Jesus Christ, a word which sets in motion in our mind a particular form of knowing and adhering to a truth beyond the grasp of its normal intelligence. It is a particular form of accepting and living a word which contains its own justification and, even though sustained by many plausible arguments, has within itself a secret reassuring attraction. It is a particular form of pledging our being to welcome a truth which affirms itself to be the equivalent of life, that particular form which is called—you have guessed it—faith.

The Eucharist is the mystery of faith. The brightest, the sweetest, the surest light for those who believe; a dull rite for those who do not believe.

Oh how decisive the Eucharistic theme is when brought to this discriminating point! Those who welcome it make a choice. They choose with the vigorous conclusion of Peter: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast words of everlasting life!"⁴

Most beloved brothers and sons, this is perhaps the propitious moment for everyone to renew the choice which Christ puts before us, not only regarding this salient dogma of the Eucharistic mystery, but regrading His whole evangelical message, which the Church, guided by the Holy Ghost and after a long vigil of meditation, puts before us. In the solemn hour of the ecumenical Council, while a new day for the life of the world dawns in the ambit of history, our faith plays a role of great importance. Everyone knows how widely and deeply the need is felt for a transcendent truth, profoundly capable of illuminating humanity's path: The Catholic faith once more presents to the world its impressive offer.

Observe: It is a free offer to free men and, as you will see if you meditate on it properly, a liberating one. The Lord said it: The truth, His truth shall make you free.⁵ It is a free and disinterested offer, which draws its beginning, and its end from an infinite love. It is an offer which does not humiliate the mind of man, but lifts it to higher visions. It is an offer which does not interfere with the ex-

⁴ *John* 6, 68

⁵ *John* 8, 32

ercise of human thought, nor does it impede labor in its natural and upright toil, nor yet does it bring to a standstill the pursuit of civil achievements. Instead it illumines and comforts the man who fills his daily life with worthy works. It is an offer—everyone knows it—which does not slow down social development, does not estrange man from his legitimate vital aspirations, but brings with it the eternal and joyous message of the Gospel, of comfort and hope for every human sorrow, and a stimulus for all due justice. It is an offer which is linked to responsibility before God for the destiny of individual life—remember: he who believes shall be saved⁶—and before history for the fate of peace in the world. It is therefore a grave and a great offer. If accepted, it pledges one's life to a sincerely magnanimous program, but always filled with Christian simplicity, good and pious. Faith is life, faith is salvation.

If our voice can have the force of expansion and penetration, it is you, people of Pisa, that we wish to reach first; to reach your hearts. This is the hour of faith. We will repeat the apostolic exhortation: "Be steadfast in the faith."⁷ Be steadfast in the faith which has fashioned your history and made your glory. Let this be the day when you regain full and willing awareness of it and make it into a reason for faithfulness in the future. Paternally, we dare to advance, with a friendly heart and with esteem, our appeal for a new consideration of the faith of Christ on the very threshold of your famous university, which we know and venerate and of which a distant predecessor of ours, Clement VI (1343) laid the foundations centuries ago, as well as on the no less esteemed threshold of your higher normal school. It is well worth while for ardent and thoughtful minds, such as gather in these august abodes of study and knowledge, to think over the gravity and to recognize the goodness of this appeal.

To the people of Tuscany, who are today receiving our visit, we repeat: Sons of Tuscany, love the Christian faith of this privileged and blessed land, the faith of your saints, the faith of the magnanimous souls whose immortal memory is celebrated

⁶ MRMC. 16, 16

⁷ I *Peter* 5, 8

yesterday and today as in the past—Galileo, Michelangelo and Dante, love the faith of your fathers. Today, let it still be your frank and lively faith, and, tomorrow, the faith of your sons.

And we would wish our cry for constancy in the faith to reach across the Tyrrhenian Sea to the beloved and hard-working island of Sardinia with which Pisa has for centuries had spiritual and civil exchanges. We wish our cry to reach the whole of Italy, which finds here the magnificent expression of its spiritual unity, the stupendous token of its Christian prosperity.

This is the message which the Pope has come to give personally to the National Eucharistic Congress at glorious Pisa.

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(Translation provided by NCWC News Service)



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