

POPE BENEDICT XVI

# THE EUCHARIST

## SACRAMENT OF CHARITY



APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION  
ON THE EUCHARIST AS THE  
SOURCE AND SUMMIT OF THE  
CHURCH'S LIFE AND MISSION.

Let us encourage one another to walk joyfully, our hearts filled with *wonder*, towards our encounter with the Holy Eucharist . . .

— Pope Benedict XVI



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### *Wonder...*

The word reminds us of parents gazing on their newborn for the first time, the joy of a bride and groom as they commit their lives to each other in Christ, the sight of a loved one returning home after a prodigal absence. It is that sense of amazement, of awe, of joy quickening our hearts, that Pope Benedict XVI calls us to experience when we participate in the Eucharist, “the gift that Jesus Christ makes of himself, thus revealing to us God’s infinite love for every man and woman.”

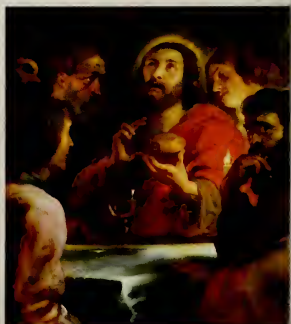
Writing to Catholics worldwide — not just as a theologian but as a pastor — in *The Sacrament of Charity*, the Holy Father explains that he wishes to encourage “the Christian people to deepen their understanding of the relationship between the Eucharistic mystery, the liturgical action, and the new spiritual worship which derives from the Eucharist as the sacrament of charity.”

### **Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation**

Following Pope John Paul II’s “Year of the Eucharist,” bishops from around the world gathered in Rome in the fall of 2005 for a special meeting called a synod. The propositions that emerged from this meeting were forwarded to Pope Benedict, who used them as the basis of his “Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation” on *The Sacrament of Charity* (available at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)).

### **The Source and Summit**

The Eucharist is both the “source and summit” of our spiritual life. As Catholics, our faith is awakened by hearing God’s word and “nourished at the table of the Eucharist.” The Eucharist is not only the para-



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mount sign of God's presence in our lives but is also the wellspring of our inspiration to live truly Christian lives. Pope Benedict urges all Catholics to rediscover this source of energy in order to transform our lives:

The more lively the Eucharistic faith of the People of God, the deeper is its sharing in ecclesial life in steadfast commitment to the mission entrusted by Christ to his disciples. The Church's very history bears witness to this. Every great reform has in some way been linked to the rediscovery of belief in the Lord's Eucharistic presence among his people.



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### **Mystery of Love**

It can be difficult to put into words the love one has for a spouse, a child, or a parent — but the Holy Father eloquently communicates to us the rich reality of the Eucharist in our Faith when he writes:

- ◆ In his sacrifice, his death on the Cross, Jesus redeemed us from evil and death. “This is love in its most radical form.”
- ◆ “In the Eucharist Jesus does not give us a ‘thing,’ but himself; he offers his own body and pours out his own blood.”
- ◆ Through his gift of the Eucharist, Jesus gives us the means of transformation through which “we become sharers of God’s inmost life.” At the Eucharist, we encounter in a tangible way the real and living God who sets off “a sort of ‘nuclear fission’ . . . which penetrates to the heart of all being,” transforming reality, transfiguring the world, and transcending the bound-

aries of human limitation. Thus, when we receive the Eucharist,

... It is not the Eucharistic food that is changed into us, but rather we who are mysteriously transformed by it. Christ nourishes us by uniting us to himself; "he draws us into himself."

◆ This union with Christ, brought about by our Communion with him, permeates our entire life:

Worship pleasing to God thus becomes a new way of living our whole life, each particular moment of which is lifted up, since it is lived as part of a relationship with Christ and as an offering to God.

◆ With the Church as his Bride, Jesus makes his redeeming sacrifice sacramentally present in every culture.

◆ The Eucharist energizes our lives and serves as the root of our global community as Catholics. "... in the celebration of the Eucharist, the individual members of the faithful find themselves in their Church, that is, in the Church of Christ." As members of this one Church, with a common mission and common goal rooted in the Eucharist, we go forth as one body to make a difference in the world.



### What Our Souls Desire

Made in the image and likeness of God, we are drawn spontaneously toward beauty as the reflection of the splendor of God's glory. Pope Benedict reminds us that the celebration of the Eucharist, "like the rest of Christian Revelation . . . is inherently linked to beauty." This beauty is not "mere decoration, but rather an essential element of the liturgical action since it is an attribute of God himself and his revelation." He adds:

This is no mere aestheticism, but the concrete way in which the truth of God's love in Christ encounters us, attracts us and delights us, enabling us to emerge from ourselves and drawing us towards our true vocation, which is love.

The inherent beauty of how the Eucharist is celebrated is reflected in the “sense of the sacred and the use of outward signs which help to cultivate this sense,” for “everything related to the Eucharist should be marked by beauty.” This includes the harmony of the ritual itself; the vestments; the furnishings; the sacred vessels; the music, especially Gregorian chant; even the space of worship. All should combine to “foster awe for the mystery of God.” We contribute to that beauty by the way we participate in the Eucharist.

### **A Gift to Die For**

Those of us who live where freedom of religion is a given must never forget our brothers and sisters who are persecuted and sometimes killed for their faith. Pope Benedict recalls that, even today, men and women die as martyrs for the faith, and “such worship culminates in the joyful and convincing testimony of a consistent Christian life, wherever the Lord calls us to be his witnesses.”

### **Words and Actions**

The liturgy of the word and the Eucharistic liturgy “form but one single act of worship,” Pope Benedict reminds us.



W.P. Wittman

From the Scripture readings, through which “God himself speaks to his people,” to the presentation of the gifts, when “we bring to the altar all the pain and suffering of the world,” to the Eucharistic prayer itself, handed down “by the Church’s living Tradition,” to the final dismissal, which sends us into the world on our “mission,” the Mass empowers us to live out our faith in daily life. “Worship pleasing to God can never be a purely private matter,” Pope Benedict says. “It demands a public witness to our faith.”



Extending his insights to the practical, the Holy Father reminds us that participating in the Sunday liturgy not only “is demanded by our Christian conscience” but also “forms that conscience.” Sunday is to be set aside as a holy day,

“a new way of experiencing time, relationships, work, life, and death,” centered around the celebration of the Eucharist. Setting aside Sunday gives new meaning to both work and rest, keeps us from being enslaved by our work, and fosters our being present to one another.

In addition, because our faith must always have a public component and witness, the Holy Father encourages the use of Latin, especially at international gatherings, “in order to express more clearly the unity and universality of the Church.” He also encourages all members of the faithful to learn the more common prayers of the Mass in Latin as a concrete way of sharing in this sign of unity and universality.

Finally, he suggests that all the faithful pray the Liturgy of the Hours and remember the souls of the departed in their prayers and in Mass intentions.

### **Adoration, Eucharistic Devotion, and Reconciliation**

In the Eucharist, the Son of God comes to meet us; in Eucharistic adoration, we go to meet the Son of God.

“Eucharistic adoration is simply the natural consequence of the Eucharistic celebration, which is itself the Church’s supreme act of adoration,” Pope Benedict explains. He encourages all of us “to make time for personal prayer before the Sacrament of the Altar,” as well as other devotions dedicated to Eucharistic Adoration.



He reminds us that the “meaning of the Eucharist must include the call to pursue the path of penance,” and thus, we need to partake of the sacrament of Reconciliation as part of the process of conversion.

## Participation without Reception

Participation in the Eucharist is more than receiving communion. A Catholic is asked to approach the Eucharist only after “an examination of his or her life.” If we, for whatever reason, are in a position where reception “objectively contradicts the loving union of Christ and the Church made present in the Eucharist,” we are asked to prayerfully and sacrificially refrain from receiving the Body and Blood of Christ.

This is the case, for instance, with divorced and remarried Catholics whose first marriages have not been annulled, non-Catholic Christians, and those who are in a state of serious sin.

Catholics in public life are also reminded of their grave responsibility to stand up for fundamental values like the defense of human life from conception to natural death, traditional marriage, and parental rights in education.

## What It All Means

It is easy for us to say that the Eucharist is the center of our lives; it is a bit harder to actually live it. What holds us back? Is it that we don't fully understand this gift? Has going to Mass become a routine?



Pope Benedict's *Sacrament of Charity* is a gift given as encouragement to open our hearts to this great mystery of the Eucharist — the Real Presence of Jesus, the Son of God. It is a gentle and loving reminder that we can always approach Jesus with an open heart, despite our sinful and often doubting natures.

However, we are never to be “strangers or silent spectators” at the Eucharist, but rather to be actively, devoutly, and fully engaged in the sacred action. The Holy Father explains that active participation “does not refer to mere external activity” but instead involves “greater awareness of the mystery being celebrated and its relationship to daily life.” Christian life takes its

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shape through the Eucharist, the Holy Father says:

The Eucharist, since it embraces the concrete, everyday existence of the believer, makes possible day by day, the progressive transfiguration of all those called by grace to reflect the Son of God. There is nothing authentically human — our thoughts and affections, our words and deeds — that does not find in the sacrament of the Eucharist the form it needs to be lived to the full.

Jesus' gift of himself is not merely an action; it is the source of our lives. "We too cannot live without partaking of the sacrament of our salvation," Pope Benedict reminds us.

### The Wonder of It All

The Holy Father concludes by affirming that the only true joy in life is found in recognizing the Lord is still with us. Through the Eucharist, we meet the risen Christ, living today in the mystery of the Church, his Body, fulfilling the promise he made to be "with you always until the end of the world!" When we fully recognize the Lord's presence in the Eucharist, "What wonder must the Eucharistic mystery also awaken in our own hearts!"

The full text of the Apostolic Exhortation is available at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

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