

The Work of Redemption

Eucharistic Belief and Practice in the Archdiocese of Seattle

Introduction

In my first year in the Archdiocese of Seattle, I have been able to celebrate Mass in dozens of our parishes and missions. Everywhere I have been, I have encountered vibrant, faith-filled communities of believers. Whether large or small, urban or rural, our parishes devote much care and attention to their liturgical celebrations. The reason for this is quite simple: “The Church draws her life from the Eucharist.”¹ The Eucharist is central to our life as Church and as individual Christian believers. In a very real way, we cannot live without it.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted every aspect of our lives, including our worship. For us Catholics, the pandemic along with the “Eucharistic fast” it imposed has revealed in a new way how central the celebration of the Eucharist is to who we are as Church and as community. Even when we are unable to gather physically, we gather spiritually: Parishes continue to put the celebration of the Eucharist at the forefront of parish life through livestreams on social media. But we have also come to realize, perhaps as never before, that there is no substitute for gathering to celebrate the Eucharist *together*, and receiving the sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood as part of a community of believers.

As I come to the end of my first year in Seattle, I invite all of us in this local Church to a renewed focus on the heart of our faith and the center of our parish life: the Eucharist. The Eucharist is an inexhaustible source of grace, the Paschal Mystery of Christ’s dying and rising daily renewed for our salvation and for the salvation of the whole world. The Eucharist is the living presence of Christ in our midst. That presence does not, must not leave us unchanged: Receiving the Body of Christ, we *become* the Body of Christ. The Eucharist unites us to Christ, and, in Christ, to each other. And the Eucharist commits us to the poor, sending us forth in service and love.

When it comes to the Eucharist, we can always go deeper. No matter whether we have spent years exploring Eucharistic theology, or are still preparing for our first Holy Communion, there is always more to discover about the Eucharist. And no matter the resources of our parish communities, with care and attention our liturgies can always be improved, to reflect more clearly the Christ who truly presides at every celebration of the Eucharist. During the coming year, I ask every Catholic and every parish community to commit themselves to deepening our understanding and experience of the Eucharist, and strengthening our Eucharistic liturgies.

In a spirit of encouragement, and with a desire for a more profound and visible unity around the altar of the Lord, I am sharing this pastoral letter on the Eucharist and declaring the coming year a special **Year of the Eucharist** for the Archdiocese of Seattle. I hope the following reflections will help provide a roadmap for the months ahead.

¹ Pope St. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 1.

Liturgy and the Work of Redemption

At the beginning of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council (1963), we read:

*The liturgy, "through which the work of our redemption is accomplished," most of all in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, is the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church.*²

Through the Paschal Mystery of Christ's death and resurrection, God has redeemed us. This is the very heart of the Good News which the apostles proclaimed and which the Church proclaims today.³ This free gift of God gives meaning to our lives: Indeed, "our birth would have been no gain, had we not been redeemed."⁴ And through the liturgy, this great work of redemption is ongoing. In the liturgy, Christ continues to act on our behalf. When the Church gathers to celebrate Eucharist, something *happens*: Christ, truly present, acts through, with, and for us, continuing the work of redemption.

There is much to reflect on in that brief passage from the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. I want to highlight three points which can help us to focus on mission, especially during the coming months as we work through a pastoral planning process as an archdiocese.

1. **The faithful express the mystery of Christ.** The liturgy is not something the priest does and the people passively receive. As Catholics, liturgy is the very language we speak. Gathering to celebrate the liturgy Sunday after Sunday is our primary means of coming to know Christ and of expressing that mystery through the offering of our time and devotion. Our gatherings in turn reflect the mystery of Christ, who acts through us in the world today. Through our *conscious participation* in the Eucharist, we learn to live in *closer communion* with Christ.
2. **The faithful manifest the mystery of Christ to others.** Living in *closer communion* with Christ, we manifest his presence to all we meet. The work of evangelization, of sharing the joy of our encounter with Christ, is the task of every Christian. As Pope Francis has written, "All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed,

² *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 2.

³ Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 571.

⁴ From the Easter Proclamation, "Exsultet," *Roman Missal*.

anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love."⁵ This is what is meant by the phrase "missionary disciples": we are sent forth with a mission to proclaim the Gospel to others, even as we never cease to be disciples, learning the ways of the Lord. Our greatest proclamation of the Gospel is an authentic witness of life.

3. **The faithful manifest the real nature of the true Church.** What does this mean? It means that the faithful, all of us, *are* the Church. The Church is not merely an institution; still less is it a building. The Church is the Body of Christ, in each of her members, living and active, on earth and in heaven. In the gathering of the community around the altar to celebrate the Eucharist, we have a glimpse of what the Church truly is: "both human and divine, visible yet endowed with invisible resources, eager to act yet intent on contemplation, present in this world yet not at home in it."⁶

In the liturgy, the work of our redemption is happening even now. Through the liturgy God calls and forms us as missionary disciples. That is why our participation is so important:

The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators. On the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action, conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration. They should be instructed by God's word, and be nourished at the table of the Lord's Body. They should give thanks to God. Offering the immaculate victim, not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him, they should learn to offer themselves.⁷

When it comes to the liturgy, it is not enough simply to be present, because we are not to be "silent spectators" or consumers, but devout collaborators with Christ in the holy work of redemption. Our active participation in the liturgy is a reflection of our active participation in the mission of Christ. Gathering time and again to celebrate the liturgy, we experience and participate in Christ's self-offering in the Eucharist. And even as we share in the fruits of his sacrificial love, we are called to make that love the model of our own lives: We are called to offer ourselves for others. The liturgy is not only the model for our lives, but forms us to live our day-to-day lives with this same sacrificial love of Christ.

This way of life is captured beautifully in the Morning Offering prayer: "Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer you my prayers, works, joys and sufferings of this day ... in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass." The divine life of Christ shared with us in baptism is nourished in us with every Eucharist that we may

⁵ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 120.

⁶ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 2.

⁷ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 48.

complete the mission of Christ in our lives. The Catholic life is a Eucharistic life. We, too, are to be blessed, broken, multiplied, and shared so that others may come to know Jesus Christ (see John 6:1-15). Our faith is to be integrated into every aspect of our life, because as Catholics we no longer live for self, but it is Christ who lives in us (see Galatians 2:20).

In helping the faithful to exercise their important role in the liturgy, and bring it to life in their daily lives, pastors have a serious responsibility. "Something more is required than the mere observance of the laws governing valid and lawful celebration; it is also their duty to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects."⁸ Both in the manner in which the priest celebrates the liturgy (the *ars celebrandi*) and in the formation he provides to his parish community, the pastor has a special responsibility to help every Catholic participate fully, consciously, and actively in the Mass and to live the spirit of the liturgy in their daily lives. Because the mystery we celebrate at every Mass is the mystery of the life of every Christian:

The knowledge that Christ is the Passover lamb who was sacrificed for us should make us regard the moment of his immolation as the beginning of our own lives. As far as we are concerned, Christ's immolation on our behalf takes place when we become aware of this grace and understand the life conferred on us by this sacrifice. Having once understood it, we should enter upon this new life with all eagerness and never return to the old one, which is now at an end. As Scripture says: We have died to sin – how then can we continue to live in it?⁹

Praying the Mass: Receiving God's Word

The Mass is the greatest of our prayers, the source and summit of our Christian lives. There are inexhaustible riches here; we could take a "deep dive" of contemplation on any number of moments in the Mass. This speaks to the mystery and infinite nature of God, whom we encounter in the liturgy. Here, I want to pause and reflect on just a few of them.

In the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council spoke eloquently of the presence of Christ in the liturgy. In fact, they spoke not simply of *presence*, but of presences. Christ is present in four ways when we gather to celebrate Mass. He is present in the assembly, for "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). He is present in the priest, who acts in his very person when he celebrates the Mass. He is present in the Word proclaimed. And he is present, in a most special way, in the Eucharist, the sacrament of his Body and Blood. Truly, when we celebrate the Mass, we can pray in

⁸ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 11.

⁹ From an ancient Easter homily by Pseudo-Chrysostom, Office of Readings for Monday, Second Week of Easter.

the familiar words of St. Patrick's Breastplate, "Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ within me."

The Church never celebrates the Eucharist without first opening the Scriptures, the revealed Word of God. On most Sundays, the readings take us through the unfolding of God's plan, from its promise in the Old Testament, through its fulfillment in the New Testament. Through the Old Testament narratives and prophetic writings, we see God's love and care for humanity as he prepares the way for the coming of Christ. The Psalms are the prayer book of the Hebrew people, and they are our prayer book as well. The Second Reading, from the New Testament, tells of the struggles of the early Church to proclaim the saving work of Jesus. And the Gospel reading is "the high point of the Liturgy of the Word,"¹⁰ for in the Gospel Christ himself speaks, and the Church hears in the Gospel "the very voice of her Bridegroom."¹¹

But the Liturgy of the Word is not about the past. It is about the present. When the Scriptures are proclaimed in the Church, "God speaks to his people, opening up to them the mystery of redemption and salvation, and offering spiritual nourishment; and Christ himself is present through his word in the midst of the faithful."¹² When we allow ourselves to listen, really listen, to what the Scriptures are saying to us in our own lives and to the reality we are living in, extraordinary things can happen. When we honestly reflect on our lives and the challenges we face as a society in light of the Scriptures, we open ourselves up to God's transforming power.

Praying the Mass: Real Presence

In the Liturgy of Eucharist, we continue our dialogue with God. The Eucharistic Prayer is spoken by the priest on behalf of the whole community. All of us, as members of the priestly people of God, offer this prayer to the Father together. We bring before God the world and all its activity, by bringing our own lives and offering them along with the bread and the wine for transformation. In the prayer at the preparation of the bread and wine, the priest asks God to receive the "fruit of the earth and work of human hands." When we bring the work of our hands – our daily love and labor, our family joys and sorrows, our needs as communities and nations – God takes these gifts and transforms them.

The bread and wine we offer to God is given back to us, to be our heavenly food, the very Body and Blood of Christ. The sacrifice of Christ, offered once for all on the cross, is renewed in this mystery, and through our Eucharistic sharing, we participate in that same sacrifice. Christ's presence in this sacrament is not merely a symbolic representation of our unity as a community, or a reminder of his love. In the Eucharist, the dying and rising of Christ become tangible, and Christ is truly present in our midst: body, blood, soul, and divinity. We call this presence the "Real Presence." When we receive Holy Communion, we truly partake of the Body and Blood of the Lord, offered

¹⁰ *Introduction to the Lectionary*, 13.

¹¹ *Introduction to the Book of the Gospels*, 4.

¹² *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 55.

for our salvation. We are united with Christ, and through our sharing in this mystery, with each other.

It has never been easy to live a Eucharistic life. When Jesus first proclaimed this mystery to his disciples, some were scandalized: “As a result of this, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him” (John 6:66). The time we live in poses special challenges to faith. We live in a culture that has largely forgotten God. Faith is often presented as a dusty relic of a bygone day, and the Church as just one more flawed human institution. These attitudes that pervade our culture can have an impact on our faith life, eroding the sacramental imagination and making it harder for us to recognize Christ’s Real Presence in the Eucharist and in the world around us.

But we know that the Eucharist *is* the Real Presence of Christ in our churches and in our lives, and that this mystery is the fulcrum of history. We need to nurture — or rediscover — our “Eucharistic amazement,” to use the phrase of Pope St. John Paul II.¹³ The Eucharist is the cornerstone of all we do: the source from which we draw our identity as a community of believers, the summit to which all our work and service is directed.

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament flows naturally from our experience of the Eucharist during Mass. As Abbot Jeremy Driscoll, OSB, has said, Exposition is like a “freeze frame” of the elevations of the consecrated elements, the Body and Blood of Christ, at Mass. The liturgy moves quite quickly. Time in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament outside of Mass, whether in the tabernacle or during Exposition, allows us to absorb and take in what this mystery is all about. The Mass is *God’s action* in creating, forming, and saving his people. Adoration places us in the presence of the accomplished fact of Christ’s saving work on our behalf. The Church envisions that Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament always exists in relationship to the Eucharistic action of the Mass.

Pope Francis has emphasized the importance of time for adoration for the Church’s mission: “Without prolonged moments of adoration, of prayerful encounter with the word, of sincere conversation with the Lord, our work easily becomes meaningless; we lose energy as a result of weariness and difficulties, and our fervor dies out. The Church urgently needs the deep breath of prayer.”¹⁴ These moments when we kneel before the Blessed Sacrament, just us and the Lord, are precious and important. But, as Pope Francis goes on, “There is always the risk that some moments of prayer can become an excuse for not offering one’s life in mission; a privatized lifestyle can lead Christians to take refuge in some false forms of spirituality.”¹⁵ Our time spent in adoration should always overflow in our lives and actions, drawing us more deeply into communion with Christ and one another. “The saints — consider the example of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta — constantly renewed their capacity for love of neighbor

¹³ Pope St. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 5.

¹⁴ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 262.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

from their encounter with the Eucharistic Lord, and conversely this encounter acquired its realism and depth in their service to others.”¹⁶

I am struck by an entry in the diary of my venerable predecessor, Bishop A.M.A. Blanchet, the first bishop of this diocese. The diocese was established on May 31, 1850, but Blanchet gives much more attention to a different date in his diary – January 23, 1851. It was on that date that the Eucharist was reserved for the first time at St. James Cathedral, then a simple wood-frame church near Fort Vancouver. Bishop Blanchet wrote: “The Blessed Sacrament is placed in the tabernacle. The church, dedicated to St. James is then, at this moment truly, the House of God, and the Gate of Heaven. We can say now, The Lord has sanctified this house which was built to establish His name here, and His eyes and His heart will always be here.” Bishop Blanchet knew that the Eucharist is Christ’s abiding presence in our midst. Christ is still present in our midst in the Eucharist today, and this presence continues to make possible all that we are and all that we do in this local Church.

A Cosmic Mystery

There is something cosmic about the Eucharist. “Even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world. It unites heaven and earth. It embraces and permeates all creation.”¹⁷ The Eucharist is both human and divine, earthly and heavenly. In the Eucharist, as in the Incarnation, earth and heaven meet: “The Lord, in the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation, chose to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter. He comes not from above, but from within, he comes that we might find him in this world of ours. In the Eucharist, fullness is already achieved; it is the living center of the universe, the overflowing core of love and of inexhaustible life. Joined to the incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God. Indeed the Eucharist is itself an act of cosmic love.”¹⁸

The Eucharist strengthens our interior life, while transporting us beyond ourselves into a profound relationship with the Lord. This heavenly food fortifies us for this earthly pilgrimage until we find our true home in heaven. I recently received a lovely note from one of our women religious who made this concise observation: “Our home is not here. Our home is in heaven, and heaven is found in the Eucharist.”

There is nothing else like the Eucharist on earth: Comparisons cannot do it justice! This is food and drink, but different from any other food and drink. This is a shared meal, but different from any other meal. In the Eucharist, God takes the humblest of our earthly offerings – bread and wine – and transforms them into something extraordinary, the very Body and Blood of Christ. In the presence of this awesome mystery, all we can do is humbly approach the Lord to receive what he desires to give us.

¹⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 18.

¹⁷ Pope St. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 8.

¹⁸ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 236.

What expectations do we bring with us when we come to Mass on Sunday? We expect a warm welcome, good music, excellent homily (that doesn't go on too long), and liturgy celebrated with dignity and reverence, style and grace. And rightly so, for all of these things are important. None of them, however, is as important as our Eucharistic encounter with Christ, which must always be the focus of our ministry, our parish life, and our daily lives of faith. In this way, the liturgy will truly be in our communities "the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fount from which all the Church's power flows."¹⁹ The Eucharist strengthens us and "draws the faithful into the compelling love of Christ and sets them on fire," giving the impetus to all other parish activities, which in turn should direct us back toward the Eucharist in praise and thanksgiving.

The Challenge of Unity

St. Paul had strong words for the Corinthians, whose community was divided by factions. He was especially scandalized that these divisions were evident when they gathered for Eucharist: "I hear that when you meet as a church there are divisions among you. ... What can I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this matter I do not praise you" (1 Corinthians 11:18, 22). We know that within the Church today, there are also divisions. Instead of recognizing our fundamental unity within the Body of Christ, some Catholics intensify those divisions by rejecting or even demonizing others. The liturgy can all too easily become an ideological battleground, as people insist that their own way of doing things is better or even the only way. But that is to see the Church as a human institution which we can shape according to our own way of thinking. The Church is a mystery, through which God shapes us, forming us into his holy people. Pope St. John Paul II said this so well: "We are constantly tempted to reduce the Eucharist to our own dimensions, while in reality it is we who must open ourselves up to the dimensions of the Mystery."²⁰ When we celebrate the Eucharist, God is forming us, through Jesus' Paschal Mystery, into the family of God. This is not our doing, but God's: "Look graciously upon this family *whom you have summoned before you.*"²¹

As a local Church, unity is more than one goal among many. Unity is essential to our mission. The prayer of Jesus for his disciples on the night before he died was that we might be one: "I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me" (John 17:20-21). The effectiveness of our witness depends on our unity. Nowhere is that unity more important than in our celebrations of the Eucharist.

*So when we as one are gathered all together,
let us strive to keep our minds free of division;*

¹⁹ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10.

²⁰ Pope St. John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 14, 7 October 2004.

²¹ Eucharistic Prayer III, *Roman Missal*.

*may there be an end to malice, strife and quarrels,
and let Christ our God be dwelling here among us.*²²

Unity is not easy. Unity requires give and take. As Pope Benedict XVI has written, “Union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become, his own. Communion draws me out of myself towards him, and thus also towards unity with all Christians.”²³ The intimate sharing with Christ we experience when we participate in the Eucharist and receive Holy Communion is not strictly between God and myself, because the Mass is not an individual devotion but a communal prayer. For this reason, our celebrations of the Eucharist should be marked not by individual expressions of piety, but by unity.

The singing, the spoken responses, and the postures we take during the Mass — standing, bowing, kneeling — are important signs of that unity, and more: They can actually help build the unity we seek. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* tells us that singing at the beginning of Mass not only introduces the celebration, but “foster[s] the unity of those gathered.”²⁴ In a similar way, “A common bodily posture, to be observed by all those taking part, is a sign of the unity of the members of the Christian community gathered together for the Sacred Liturgy, for it expresses the intentions and spiritual attitude of the participants and also fosters them.”²⁵ When we gather to celebrate the Mass, what we do as a community really matters. The fraction rite of the Mass, when the priest breaks the host, reminds us of this. The one host is broken into many parts, so that the many can become one body in Christ. As St. Paul wrote, “Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (1 Corinthians 10:17).

Our unity must reach beyond our parish community. When we celebrate the Mass, we are part of a larger Church — this local Church, the Archdiocese of Seattle, and the Church throughout the world. In early Christian Rome, this unity was expressed in a unique rite, no longer part of the Mass, called the *fragmentum*. Each Sunday, the bishop of Rome would send a fragment of the bread consecrated at his Mass to each parish. This fragment would then be mingled with the chalice at each Eucharistic celebration. It symbolized the union of the parishes with the Mass offered by the bishop of Rome.

As I have gotten to know the archdiocese over the past year, I have seen a wide range of liturgical practices. In order to express and reinforce our unity as a local Church, I would like to clarify several aspects of the Mass and bring us into a unity of posture and practice. I recognize that this will require some change for virtually all our parish communities, and for some more than others, but our unity as a local Church in celebrating the liturgy surely warrants the effort on our part. In this matter, we must be

²² From “Ubi caritas,” the Offertory chant for Holy Thursday, *Roman Missal*.

²³ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 14.

²⁴ *GIRM*, 46.

²⁵ *GIRM*, 42.

attentive to the practice of the Universal Church, particularly “to what serves the common spiritual good of the People of God, rather than private inclination or arbitrary choice.”²⁶

Postures of Prayer

During the Mass, we pray not only with our minds, hearts, and voices, but with our bodies as well. We stand – an ancient posture of prayer and reverence. We sit – the posture of listening and attention. And we kneel – the posture of humble adoration. All of these postures have their appropriate place in our liturgical celebrations: standing for the Introductory Rites, the proclamation of the Gospel, the Profession of Faith, and the Prayer of the Faithful; sitting for the Liturgy of the Word and the homily.

With regards to the Eucharistic Prayer, I would like us to use common postures across the archdiocese during the Liturgy of the Eucharist and the Communion Rite, in keeping with the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* and widespread practice in the United States. Thus, we “should kneel beginning after the singing or recitation of the *Sanctus* (Holy, Holy, Holy) until after the Amen of the Eucharistic Prayer.”²⁷ Following the Eucharistic Prayer, we stand to pray together the Lord’s Prayer and to exchange the sign of peace. The sign of peace is more than merely a gesture of goodwill. It is *Christ’s* peace which we receive and share in this moment. The Lord’s peace draws us into communion with the Lord and with one another.

In addition, we should “kneel after the *Agnus Dei*”²⁸ until it is time to go forward in the Communion procession. Kneeling is a posture of adoration. When we are on our knees, we cannot “do” anything else! In this moment, we prepare to receive Communion by kneeling in the presence of Christ, already in our midst in the sacrament of his Body and Blood, until it is time to rise and join the Communion procession.

Reception of Holy Communion is a sacred moment of encounter with the risen Lord in the sacrament of his Body and Blood. It is intimate, yet it is not merely individual: This is a communal action. When we go forward to receive Communion, we do so as part of a procession with the whole gathered community. We become what we receive: the Body of Christ. For this reason, unity of posture is important in the Communion procession as well. In the Archdiocese of Seattle, we will follow the norms for the United States as expressed in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*. As we move in procession to the altar, we bow before receiving the Body or Blood of Christ, and remain standing to receive Holy Communion, whether the host or the chalice. To kneel at this point, or to add other gestures, individualizes the reception of Communion. But this is not the moment for personal expressions of piety, which can distract others and draw attention to ourselves. Rather, reverent in our belief in the

²⁶ *GIRM*, 42.

²⁷ *GIRM*, 43.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Lord's true presence in the Eucharist, this is the time when we should be most unified as a community. In receiving the Body of Christ, we *become* one with Christ, and through Christ, one with everyone else who receives the same Eucharistic Lord.

Participating in the Communion hymn while the congregation continues to process and receive Communion is another important form of worship and source of unity. Upon returning to our seats following Communion, it is appropriate to "sit or kneel during the period of sacred silence after Communion."²⁹ This is a time to prayerfully reflect upon the mystery we have received and to give thanks for such a precious gift.

The purification of the sacred vessels after Communion is performed by the priest or deacon. While our reverence for the Eucharistic presence of the Lord demands that this rite be performed with care, it should not be unduly prolonged. Note that the *GIRM* allows for the vessels to be placed on a side table and covered, to be purified after Mass, an option to be considered if the purification would take a considerable amount of time.

I ask all our priests to spend time prayerfully reviewing the liturgical documents and texts so that we may humbly examine our practice as presiders and our fidelity in celebrating the Eucharist. For various reasons, over time, subtle but real changes can enter into our celebrations of the liturgy, whether in language of prayers or additional gestures or practices. Let us commit ourselves to greater fidelity to both the prayers and the rubrics of the Roman Rite, remembering that no person, "not even a priest, may add, remove, or change anything in the liturgy on his own authority."³⁰

Along with this pastoral letter, I am issuing revised guidelines for the celebration of the Eucharist in the Archdiocese of Seattle. I ask all pastors to review the guidelines with care and to implement needed changes in time to begin a new Liturgical Year, Advent 2020.

The Eucharist and Charity

When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, it is not the bread and wine alone that are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. *We* must be transformed as well. When we present our gifts of bread and wine, along with any collection, we symbolically place ourselves upon the altar, that we may become (along with the bread and wine) the Body of Christ. When we receive the Body and Blood of Christ, we become what we receive — we are incorporated into Christ's Body. St. Augustine said to his congregation, "So, if you want to understand the body of Christ, listen to the apostle telling the faithful, *You, though, are the body of Christ and its members* (1 Corinthians 12:27). If it is you that are the Body of Christ and its members, it is the mystery meaning you that has been placed on the Lord's table; what you receive is the mystery that means you."³¹

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 22.

³¹ St. Augustine, Sermon 272.

And to be Christ's Body is to carry on the mission of Christ in the world. This mission at its core is to proclaim the Word of Christ, to celebrate his sacraments, and to extend his love through lives of charity.

The Eucharist commits us to the poor.³² Recent popes have made the link between Eucharist and charity abundantly clear. Pope St. John Paul II reminded us to keep our spirituality grounded, to "reject the temptation to offer a privatized and individualistic spirituality which ill accords with the demands of charity."³³ In his letter for the Year of the Eucharist, he wrote: "We cannot delude ourselves: by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognized as true followers of Christ. ... This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged."³⁴ Pope Benedict XVI reiterated the essential link between worship and service, between Eucharist and charity: "'Worship' itself, Eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented."³⁵

As we work to strengthen our Eucharistic celebrations and to deepen our Eucharistic spirituality during the months to come, let us also commit ourselves to truly authentic Eucharistic celebrations, which overflow in the concrete practice of love through service to the poorest and most vulnerable.

A Year of the Eucharist

With this letter, I am announcing a Year of the Eucharist, beginning on the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ on June 14, and concluding with the same solemnity on Sunday, June 6, 2021.

This is to be a time for catechesis and teaching for everyone on the topic of the Eucharist. "With zeal and patience pastors of souls must promote the liturgical instruction of the faithful and also their active participation, both internal and external."³⁶ Priests and deacons should take every opportunity the Lectionary presents this year to preach on the Eucharist. This is an appropriate time for parishes to provide additional training for all liturgical ministers, as well as additional catechesis for all the faithful. Our goal is for all Catholics to enter into the mystery we celebrate in order to appreciate it more fully, and we hope that the faithful may also recognize the implications of the sending rite at the end of Mass as a commissioning to live this Eucharistic life in the world, to carry out the mission of Jesus in our day-to-day life.

The archdiocese will assist parish leaders to identify good materials and speakers for parish groups and home study. Parishes are encouraged to offer retreats and workshops to provide not only opportunities for prayer but also catechesis on the

³² Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1397.

³³ *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 52.

³⁴ *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 28.

³⁵ *Deus Caritas Est*, 14.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 19.

Eucharist and the profound source of grace it provides for conversion and holiness of life.

Above all, it is my hope that this intensified time of prayer and study will foster and strengthen our Sunday gatherings to celebrate this incredible gift, this work of redemption that is the Eucharist.

While the primary focus of this Year of the Eucharist is to increase our understanding and elevate the quality of how we *celebrate* the Eucharist at Mass, our faith in the Eucharistic presence of Christ naturally leads us to moments of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. I encourage all pastors to make sure the faithful have access to times for Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and I encourage the faithful to take advantage of these opportunities. While you are out running errands, or perhaps while you wait to pick up your children after school, perhaps you can develop the blessed habit of stopping in a church for a few brief moments of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

How wonderful it would be if, during the coming year, each of us could grow in our desire and ability to be in prayerful conversation with Christ, present in the Blessed Sacrament! The Lord longs to hear from us, to know, in our own words, what is happening in our lives: our hopes, fears, joys, concerns, questions. As quoted at the beginning of this letter, the Church draws life from the Eucharist,³⁷ and thus so does each of us who are members of this Body of Christ, the Church. How beautiful it is when we learn to live *as* Christ, when we allow Christ to live more fully in and through us. This is a big part of what the Eucharistic life is all about!

I know the timing of this dedicated period to enhance our liturgical life is not optimal, as the coronavirus will more than likely continue to interrupt our ability to gather regularly to celebrate the Eucharist. Nevertheless, to celebrate a Year of the Eucharist has long been my desire, so let us trust in God's Providence that by his grace we will benefit from our renewed prayer and study of the Eucharist.

Mary, Mother of the Eucharist

From that privileged moment of the Incarnation, Our Blessed Mother accepted God's plan with great love and submission of will. The Angel Gabriel foretold that as the Son of God, this child would be conceived by the Holy Spirit, and receive a throne of a kingdom that would know no end (see Luke 1:26-38). The prophet Simeon also foretold that through Jesus hearts would be laid bare and Mary's own heart would be pierced by a sword (see Luke 2:33-35). From the moment of his birth, Mary lovingly and obediently offered her son, Jesus, back to the Father, until the very moment, standing at the foot of the cross, her heart was pierced along with her son's, thus "uniting herself ... with his sacrifice, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this victim which she herself had brought forth."³⁸

³⁷ Pope St. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 1.

³⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, 58.

Mary is the *Mother of grace*, for she was the handmaid of Christ in gaining for us the greatest of all graces: redemption and salvation, the divine life and unending glory.³⁹ Our Blessed Mother is intimately linked with the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Standing at the foot of the cross, Mary witnessed the death of Jesus and received his wounded body into her arms. Mary joyfully welcomed the risen Christ. She was present at Pentecost. Still today, Mary is present at every Eucharist, praying with and for the Church.

Our Blessed Mother demonstrates for all believers how to live as disciples of Jesus, making of our own lives a loving offering to God. To Mary, then, let us entrust ourselves and our Eucharistic celebrations during the coming Year of the Eucharist. Let us seek her intercession that we may learn to live more fully the life of Christ, the life and love that is shared with us in every Eucharist. May her intercession gain for us the grace to cooperate more fully with her son, who through the *work of redemption* accomplished in every Mass, renews his dwelling in each of us.

Please allow me to conclude with a word from St. Catherine of Siena about how the Eucharist feeds us, and how this food strengthens us to make our life a gift of love for others:

Nor is this sacrament diminished by being divided, any more than is fire, to take an example. If you had a burning lamp and all the world came to you for light, the light of your lamp would not be diminished by the sharing, yet each person who shared it would have the whole light. True, each one's light would be more or less intense depending on what sort of material each brought to receive the fire. ...

Your being was given to you for love, and in holy baptism, which you received by the power of the blood of this Word, you were made ready to share this light. ...

So if you would bear this light, you must receive the wick that is faith. And to this grace that you receive in baptism you must join your own soul's love. For I created your soul with a capacity for loving – so much so that you cannot live without love. Indeed, love is your food.⁴⁰

+ Feast of St. Catherine of Siena

April 29, 2020

First Anniversary of Appointment as Coadjutor Archbishop of Seattle



Most Reverend Paul D. Etienne, DD, STL
Archbishop of Seattle

³⁹ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 61.

⁴⁰ St. Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, 110.

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