



Conference 3 | The Eucharist: A Special and Mysterious Encounter

Transcript

Before we begin this third teaching to learn how to live in the presence of God, we are going to entrust ourselves to the Blessed Virgin Mary. (Hail Mary full of grace ...)

So, we have already spoken about the presence of God in nature and of the presence of God in the humanity of Christ. Now we will then speak of the presence of God in the Eucharist. I think that there is here a mystery which is very beautiful and very important. More importantly, I think in the spirit of time, which is ours today, we have a great need for this contact with the Lord. And this contact we could live it in different ways as we have said before. But I believe that this contact with God we can find it very specially in the Eucharist, as well as also in the celebration of the mass. But also, in the Eucharist adoration we can encounter the true presence of Christ. It is true this presence is hidden. It is mysterious. There are not human means to help us or allow us to discover it. But what can help us to have access to this presence is **faith**. When I receive communion or when I am at a time of adoration, if I come close and approach the Eucharist with love and with faith, and if I believe truly in the teaching of the church on the Eucharist, little by little this presence which was hidden will be reveal itself to me. It doesn't mean that I will always have an experience that I can feel. Very often we will live things in a certain dryness. But if I remain in an attitude of faith, I believe there will be from time-to-time certain experiences that I will be able to live. There will be a certain grace that I will experience, a certain presence, a love. It would be like a tenderness that comes to visit me, to move me, and touch me. And I will feel that the Lord is truly here, with all the love that he has for me.

I would like to start first with a certain quote from John Paul II, he has written some very beautiful documents on the mystery of the Eucharist. The last great encyclical that John Paul II wrote, it was ***The Church lives off the Eucharist***. And he also proclaimed, I think it was in 2004 the year of the Eucharist. And he wrote then a letter to introduce to us the year of the Eucharist. And he wrote a document which was titled "***Remain with us Lord***". And that was from the words of the apostles of Emmaus in the gospel of St. Luke. Here is what St. John Paul II says in this document in the 16th paragraph of the document.

"With the entire tradition of the church, we believe that Jesus is truly present under the Eucharistic species. Faith demands that we approach the eucharist fully aware that we are approaching Christ himself. It is precisely His presence which gives the other aspects of the eucharist as meal, as memorial of the paschal mystery, as eschatological anticipation, as significance which goes far beyond mere



symbolism. The Eucharist is a mystery of presence, the perfect fulfillment of Jesus's promise to remain with us until the end of the world. "

These are very beautiful words. John Paul II reminds us that when we are close to the Eucharist, we make face to Christ himself who is personally present, really present in front of us. This is what our catholic faith tells us in regards of the Eucharist. Obviously, there are many aspects in the Eucharist. It is the memorial of the passion of the Lord. It brings to us the whole sacrifice of the cross. But it is also a meal which is a nourishment for the faithful. There is also in the Eucharist the mystery of communion. It puts us in communion with God Himself, but also in communion with each other. But in the Eucharist, there is also an eschatological aspect, which means it helps us to anticipate this life that we will live with God in his kingdom. We can say that through the Eucharist heaven is already present on earth. It is the whole world, which is to come, it is the whole kingdom of God which we wait for in hope. Which is made present in our midst, in a way which is invisible but in a way which is real. The holy father reminds all these realities that they are not simply symbols, they are not simply images to think of, but it is a true and real presence. **It is truly, truly the body and the blood of Christ.** It is the humanity and the divinity of Christ which are present. And obviously with the son there is also the presence of the Father and the Holy Spirit. **We cannot separate the three divine persons.** Which means then that this real presence in the Eucharist puts us truly in contact with the mystery of God. There is all the richness of all the mysteries of Christ of which I spoke in the previous teaching, "All the mysteries of the life of Christ". All of them are contained within the Eucharist. In Eucharist we have the totality of the person of Jesus. And we have the totality of all the mysteries of his life. But there is also all the presence of the mystery of God. This presence of God in which the Eucharist puts us in contact with. Obviously, this reality remains a little bit hidden. But it is nevertheless the totality of the mystery of Christ which is given to us in the Eucharist and what our faith tells us.

You know that Saint Francis of Assisi had a great love for the Eucharist and that's also another reason for which the St. Francis of Assisi loved France very much. Because in the middle ages in the period St. Francis lived, there was a very strong eucharistic devotion which existed. Unfortunately, things are not the same today. Would you please pray for France? But I like something that St. Francis said. He said: **"The Eucharist is the only thing which remains with us from the body of Christ."** We can no longer see and touch the body of Christ as did his apostles, but this eucharist is what remains with us from the body of Christ. And through the Eucharist we can have the same contact, the same relationship which the apostles had with Christ during that time. Because Christ is truly and veritably present in the mystery of the Eucharist. Jesus made us this promise in the gospel, "I will be with you all the days until the end of time". All the days the Lord is present until the end of time. Because He will never abandon His church. And He accompanies His church most importantly in the difficult moments in which His church lives. This promise of Christ is realized in many ways but as the text of St. John Paul told us, the means most perfect in which Christ realizes His promise to remain always with us, this promise is



through the gift of the Eucharist. There are different ways of His presence, in His word and other realities, but the Eucharist renders Christ present with a very particular intensity.

I would like to make with you a small reflection to show you how much this gift of the presence is a gift which is very beautiful. Let's take for example the life of a family, and here in this family there is a child who is ill. A small boy for example, who is 5 years old. He has problems and we must go to the hospital to have an operation. It is an operation which is difficult and complicated. So, we take the child to the hospital, and we can ask ourselves this following question. What will give security to this little child? How do we know he is going to be tranquil and calm in this operating room? Is it all these explanations that we are going to give him that will make him feel better? You have this and this problem and we're going to give you this operation. Is this what is going to reassure this child? It is not totally sure. We know very well that what is going to reassure this child when we take him to the hospital. Close to him there is his mother and his father, and they hold his hand, and they are close to him in their presence, this is what is going to make this child calm and tranquil. This presence of love. And this presence of someone in whom he trusts. I believe this is the same for us. When we are going through the difficult moments of our existence. What is the thing that is going to reassure us? It is not to have many explanations. Sometimes we have this impression that we might be a little calmer and more tranquil if everything is explained to us; when all of our questions will be answered. I am not sure that it always efficacious. We are people a little bit more complicated. And we will always ask more and more questions. And at the very end, the thing most important for us, it is not through all these explanations, but to have a presence. To have next to us the presence of someone who loves us. Someone who loves us infinitely, someone in whom we can have total trust and confidence. Someone who has given up his life for us. This is the Eucharist. It is a response to this fundamental need, to have next to us a real presence. And it is the presence of someone in whom we can have total trust. God could not have made to us a gift greater than this. There is also something very moving in this question of this eucharistic presence.

We are also going to read another passage from John Paul II, which will remind us of the passage of the disciples of Emmaus. We know it very well this passage in the gospel of St. Luke. After Jesus was crucified, there were two disciples who leaving Jerusalem to return to their home, to their village called Emmaus. They left filled with sadness and discouragement because they had placed all their hope in Jesus. And they really thought and believed that he was going to bring about the kingdom of God. And here he was condemned, crucified, and put to death. So, his mission seemed to be a total failure. And these men were completely saddened and discouraged because of all this. While they were walking back to their village, someone approaches them and starts to walk with them. And then he came to them and asked, "What is it that you are discussing? And it was Jesus, himself who came to accompany them without them realizing that. And so here Jesus explains to them the scriptures that the Messiah had to suffer. And things began to change in them, they started to find a certain hope. And they will say later



among themselves, “Wasn’t our hearts burning while he was explaining the scriptures?” So when they arrive at the end of their trip, he seemed as if he was going further than them. So the two disciples asked him to remain with us. Remain with us Lord, because the night is near and the day is coming to its end. So these two people who were so moved by the words of Christ, even if they did not recognize him, asked him to stay with them. They didn’t want to leave this man who was starting to change their hearts and he gave them light and hope. I believe that the question that the apostles at Emmaus asked is also our question, it is also our profound and deep desire. **Remain with us Lord.** Because things are not very easy, and we are in real need of your presence, we are in need of your word, and we have a need that you remain close to us. That you continue to talk to us and teach us. I believe that this is a very beautiful prayer for our world today. Remain with us Lord. So, Jesus accepts this suggestion. And he enters with them in the house. And in the beginning of the meal, Jesus breaks the bread, and he says the blessing and at this exact moment he disappears. In fact, they recognize him and then he disappears. It was Christ, himself who was there with them and accompanied them. Well, Jesus doesn’t really disappear in fact. Jesus disappears in his physical form, in his human appearance. But he remains exactly in this eucharistic bread. There is a beautiful catechism on the eucharist through this story. And that is through this bread which is given to us we receive the presence of Jesus which is given to us and remains with us. But this remark that St. John Paul II makes, is that after all Christ is going to give to these disciples a lot more than they asked for. Because the disciples asked Jesus to remain with them, but what does Jesus do in the Eucharist? He comes not simply to be with us, but to be in us. So, let us read together the words of St. John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, in Paragraph 19.

“When the disciples on the way to Emmaus asked Jesus to stay with them, he responded by giving them a much greater gift. Through the sacrament of the eucharist he found a way to stay in them. Receiving the Eucharist means entering into a profound communion with Jesus. Abide in me and I in you. (John 15:4). This relationship of profound and mutual abiding enables us to have a certain foretaste of heaven on earth.”

These are very beautiful words. Because what is realized through the Eucharist, it is exactly this invitation in the gospel of St. John, which is **abide in me as I abide in you.** So, through this Eucharist the Lord comes to inhabit us, he comes to inhabit our heart, our soul. In a very real way, in a very profound and deep way. Even if we don’t feel a great thing. But on one hand, the Lord comes to remain with us in our hearts, but he also gives us the possibility that we remain in him. Not simply he comes to be in us, but he welcomes us to be in him. He welcomes us in this immensity of his love. This beautiful reality, this reciprocity of the fact that God abides in us and we abide in Him.

It is expressed in an interesting way by St. Catherine of Sienna. She has a little image which might seem to us astonishing, but I personally find it beautiful. She says that when a Christian receives communion God remains in him, but this Christian remains in God also. She said, just like a little fish that is in the



sea. He carries the sea in it, inside this fish is the salty water of the sea, but this little fish is fully immersed in the ocean. This is similar to the condition of a Christian who has just received the Eucharist. He carries God in his heart, in himself, at the same time he is totally immersed in the love of God. He can go and come, he can go up and go down, just like a little fish which is swimming. To take a walk with such great joy in this immensity of the love of God. I find this a very beautiful image of this reality. God who comes to remain in us at the same time who receives us in the immensity of His love. He envelops us of his presence and he surrounds us totally with his love. Obviously, we don't feel this always, but we must believe it. We must believe it because it is the reality. If we believe truly in this, little by little we will see fruits. Little by little a relationship with God which is more profound, and we will begin living in this relationship.

I would also to make another remark, in the same contents. It is taken from a homily from Benedict XVI when he was still a pope. He participated in a Eucharistic Congress in a town in Italy, called Bari. So, in this congress he gave a homily and he spoke of something very interesting regarding the Eucharist which was a little bit of a problem for St. Agustin. Because St. Agustin had a platonic formation which opposed the body and the soul. In the beginning he had a difficulty speaking of the eucharist as a meal, that man can eat God himself. Because in our normal life, when man eats something, it is man who is the strongest and he assimilates the nourishment which he is eating and this nourishment which I just ate becomes mine. But he understood later, that in the Eucharist it was the opposite. That solved his problem. We are going to read together this text from Benedict XVI.

“Coming from a platonic formation it was difficult for Agustin to accept the incarnate dimension of Christianity in particular he reacted before the prospect of the Eucharistic meal which seemed to him unworthy of God. In ordinary meals man that becomes stronger as it is he who assimilates the food making it an element of his own corporal reality. Only later did Agustin understand that in the Eucharist the exact opposite occurs. The center is Christ who attracts us to himself. He makes us come out of ourselves to make us one with him. “

It is true that the eucharist is a nourishment. Jesus told us in the gospel of St. John, *“My body is true nourishment, my blood is true drink”*. And this food gives an interior strength, a spiritual strength. But what happens in the eucharist also, which is even greater than that, is that God attracts us to himself and he allows us to enter himself. He allows us to enter in the depth of his life. And little by little He becomes the center of our life. And he allows us to go farther and farther towards him in the richness of his love.



I would like to make a few more remarks in regards of this presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. There is something that I personally like very much about this presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Maybe it is something a little too personal, but I am going to share it with you anyway. Because it is a presence that is very gentle and very humble, and it is a presence which is silent. Of course, it is true that from time to time the Lord can talk to us. But often, it is a presence that is silent. And I believe that this is very good for us because we very often what happens in our world today, there are too many realities which are taking over us, there is sounds, words and music, there's lights, images, sometimes we are completely invaded by all this. Even when we go in the bathrooms in a restaurant there is music. I think also soon we will have videos in the elevators to have marketing and publicity. This is totally invading. These images remain completely in our memory and we are polluted by all these sounds and images. And I think on the contrary what we find in Eucharist, it is not a presence that takes over us or invades us in a negative way. Rather it is a presence which is gentle and silent. A presence that respects us. You know in life we encounter people who sometimes take over. They come over to your home, they don't stop talking, and they give you a ton of advice, "Oh, the color of your drapes does not go with the color of your carpet. You absolutely must change it." And these people are so invading to our life and we have one single desire, that is that they leave. So that we can have a little bit of calm and silence. It is very beautiful that this Eucharistic presence of Jesus, though it is a true presence, a very deep presence, but it is never a presence that invades us. Jesus respects us. He is not here to judge us, or to obligate us to do this or that, He is here simply to be with us. To receive us and welcome us. But in a gentleness, in a respect and a humility. And that is so good for us. We don't need to protect ourselves. We can be who we are, we can be ourselves. Simply welcome the Lord who welcomes us. God receives me the way that I am. And I receive Him the way that He is. In His simplicity, in His love. In His humility. But also, in His mercy and infinite love.

There is also in the eucharist a **mystery of poverty**. The poverty, the humility of God. We are always looking to be exalted you see. And what is this contrary movement of the divine love? It is a movement of inclining down, a movement of humility, and lowering of self. God is made flesh through the incarnation and he lowers himself in the poverty of Bethlehem, and Christ lowered himself on the cross. He made himself to be a servant. He was humiliated for us. And he lowered himself onto death as he tells us, Saint Paul. In the Eucharist, God lowers himself also. He becomes a very simple piece of bread, a simple material. This is the extreme humility of God. Made by love. So that he doesn't crush us or terrorize us. But to be here by love. And I think also that this mystery of poverty and humility in the Eucharist also, **it's a great mystery of love**. What does Jesus tell us when he becomes so poor? I have made myself very poor for you to espouse your own poverty, your fragility, your limitations, all the poverty of your human condition and also your poverty as a sinner. I come to visit that poverty. And I come to make this poverty my own. I am going to take all this poverty, which is yours, in my love, so that you will not ever be afraid of your poverty. **Your fragility, your limitations, your weakness, you must not be afraid of them. Because it is in those that God comes to visit you.** They become a place where you encounter God. Often times we think that we can only encounter God in our success, in all



the good which we accomplish. We must also know and understand that we are capable of encountering God not simply and only in the good which we accomplish. Even though this is a very beautiful thing, but also, I encounter Him where I am poor and fragile. There is where I can encounter God. That is where God comes to visit me. And I believe that this extreme poverty of God in the Eucharist is almost like a word that comes to tell us, there where you are, extremely poor, there is where I am. There is where I encounter you. Give me your poverty, I will make of that a richness. That poverty becomes a richness because that is where you are going to know the mercy and you will you know at what point I love and how close and near I am to you.

Obviously, we can make many more reflections on the Eucharist. But I believe that we maybe should stop here with what I have said, and to render thanksgiving to the Lord for this presence. It is so beautiful that in this world which is ours today we have this possibility in the Eucharist to be truly in contact with Christ. And then through Him to be in contact with all the mystery of God himself. I almost forgot, but it is important to read another text from St. John Paul II, which tells us how everything is given to us in the Eucharist. It is also in the encyclical letter in the paragraph 60

“Every commitment to holiness, every activity aimed at carrying out to the church’s mission, every work of pastoral planning must draw the strength it needs from the eucharistic mystery and in turn be directed to that mystery as its culmination.”

All the life of the church finds its source in the Eucharist. At the same its summit, its whole achievement. and then the Pope says:

“In the eucharist we have Jesus, we have his redemptive sacrifice, we have his resurrection. We have the gift of the Holy Spirit, we have adoration, obedience, and love of the father. Were we to disregard the eucharist how could we to overcome our own deficiency?”

Everything that we are in need to have for our Christian life is given to us by the Eucharist. Let us really learn how to give thanksgiving and to welcome this mystery with grace and with love.

Amen