



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 13 June 1979

1. "Pange, lingua, gloriosi / Corporis mysterium / Sanguinisque pretiosi..." (St Thom., Hymn at the I Vesp. of the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ).

The day is now approaching, and has already practically begun, on which the Church will speak, through her solemn liturgy, in veneration of this mystery, by which she lives every day: the *Eucharist. Gloriosi Corporis mysterium Sanguinisque pretiosi*. The foundation and, at the same time, the summit (cf. Const. on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n..10) of the life of the Church. Her constant feast and, at the same time, her "holy everyday experience".

Every year Holy Thursday, the beginning of the Holy Triduum, gathers us in the Upper Room, where we celebrate the Memorial of the Last Supper. And this would be precisely the most suitable day to meditate with veneration, on all that the Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of the Lord, constitutes for the Church. It has been seen, however, in the course of history, that this one day, the most suitable one, is not enough. It is, moreover, organically integrated in the paschal memory as a whole; the entire Passion, the Death and the Resurrection, occupy our thoughts and our hearts then. We cannot therefore say of the Eucharist everything that our hearts are full of. So since the Middle Ages, and exactly since 1264, the need of adoration, both *liturgical and public*, of the Blessed Sacrament has found expression in a separate solemnity, which the Church celebrates on the first Thursday after Trinity Sunday, that is, tomorrow, beginning with the first vespers of the preceding day, that is, today. I wish this meditation to introduce us into the full atmosphere of the eucharistic feast.

2. "Non est alia natio tam grandis, quae habeat deos appropinquantes sibi, sicut Deus noster adest nobis". There is no other nation so great that has the Divinity so near as our God is present to us" (St Thomas, *Officium SS. Corporis Christi*, II *Nocturn*; cf. *Opusc.* 57).

It is possible to speak of the Eucharist in different ways. In the course of history people have

already spoken of it in different ways. It is difficult to say something that has not been said already. And at the same time, whatever we may say, from whatever direction we approach this great Mystery of the faith and the life of the Church. *we always discover something new*. Not because our words reveal this new element. It lies in the Mystery itself. Any attempt to live with it in the spirit of faith, brings with it new light, new amazement and new joy.

"And marvelling at that, the son of thunder, and considering the sublimity of divine love..., exclaimed: 'God so loved the world' (Jn 3:16).... Tell us, therefore, O blessed John, in what sense *so*? Tell us the measure, tell us the greatness, teach us the sublimity. God so loved the world..." (St John Chrysostom, *In cap. Genes, VIII Homilia XXVII, 1; Opera omnia* (Migne), 4, 241).

The Eucharist brings us closer to God in a stupendous way. And it is the *Sacrament of his closeness* to man. God in the Eucharist is precisely this God who wished to enter the history of man. He wished to accept humanity itself. He wished to become a man. The Sacrament of the Body and Blood reminds us continually of his Divine Humanity.

We sing "Ave, verum corpus, natum ex Maria Virgine". And living with the Eucharist, we find again all the simplicity and depth of the mystery of Incarnation.

It is the Sacrament of God's descent to man, of his approach to everything that is human. It is the Sacrament of Divine "condescension" (cf. St John Chrysostom, *In Genes 3, 8: Homilia XXVII, 1; PG 53, 134*). The divine entrance into human reality reached its climax by means of the passion and death. By means of the passion and death on the Cross, the Son of God Incarnate became, in a particularly radical way, the Son of Man, who shared right to the end what is the condition of every man. The Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Body and Blood, reminds us above all of this death, which Christ suffered on the cross; reality in a certain way, that is, without blood. This is testified by the words spoken in the Upper Room about the bread and the wine separately, the words which, by the institution of Christ, *bring about the Sacrament of his Body and his Blood*; the Sacrament of death, which was an expiatory sacrifice. The Sacrament of death, in which all the power of love was expressed. The Sacrament of death, which consisted in giving his life to win back fullness of life.

"*Manduca vitam, bibe vitam: habebis vitam, et integra est vita* ("Eat life, drink life: you will have life, and it is complete life") (St Augustine, *Sermones ad populum, Series 1, Sermo CXXXI. I, 1*).

By means of this Sacrament, *the death that gives life is continually proclaimed, in the history of man* (cf. 1 Cor 11:26).

It is continually realized in that very simple sign, which is the sign of the Bread and Wine. In it God is present and close to man with that penetrating closeness of his death. on the cross, from which there sprang the power of Resurrection. Man, by means of the Eucharist, becomes a participant in

this power.

3. The Eucharist is the Sacrament of Communion. Christ gives himself to each of us, who receive him under the eucharistic species. He gives himself to each of us, who eat the eucharistic Food and drink the eucharistic Drink. This eating is a sign of Communion. It is a sign of spiritual union, in which 'man receives Christ, is offered participation in his Spirit, finds in him again, particularly intimate, his relationship with the Father; feels access to him particularly close.

A great poet says (Mickiewicz. *Evening Talks*):

"I speak to you, who reign in heaven and at / the same time are a guest in the house of my spirit... / I speak to you! Words fail me for You; / Your thought listens to every thought of mine; / You reign far away and serve close at hand, / King in heaven and in my heart on the cross..."

In fact, we approach eucharistic Communion by first reciting "Our Father".

Communion is a bilateral tie. We should say, therefore, that not only do we receive Christ, not only does each of us receive him in this eucharistic sign, but that *Christ too receives each of us*. In this Sacrament he accepts man always, so to speak; he makes him his friend, as he said in the Upper Room: "You are my friends" (Jn 15:14). This welcome and acceptance of man by Christ is an extraordinary favour. Man *feels very deeply the desire to be accepted*. All man's life turns in this direction, that he may be welcomed and accepted by God; and the Eucharist expresses that sacramentally. Yet man must, as St *Paul* says: "examine himself" (cf. 1 Cor 11:28), to see if he is worthy of being accepted by Christ. The Eucharist is, in a certain sense, a constant challenge to man to try to be accepted, to adapt his conscience to the demands of holy divine Friendship.

4. We wish to express, in the framework of today's solemnity, as well as on next Sunday and on the individual days, this *particular, public veneration and love*, with which we always surround the Blessed Sacrament. Allow my thoughts, at this moment, to go back once more to Poland, from which I returned a few days ago. Those were days of a special pilgrimage in the land in which I was born and brought up, among men to whom I do not cease to be bound with the deepest ties of faith, hope and charity. I wish, once more, to thank all my fellow countrymen heartily. I thank the State Authorities; I thank my Brothers in the Episcopate; I thank everyone.

Well it was exactly there, in my native land, that *I learned fervent veneration and love for the Eucharist*. I learned there the cult for the Body of the Lord. For centuries there have been held, on the feast of "Corpus Domini", eucharistic processions in which my fellow-countrymen tried to express publicly and as a community what the Eucharist represents for them. And they still do so today. So *I unite with them* spiritually, while for the first time I have the joy of celebrating the solemnity of the Body and the Blood of Christ here, in the Eternal City, in which Peter, from generation to generation. answers Christ in a certain way: "Lord, you know that I love you..."

At the conclusion of the audience the Pope expressed solidarity with missionaries expelled from Burundi:

I cannot conceal from you, dearest Brothers and Sisters, the feeling of acute and profound sorrow which I experienced in my heart on learning the grave news of the expulsion of seventy missionaries from the Republic of Burundi last week while I was in Poland. They are priests, Sisters and laity of missionary institutes and enterprises, known and esteemed for their commitment to evangelization in the whole world. My solidarity is, above all, for the Catholic communities of the dioceses, and in the first place for their Pastors, suddenly deprived of valuable qualified help in various sectors of pastoral life, of the training of the clergy, of schools and works of charity and of human advancement. My affectionate thought goes out to those missionaries uprooted from the Lord's vineyard to which they were dedicated.

Likewise I am profoundly saddened by the thought that the Church, universal in her mission and in her concern for all peoples, and which, even in the midst of difficulties, can never cease "to feel herself at home" in any country of the world—Burundi, moreover, has a considerable Catholic population—has not had time to examine in what matter someone may have failed—if there has been a failure—in the loyalty and respect which our religious mission demands and which we observe everywhere in regard to civil Authorities and institutions. If it should happen that someone has not behaved well, I think that the Church Authority has reason to expect confidence on the part of the civil Authority, and all the more so if the Church has official relations with the latter. The Church has given proof of a spirit of collaboration and can, if necessary, intervene and correct, while on her part she cannot but rely on a spirit of understanding and of dialogue of the civil Authorities.

Dear Sons, pray with me that there may be preserved for the Church in Burundi the spiritual help of the missionaries, that the wound may be healed and dialogue resumed, and that it may develop to the advantage of the Catholic community and of the entire nation of Burundi which is so dear to me.

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