



The Holy See

OPENING OF THE XLVII INTERNATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 18 June 2000

Solemnity of the Holy Trinity

1. *"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call" (Eph 4: 4).*

One body! At these solemn Vespers, with which we open the *International Eucharistic Congress*, it is on the Apostle Paul's words that our attention is particularly focused this evening. One Body: our thoughts turn first of all to the Body of Christ. *The Bread of life!*

At the Last Supper, Jesus, who was born of the Virgin Mary 2,000 years ago, wanted to leave us his Body and his Blood, sacrificed for all humanity. The Church, his Mystical Body, gathers round the Eucharist, the sacrament of his love for us. See: Christ and the Church, one body, one great mystery. *Mysterium fidei!*

2. *Ave verum corpus, natum de Maria Virgine!* - Hail, true Body of Christ, born of the Virgin Mary! Born when the time had fully come, born of woman, born under the law (cf. *Gal 4: 4*).

In the heart of the Great Jubilee and at the beginning of this week dedicated to the Eucharistic Congress, we return to that historic event which marked the fulfilment of our salvation. Let us kneel as the shepherds did before the manger in Bethlehem; like the Magi who came from the East, let us adore Christ, the Saviour of the world. Like the aged Simeon, let us hold him in our arms, blessing God because our eyes have seen the salvation which he has prepared in the presence of all peoples: a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of his people Israel (cf. *Lk 2: 30-32*).

Let us retrace the stages of his earthly life to Calvary, to the glory of the Resurrection. In the days

ahead, it will be in the Upper Room especially that we will pause to reflect on what Christ Jesus did and suffered for us.

3. "*In supremae nocte cenae ... se dat suis manibus*". At the Last Supper, while celebrating the Passover with his disciples, Christ offered himself for us. Yes, gathered for the International Eucharistic Congress, the Church returns in these days to the Upper Room and remains there in thoughtful adoration. She relives the great mystery of the Incarnation, focusing her gaze on the sacrament in which Christ gave us the memorial of his Passion: "This is my body which is given for you..... This cup ... poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (*Lk 22: 19-20*).

Ave, verum corpus ... vere passum, immolatum!

We adore you, true Body of Christ, present in the Sacrament of the new and eternal Covenant, living memorial of the redeeming sacrifice. You, Lord, are the living Bread come down from heaven, who gives life to man! On the Cross you gave your flesh for the life of the world (cf. *Jn 6: 51*): *in cruce pro homine!*

The human mind is astonished at so sublime a mystery. But strengthened by divine grace, it dares to repeat with faith:

*Adoro te devote, latens Deitas,
quae sub his figuris vere latitas.*

I adore you devoutly, O Godhead unseen,
who truly lie hidden
under these appearances.

4. "One body, and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call" (*Eph 4: 4*).

In these words, which we have just heard, the Apostle Paul speaks of the Church, the community of believers gathered together in the unity of one body, enlivened by the same Spirit and sustained by sharing the same hope. Paul is thinking of the reality of Christ's Mystical Body, which finds in his Eucharistic Body its own vital centre from which the energy of grace flows to all its members.

The Apostle says: "The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (*1 Cor 10: 16-17*). Thus all of us, the baptized, become members of that body and therefore individually members one of another (cf. *1 Cor 12: 27; Rom 12: 5*). With heartfelt gratitude let us thank God, who made the Eucharist the sacrament of our full communion with him and with our brothers and sisters.

5. This evening, with the solemn Vespers of the Blessed Trinity, we are beginning an unusually full week which will see Bishops and priests, religious and lay people from every part of the world

gathered round the Eucharist. It will be an extraordinary experience of faith and an eloquent testimony of ecclesial communion.

I greet you, dear brothers and sisters who are taking part in this Jubilee event, which can be regarded as the heart of the entire Holy Year. I extend my greeting in particular to the faithful of the Diocese of Rome, our Diocese, which, under the guidance of the Cardinal Vicar and the Auxiliary Bishops, and with the collaboration of the clergy, the religious and many generous lay people, has prepared the various aspects of the Eucharistic Congress. It is ready to ensure that the Congress will run smoothly in the days ahead, conscious of the honour it has in hosting this central event of the Great Jubilee.

I would also like to extend a special greeting to the many confraternities meeting in Rome for a significant "Fraternity Walk". Their presence, made more impressive by the artistic crosses and precious sacred images carried on majestic "machines", creates a worthy setting for the Eucharistic celebration which has brought us here together.

The minds and hearts of so many of the faithful dispersed throughout the world converge on this square. I invite everyone, individual believers and ecclesial communities from every corner of the earth, to share with us these moments of sublime Eucharistic spirituality. I especially ask children and the sick, as well as contemplative communities, to pray for the happy and fruitful success of this world Eucharistic meeting.

6. The Eucharistic Congress also invites us to renew our faith in the real presence of Christ in the sacrament of the altar: *Ave, verum corpus!*

At the same time, we receive the urgent appeal for the reconciliation and unity of all believers: "one body one faith, one baptism"! Divisions and disagreements still rend the body of Christ and prevent Christians of different confessions from sharing the one Eucharistic Bread. Therefore, let us pray together for the healing power of divine mercy, which is superabundant in this Jubilee Year.

And you, O Christ, the only Head and Saviour, draw all your members to yourself. Unite them and transform them in your love, so that the Church may shine with that supernatural beauty which is resplendent in the saints of every era and nation, in the martyrs, in the confessors, in the virgins and in the countless witnesses to the Gospel!

O lesu dulcis, o lesu pie,

O lesu, fili Mariae!

Amen!

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