

THIRSTING FOR GOD



HOLY THURSDAY 2005

A REFLECTION FOR THE YEAR OF THE EUCHARIST

Referring to the occasion when Jesus asked the Samaritan woman to give him something to drink (Jn 4:7), the Catechism of the Catholic Church says:

“It is (Jesus) who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God’s desire for us. Whether we realise it or not, prayer is the encounter of God’s thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him” (2650).

We find it hard to hear the message of Jesus Christ in all its wonder and in all its challenge. One important reason for that is that we do not recognise our own thirst, our own longing for God, our need of Christ the Way and of the Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life.

- We long *to find meaning* in our lives, a meaning that we can find only in the God who made us and invited us to share in the glory of Christ. We learn to understand that meaning by listening to God’s Word.
- We long *to belong*. We are not meant to be isolated individuals; we are members of the universal human family and are called to belong in a way that surpasses all imagining and limitations because it leads to the new creation where that family will be transformed, freed from all, imperfection, frailty, suffering, betrayal, and death.
- We long *to have a purpose* or mission that is worth the effort of our whole heart and soul and might. Every business and institution now has a mission statement. We all need a goal in life and that goal and task has been given to us by Jesus Christ.
- We long *to be able to hope* with a hope strong enough to face all the suffering of life. The great underlying fear is that life may, in the end, be absurd. The death and resurrection of Jesus show us a God whose power and love are more powerful than evil and death.

What the Catechism says about prayer is true above all of the supreme Christian prayer – the Mass. The Eucharist is the encounter of God’s thirst with ours. The more fully we acknowledge our thirst, the more ready we are to participate in and to appreciate the gift of the Eucharist.

These reflections are intended to help individuals and groups to recognise that thirst for *meaning, belonging, purpose, and hope* and to help them understand more clearly how our celebration of the Eucharist and our prayer before the Blessed Sacrament can both intensify and promise to satisfy that thirst.



Bishop of Limerick
Holy Thursday 2005

THE EMPTINESS THAT ASKS ABOUT MEANING

You would imagine it should be impossible to be bored in the twenty-first century. Satellite and cable bring an ever-increasing number of television channels; new mobile and wireless technologies promise sound, text, pictures, video and email wherever we are; the endless possibilities of the Internet, now with a broadband connection, are becoming more and more available; music, news, information are constantly on tap. I-Pods and MP3s allow us to carry with us music to fill every silence. The strange thing is that, in the middle of so many options, people are as bored as they ever were.

The things that compete for our attention do not really involve us or fulfil us. Although they keep us occupied and busy, they distract us from ourselves. We live with a great deal of 'buzz' but not a lot of reflection. We live in a world which does not like silence, which deafens itself with noise. One reason for that is to ensure that we will not have to face the deeper questions. As Pope John Paul pointed out, we are "often unable to be silent for fear of meeting (ourselves), for fear of feeling the emptiness that asks itself about meaning"¹.

The question of meaning is rarely posed in the public arena, except in the context of major tragedies like the Asian tsunami and the Beslan siege. In the lives of individuals, of course, it arises all the time. Bereavement, serious illness, major anxieties and disappointments make us face the most fundamental questions. When we experience heartbreaking and troubling events we realise that the emptiness and the questioning have never really gone away. We meet ourselves and we feel an emptiness that frightens us.



The busy-ness and noise of modern life are all-pervasive. Prayer and liturgy move to a different rhythm. They call for reverence, silence, gratitude; they require us to stand back from the need to be doing things and acquiring things and achieving things.

A clear symptom of a lack of this reverent, thankful, attentive attitude is the complaint that 'the Mass is boring'. It is boring only if we fail to understand that here we are at the heart of things. We are in the presence of the truth that we spend much of our time ignoring – the fundamental reality of who we are.

This Year of the Eucharist is an opportunity to awaken a fuller realisation that in the Mass we are in touch both with the emptiness that lies deep in our hearts and with the Risen Christ who alone can fill that emptiness.

The Eucharist is "the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed and source from which all its power flows"². Pope John Paul hopes that this year will be "a precious opportunity to grow in awareness of the incomparable treasure which Christ has entrusted to his Church"³.

The Incomparable
Treasure

On the first Easter Sunday, two disciples walked with downcast faces, burdened by questions and by a sense of emptiness. In this reflection, I want to share that journey with the disciples on the road to Emmaus as the Lord opened their hearts to 'the incomparable treasure' of his presence

¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Oriente Lumen*, 16.

² VATICAN II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 10.

³ JOHN PAUL II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, Apostolic Letter for the Year of the Eucharist, 29.

'in the breaking of the bread' (Lk 24:13-35). As we walk with them we may find, as they did, that we are in contact with what our frenetic activity and our endless agitation have always been seeking.

The Restless Heart

The Eucharist brings us face to face with the fundamental questions that we try so hard to avoid. In the Penitential Rite at the beginning of every Mass we thank the Lord who heals the wounds of sin and division, gathers the nations into peace, heals the sick, forgives sinners, brings light to those in darkness and leads us into everlasting life; we acknowledge that we are sinners; we recognise our need for the prayers of Mary, ever virgin, of the angels and saints and of one another. We are people with longings and hopes that seem too big to be realistic and with failures and weakness that our resources could never overcome.

Our presence at Mass is a recognition that we depend totally on God's creative and merciful love. The meaning of our lives is to offer ourselves in union with Christ's offering, journeying with him, together with all God's people, through death and resurrection to the home of our Father. That is how our emptiness will, please God, one day be filled.

In spite of our best efforts, as we take part in the celebration of the Eucharist, our minds will often continue to be busy about many things. These are not mere distractions. Like the disappointment, the unhappiness and the bewilderment which the disciples expressed to the Stranger who walked with them, these are signs of our searching for happiness and fulfilment. The deepest source of the worries, hopes, desires, memories, grievances and irritations that fill our minds is the fact that we are restless beings. We are made for God and our hearts are restless until they rest in God⁴. All our longing is, in the end, a longing for God⁵.

We come to Mass as people who are sinful, mortal, restless and vulnerable. We live in a world where cruelty, injustice, suffering and poverty exist on a scale that makes us feel powerless. Our lives are filled with aspirations and longings, disappointments and fears and all too fragile happiness. Deeper than all the surface activity lies a restless turmoil, a permanent unease which sometimes expresses itself in superficial, distorted or even profoundly misguided ways. The longings of our heart, which God alone can satisfy, will never be stilled in this world.

Invited by God

The Church teaches us that, in the first moment of each human life, God directly creates our spiritual and immortal soul⁶. To put it another way, in the very act of creating us, God speaks an invitation to each of us to know and love him, to be sons and daughters of our eternal Father. We are the only creatures on earth with the capacity to know and love our Creator. "The invitation to converse with God is addressed to men and women from their origin. For if people exist it is because God has created them through love, and through love continues to keep them in existence"⁷. We discover signs of that creative love in the beauty of creation, and especially in the dignity and longings of the human person.

But God's invitation was expressed most clearly when he spoke "at many times and in various ways" to the chosen people. Above all it is expressed when "in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb 1:1). "He sent his Son, the eternal Word, who enlightens all humankind, to live among them and to tell them about the inner life of God"⁸.

⁴ St Augustine, *Confessions*, 1,1.

⁵ Cf AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.1, a.6c, and ad 3.

⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 366.

⁷ *Gaudium et Spes*, 19.

⁸ VATICAN II, *Dei Verbum*, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, 4.

“The desire for God is written in the human heart”⁹. That is the most basic truth about us. God speaks to us and calls us; the entire meaning of our lives is to respond to that loving call.

The Eucharist expresses the invitation of God, by which and for which we were brought into being. The Eucharist celebrates the fact that we were made for something infinitely greater than anything the tumult of our experiences, hopes, anxieties and imagination could ever yield.

The truth is that in the depths of our hearts we are **a longing for God**. The name that our Patron St. Ita gave herself – her original name was Deirdre – means ‘thirst’, thirst for God. This was the core of her life.

God, you are my God, I pine for you;
my heart thirsts for you,
my body longs for you,
as a land parched, dreary and waterless. (Ps 63:1)

We pine for God because we are created in order to respond to his word. God spoke individually to each of us as we were brought into existence. The Word of God became flesh and lived among us. The Word of God walked, unrecognised, with the disciples on the road to Emmaus and caused their hearts to burn within them as he opened up the Scriptures for them (Lk 24:32).

Christ speaks to our hearts

That same Word speaks to us in the Eucharistic liturgy. “(Christ) is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in Church”¹⁰. We sometimes like to imagine the rapt attention that we would have given, the way our hearts would have burned within us, if we had been privileged, like the first disciples, to hear Jesus speaking to us. But, ‘*it is he himself who speaks*’ in our churches. Those who read in church and those who listen should be conscious that Jesus is among us, speaking as truly as he did on the Mount of Beatitudes.

It is he himself
who speaks

If our hearts do not burn within us, it is not because the Lord is not speaking; it is not because the particular passage of scripture does not appeal to us; it is not because the Old Testament reading belongs to an unfamiliar culture; it is not because the words of the Gospel are too familiar. It is because, although the Lord is speaking to us in the depths of our being, we remain on the surface.

The Second Vatican Council tells us that when people look deeper than the superficial and “are drawn to think about their real selves, they turn to those deep recesses of their being where God who probes the heart awaits them”. There, “in their most secret core and sanctuary... they are alone with God whose voice echoes in their depths”¹¹

You were with me
but I was not with
you

St Augustine tells us that God is “higher than my highest and more inward than my inmost self”. The trouble is that, “He is within the inmost heart, yet the heart has wandered away from him”. Augustine laments that he sought God’s beauty in a superficial way among the beautiful things of creation. He had been searching for God outside himself and all the time, God was within his heart: “You were with me”, he says to God, “but I was not with you”¹².

⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 27.

¹⁰ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7.

¹¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 14, 16.

¹² ST AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, 3,6; 12.12; 10.27.

The words that Jesus speaks to us in the readings are not just letters and sounds. They speak to our hearts. The heart is our 'hidden centre', "beyond the grasp of our reason"; "only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully"¹³. God is 'more inward than my inmost self'. God's word speaks to the depth of our hearts, and God, the Holy Spirit, responds: "we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (Rom 8:26); "It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom 8:15).

In that exchange deep in our hearts there is a love without limit, a love infinite and eternal, whose demands we fear because, in words attributed to Brother Roger of Taizé, "It does not ask too much of us, but it does ask for everything!"

For our hearts are divided. This heart of ours has layer upon layer of desire, some light, some dark, some translucent with honesty and integrity, others opaque with self-love, resentment and despair. Desire is entangled in a forest of ambiguity, of willing and partly willing, of mixed motive and feeling... Here... we cannot be fully happy: all the complaint of our unhappiness lies in this dividedness and in our attachment to it, in our unwillingness to live in that land of the self where the love of God already dwells within us, unrecognized and unbefriended. We actually prefer the half-light of ambiguous desire, frightened by too much love¹⁴.

Hearing God's word, like all prayer, is not, in the first place, the product of our effort, our determination or our skill. It is a question of opening ourselves to what God is doing and saying in us. We will never fully understand what the Lord is saying, but, because it is God's word, we listen prayerfully and attentively. The silence in which the Father converses with the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit always lies beyond us, in unapproachable light, and yet it is at work in our hidden centre. Through the coming of the Word, that light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overpower it (Jn 1:5). The light shines in us when we recognise the Word as the source of our dignity and hope; we are addressed by Christ the Word and invited to share in the eternal life of God. The Second Vatican Council told us that, "a new impulse of spiritual life may be expected from increased veneration of the word of God which 'stands forever'¹⁵.

The gifts of faith, hope and love entrust us to, and involve us in, that conversation of infinite love. Believing in, hoping in and loving the creative and redeeming love, the unlimited power and the unshakeable promise of God can bring deep peace. Jesus promised that those who come to him will not hunger and those who believe in him will never thirst (Jn 6:35).

Satisfying and intensifying our thirst

But even God's word as we hear it in this life can never fully satisfy our thirst. "We know that while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith and not by sight" (2 Cor 5:6,7). So it is also true that, as God says in the Book of Sirach, "Those who eat me will hunger for more, and those who drink me will thirst for more" (Sir 24:21).

An old story from India tells that a young man approached a wise teacher to ask how he would find God. The teacher led the enquirer into the middle of the river, suddenly pulled his head under the water and held it there until he had almost drowned. When the shocked young man had recovered the teacher asked, 'What were you thinking while you were under water?' He replied, 'I was thinking, *I want air, I need air more than anything else in the world*'. 'Well, when you want God as much as you wanted air', the teacher said, 'then you will find him'. Moses teaches the same lesson when he warns the people that their lack of faithfulness to God will result in being driven into exile from the Promised Land: "From there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find him if you search after him with all your heart and soul" (Dt 4:29).

¹³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2653.

¹⁴ TURNER, D., *Faith Seeking*, SCM Press 2002, p. 107.

¹⁵ *Dei Verbum*, 26.

The Word of God does not cooperate with the self-deception that occurs when we try to escape from our restless hunger. On the contrary by speaking to our hunger it intensifies it, for that hunger is our longing for God, the deepest truth of our being.

The more fully we hear the Word of God the greater becomes our unsatisfied longing for the fulfilment it promises, the more we begin to see that we need God more than anything else in the world: "God has placed in human hearts a "hunger" for his word (cf. Am 8:11), a hunger which will be satisfied only by full union with him"¹⁶.

The more fully we hear
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fulfilment

Learning to listen

Christ speaks to us in the Liturgy of the Word. We need to prepare ourselves to hear him. It is our responsibility to try to be present to our own hearts and to the hunger which the Word awakens, addresses and intensifies. It is our responsibility to try to hear what Jesus says to us.

A readiness to listen is the attitude which a person ought to seek and to adopt, but it depends on the Holy Spirit in a synergy between the human will and the action of the Spirit... This is essential if one does not wish to be simply listening to a dead word, or at most, listening in a purely intellectual and speculative way¹⁷.

It is important to prepare ourselves to listen well by praying before Mass, asking that our hearts be open to the Word. An old Irish prayer, traditionally said before the Gospel, goes:

A Íosa, glan mo chroíse go gléglan gach lá;
A Íosa, cuir m'intinn faoi léirsmacht do ghrá.
Déan mo smaointe go fíorghlan agus briathra mo bhéil
Is, a Thiarna, a Dhé dhílis, stiúirigh choíche mo shaol¹⁸.

It would be good to reflect on the Sunday readings, or at least on the Gospel, during the preceding week. We can do so especially by *lectio divina* or by the seven-step method. We might return to the readings when the liturgy is over to reflect on what they have said to us.

How often do even the most committed Christians and families talk to one another about how God's word may have spoken to them in their Sunday Eucharist? Did it enlighten us? Did it reveal something about our need for God and for one another? Did it point to the need to respond more generously or more creatively to people who are marginalized in some way? We hear the word together; in fact it is the word that calls us to be God's People. It challenges us not just as individuals but as a community, as families, as parishes, as a diocese, as the people God has called. If we never talk about that challenge to one another, how can we respond as a community? If we never talk to one another about what it is that makes us who we are – namely the word which God has spoken to us in our creation, in our baptism, in our lives, in our celebration of the Eucharist, how can our sense of who we are grow stronger?

¹⁶ *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 19.

¹⁷ BIANCHI, E., *Pregare la Parola* [Praying the Word], Gribaudi 1997, p. 41.

¹⁸ Jesus, cleanse my heart each day and make it spotless
Jesus, rule my mind by the power of your love.
Make truly clean my thoughts and the words of my mouth,
and, dear Lord God, direct my life now and forever.

“THAT MOURNS IN LONELY EXILE HERE”¹⁹

Communication, even across continents, has never been easier. Mobile telephones and e-mails bring the whole world closer together. Travel has become easier; friendships that in the past, gradually faded because of distance should be able to remain strong if we really want them to. More and more people live in large urban complexes where they are rarely far from others. And yet loneliness is probably more common than it has ever been.

Sources of loneliness

Some of this is because we are not deeply in touch with ourselves and are, therefore, frightened of reaching out. An anonymous commentator reflected sadly: “It’s so lonely here when you don’t even know yourself!” It is tempting to remain in unthreatened isolation rather than to take the risk of knowing and being known.

Some loneliness is because, like the disciples on the road, we are lost in our own troubles. They were so wrapped up in their misery that they were not open to what the Stranger was telling them; they were “foolish and slow of heart to believe” the news that was to reunite the downcast followers of Christ in jubilant communion. We have only to listen to daytime radio to know that many people travel the road of life feeling that nobody is willing to understand them or to help them. They feel put upon, isolated, misunderstood and ill-treated. They have nobody to turn to other than a supportive radio presenter and an eavesdropping nation, which may or may not be sympathetic.

Some loneliness is because, among all the thousands of people with whom we come in contact, there are few enough whom we really know. Most of those we meet are, and will remain, people about whose family life, anxieties, hopes and sorrows we know little or nothing.

We ‘know’ people through the news, although, in reality, we know hardly anything about them as real people. That is why we can look at a person’s life falling apart – whether we think they brought it on themselves or not – with remarkably little compassion. We denounce them, dismiss them or deride them in a way that we could never do if we really knew their personal weaknesses, struggles, pains, hopes and sorrows – or if we ever thought about their families. A self-righteous, uncaring reaction to people in trouble, people we do not really know, people who ‘mean nothing to us’, tells us something uncomfortable about the society we live in – and what we may expect should we or a member of our family be in such a position.

Some loneliness is because the great bustle of modern life often means that when a person really needs a friend there is nobody who sees it as his or her responsibility to reach out to them. Someone summed up the motto of today’s world: “Remember, we are all in this alone”. (20)²⁰

The foundation of all social life and of all belonging, the family, is often less able than in the past to provide the sense of secure belonging that we need. This can be the case for many reasons, because we as a society do not give support of family life the priority it should have, because of the mobility which separates young adults from parents and grandparents from grandchildren, because of pressures on particular families, because of the pace of modern living, and, sadly, because of the tragedy of marriage break-up.

The causes and kinds of loneliness are varied. The fact is, however, that there is loneliness in all of us. The other side of the search for meaning is the search to belong. Belonging is part of what we are. We are made to belong to

Our true homeland is in heaven and we are in exile

¹⁹ *O Come Emmanuel*, tr. Thomas Helmore.

²⁰ Attributed to Lily Tomlin.

a community greater than we have ever experienced or imagined and we are, therefore, always lonely. Our true homeland is in heaven (Phil 3:20) and we are in exile.

Made in and for relationship

At the very beginning of our lives we were invited into a relationship with God. From the beginning we were also invited into human relationships. In the womb, before we became conscious of ourselves, we were already known, and hopefully being welcomed, as a son or daughter, a brother or sister. In a good family we learn to know ourselves; we learn to relate with others; we learn to communicate; we acquire the sense of being loved, which calls us to love in return and to extend that love to the wider community. And yet, there is an incompleteness and fragility about even the closest and deepest relationships. Everything that we rely on is threatened by death; even the most ardent love can go sour; even the most faithful loyalty can be betrayed. That uncertainty intensifies the longing for a belonging that is beyond impermanence and failure.

At the dawn of creation God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen 2:18). We come to know ourselves only through our interaction with others. "(Human beings) can fully discover their true selves only in sincere self-giving"²¹. The ache of loneliness arises because we are made for communion, for companionship (which literally means, sharing bread together).

We belong to the family of God. It is no accident that we refer to the Blessed Eucharist as 'Holy Communion': "At each Holy Mass we are called to measure ourselves against the ideal of communion which the Acts of the Apostles paints as a model for the Church in every age"²².

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet and it was distributed to each as any had need (Acts 4:32-35).

When we receive him in Holy Communion, we receive what we are; we are the Body of Christ:

To that which you are, you respond: 'Amen', and by responding to it you assent to it. For you hear the words 'The Body of Christ,' and respond 'Amen.' Be then a member of the Body of Christ that your Amen may be true²³.

We receive the Body and Blood of Jesus who both eases and intensifies our deepest hunger. We receive him together. In other words, we recognise that we are travelling the same road, with the same emptiness, the same questions, the same hope, the same needs and the same gratitude. It follows that each of us has an obligation to be ready and anxious to help carry the pain and the struggle of the other. There was not a needy person among the first Christians. To live as Christ's Body means, "making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph 4:3-6). When the Holy Father said that at each Mass we must measure ourselves against the ideal of communion described in the Acts of the Apostles, he was issuing an endlessly demanding challenge. In a Christian community nobody should feel marginalized or isolated, nobody should leave the Sunday liturgy feeling friendless and isolated.

The priest who presides at the celebration of the Eucharist has been ordained to represent Christ, the Head of the Body. He is, of course, a brother with all who have been baptised²⁴, in need of

²¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 24

²² *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 22,

²³ AUGUSTINE, *Sermon 272*.

²⁴ VATICAN II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, On the Ministry and Life of Priests, 9.

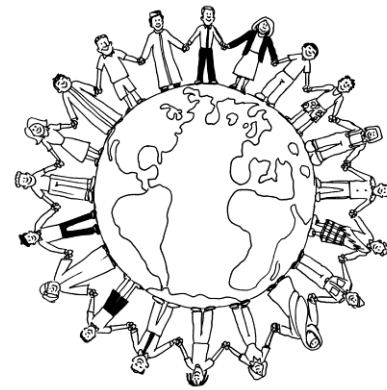
God's mercy, fragile and flawed, like every other member of the community, needing their prayers and support, experiencing like them the emptiness which God promises to fill. But he is also a sign of the truth that this community is not created out of its own limited human resources and talents; it is built on the one foundation, Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:11, Eph 2:20). We are Christ's Body; already we have begun to be part of a community which is flawless and eternal. The presence of Christ the Head guarantees that. The presence of the priest, acting 'in the person of Christ' the Head, makes us a Eucharistic community²⁵.

The decline in the number of vocations to the priesthood is a call to each parish and cluster to ask itself whether their Christian community is one that actively prays for vocations. The parish also needs to ask itself whether it provides an environment in which a young man would be encouraged to consider a vocation to the priesthood and would be supported in following it.

We are already at the point where not every parish can have a full time, resident priest. It is already evident that over the next decade this situation will disimprove, since when new candidates come forward it will take several years before we could hope to see them being ordained. One fruit of the Year of the Eucharist should be a greater urgency in every parish about praying for and encouraging vocations to the priesthood.

The whole human family

The Church does not exist simply for its own sake, but is "a sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race"²⁶. Our desire to belong goes far beyond our own family, our own parish. Our desire is for a sense of belonging that embraces the whole human family. The Church is a sign and instrument of that universal unity.



The disaster in South East Asia prompted an extraordinarily generous response. Seeing those dreadful scenes and hearing the unimaginable numbers of casualties, we recognised that brothers and sisters of ours were facing horrors too awful for words. We knew that the human race is one family and that our response to the weakest and most helpless of Christ's brothers and sisters is a response to him²⁷..

Our need to belong is a longing for a fullness that stretches our minds to breaking point. Our gathering around the table of the Eucharist will have its completion when the fullness of God's peace is revealed. We will be gathered around the throne of God, brothers and sisters of Christ from every time and place, "people of every race, language and way of life to share in the one eternal banquet"²⁸.

The great variety of individual gifts, languages, histories, cultures and achievements will no longer be a cause of envy, rivalry, suspicion or misunderstanding. We will rejoice in all "the fruits of our nature and our enterprise" and we will "find them once again, cleansed this time from the stain of sin, illuminated and transfigured when Christ presents to his Father an eternal and universal kingdom"²⁹. We will see in each of those people a unique image of our God. We will rejoice in each gift and each good fruit as if it were our own:

²⁵ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, The Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church, Ch. 3.

²⁶ VATICAN II, *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 1.

²⁷ Cf Mt 25:31-46.

²⁸ *Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation II*.

²⁹ *Gaudium et Spes* 39.

Eternal life consists in the joyful companionship of all the blessed, a companionship which is full of delight; since each one will possess all good things together with all the blessed, for they will all love one another as themselves, and, therefore, will rejoice in one another's happiness as if it were their own, and consequently the joy and gladness of one will be as great as the joy of all³⁰.

That is the universal, eternal companionship for which we are made and for which we long. The Eucharist is a celebration of that union between humanity and God and that complete companionship among human beings:

The Eucharist is truly a glimpse of heaven appearing on earth. It is a glorious ray of the heavenly Jerusalem which pierces the clouds of our history and lights up our journey³¹..

Learning to welcome one another

The early Church understood hospitality as a fundamental Christian virtue. It was the characteristic of the Christian community to welcome strangers and to offer them friendship and respect.

When we gather to celebrate the Eucharist we should be asking ourselves whether this is a welcoming community – for those who are strangers in our country, for those who have been away from the Church for some time, for young people, for people of different backgrounds. The words of St James are uncompromising:

If a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say 'Have a seat here, please,' while to the other who is poor you say, 'Stand there' or 'Sit at my feet', have you not made distinctions among yourselves and made yourselves judges with evil thoughts... If you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors (James 2:2-9).

A welcome – or its opposite – can often be conveyed in small ways, a smile, a kind word, a gesture – or their absence. When the King in Matthew 25 acknowledges those who welcomed him in strangers and condemns those who failed to welcome him, both groups are astonished (Mt 25:38, 44).

The Eucharist speaks to the yearning to belong, to the sense of 'lonely exile'. We can, however, obscure the meaning of the welcoming presence of the Lord if a parish does not, as the Pope exhorted,

rediscover its vocation to be a fraternal and welcoming family home, where those who have been baptised and confirmed become aware of forming the People of God. In that home, the bread of good doctrine and the Eucharistic Bread are broken for them in abundance, in the setting of the one act of worship; from that home they are sent out day by day to their apostolic mission in all the centres of activity of the life of the world³².

*A welcoming
family home*

The Eucharist is a foretaste of the glorious communion of the human family with God – God's people 'mourn in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appear'. It follows that our celebration demands of us that we seek to foreshadow the unity and peace to which all of us are called. Pope John Paul said this to the participants in the Eucharistic Congress in Lourdes in 1981:

"The Congress has taught you to live the breaking of the bread as Church, according to all its demands: welcoming, exchanging, sharing, going beyond barriers, being concerned for the

³⁰ AQUINAS, *On the Creed*, xii, 20.

³¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, On the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church, 19

³² JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, Catechesis in our Time, 67.

conversion of people, the renunciation of prejudices, the transforming of our social milieu in structures and spirit. You have understood that to be true and logical your meeting at the Eucharistic table must have practical consequences.³³

“IS THAT ALL THERE IS?”

This contrasts with the bleak chorus of Peggy Lee’s song from the 1960s, which echoes an unease deep in our culture. It asks whether there is anything worth committing ourselves to, anything worth living for:

“Is that all there is, is that all there is
If that’s all there is my friends, then let’s keep dancing
Let’s break out the booze and have a ball
If that’s all there is.”

In spite of the frenetic activity of our lives, a pall of boredom hangs over us. Perhaps a world that provides so many stimuli makes us less able to pursue our own goals. “I’m bored!” “There’s nothing on the telly!” “There is nothing worth getting out of bed for.” “What is there to do?”

Tolstoy describes boredom as “the desire for desires”. And we do need to have desires and goals. Human beings “fully discover their true selves only in sincere self-giving.” If there were no cause worth our commitment, nothing worth our wholehearted effort then nothing would be left but to “eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (Is 22:13).

The two downcast disciples had come to the end of their journey. They invited the Stranger to remain with them because “the day is now far spent” (Acts 24:29). But when they recognised the Risen Jesus in the breaking of the bread, “they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem” (Acts 24:33). Suddenly they were people with a mission, people so much on fire with Good News that they could not wait to share and spread.

Sent out

The Eucharist is not only the summit but also the source of our lives. In other words, the Eucharist sends us out to live with new purpose and strength: “Entering into communion with Christ in the moment of his Pasch also means sensing the duty to be a missionary of the event made present in that rite”³⁴. In Limerick, Pope John Paul told us that there is no such thing as an ordinary layperson because, “As God’s holy people you are called to fulfil your role in the evangelisation of the world”³⁵.



John Paul II in Limerick

³³ JOHN PAUL II, Televised Message from the Gemelli Hospital to the Eucharistic Congress, Lourdes, 21 July 1981.

³⁴ *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 24.

³⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Homily in Limerick, 1 October 1979.

We are people with a mission in life; we are people whose lives are a mission. The very word 'Mass' derives from the Latin *missio*, which means sending out. When we look at our lives and our quest for meaning, when we look at a world so in need of the Good News, the question, 'What is there to do?' is hardly appropriate!

In the Eucharist we are face to face with the meaning of our lives and of human history, with the longing for a universal belonging, with our need to commit our lives to a mission worthy of our whole heart and mind and strength. That mission is to help people to recognise the God for whom all human beings thirst with a thirst is often suppressed, but never satisfied. Our role is to awaken the thirst and to make the Good News known by our attitudes, actions and words, 'in families, schools, the workplace, in all of life's settings':

In Jesus, in his sacrifice, in his unconditional 'yes' to the will of the Father, is contained the 'yes, the 'thank you' and the 'amen' of all humanity. The Church is called to remind all men and women of this great truth. This is especially urgent in the context of our secularised culture, characterised as it is by a forgetfulness of God and a vain pursuit of human self-sufficiency³⁶.

'There is no such thing as an ordinary layperson'. The time is past, rather it never existed, when one could leave that task to others:

We must revive in ourselves the burning conviction of Paul, who cried out: 'Woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel' (1 Cor 9:16). This passion will not fail to stir in the Church a new sense of mission, which cannot be left to a group of 'specialists' but must involve the responsibility of all members of the People of God. Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep him for themselves, they must proclaim him. A new apostolic outreach is needed, which will be lived as *the everyday commitment of Christian communities and groups*³⁷.

The renewal that we have been undertaking in the diocese, the clusters and the parishes needs to have this as a priority. *How, in practice, do we proclaim the Gospel in our communities and beyond?*

A new mode of being

The Eucharist is not just a source of strength for our mission; it is, in a sense, the mission itself. We reflect, as individuals and together on what we celebrate, on the truths and values which the Eucharist expresses, on 'the attitudes it inspires and the resolutions to which it gives rise'. As we do so, our union with Christ grows and 'new mode of being' passes from Jesus into us and to the whole of our society and culture³⁸.

The Church is a sign and instrument of the unity of the whole human family. Any community, but particularly a Eucharistic community, is fatally unhealthy if it fails to look beyond itself. The Good News is not just for those who are present at Mass. It is also for those who are not – those who no longer practice regularly and those who have never received the Gospel.

In celebrating, as Jesus asked us to do in memory of him, we ought to be particularly conscious of the pain of Christian divisions. We should pray, work and have "a burning desire" for the day when the visible unity of Christ's Church will be restored and we will be able to "join in celebrating the one Eucharist of the Lord"³⁹.

We celebrate conscious that every human being is invited by God as we are; every human being in his or her heart thirsts for God; every human being has been created in order to belong in

³⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 26.

³⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, At the Close of the Great Jubilee, 40.

³⁸ Cf. *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 25.

³⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Ut Unum Sint*, On Commitment to Ecumenism, 45.

God's new creation. We are conscious that Christ died for each person, as he did for us. We know that we are meant to love and serve all of them as he did: "In the Eucharist our God has shown love in the extreme, overturning all those criteria of power which too often govern human relations and radically reaffirming the criterion of service"⁴⁰.

The Trócaire collection for the people of South East Asia was taken up in the context of our gathering for Mass. The response to the disaster from the diocese of Limerick, which amounted to well over six hundred thousand euro to the Trócaire collection alone, was unprecedented. [One also has to remember the generosity here and throughout the country through many other agencies and groups.] It was a truly Eucharistic occasion. The Gospel of Saint John records how at the Last Supper, Jesus set an example for the disciples to follow (Jn 13:15):

A truly Eucharistic occasion

by bending down to wash the feet of his disciples, Jesus explains the meaning of the Eucharist unequivocally. Saint Paul vigorously reaffirms the impropriety of a Eucharistic celebration lacking charity expressed by practical sharing with the poor (cf. I Cor 11:17-22, 27-34)⁴¹.

The Pope suggests that we could very suitably mark the Year of the Eucharist by finding ways of responding to the needs of others:

Can we not make this Year of the Eucharist an occasion for diocesan and parish communities to commit themselves in a particular way to responding with fraternal solicitude to one of the many forms of poverty present in our world? I think for example of the tragedy of hunger which plagues hundreds of millions of human beings, the diseases which afflict developing countries, the loneliness of the elderly, the hardships faced by the unemployed, the struggles of immigrants... We cannot delude ourselves: by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need will we be recognised as true followers of Christ (cf. Jn 13:35; Mt 25:31-46). This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged⁴².

In the light of the needs in ourselves and in the world, how can anybody experience boredom and feel that there is nothing worthwhile to be done? Perhaps the reason is the enormous, apparently impossible, scale of the needs. We feel like the apostles coming to Jesus with the five loaves and the two fish, "but what are they among so many?" (Jn 6:9)

There are many people, and especially many young people, who show great commitment in responding to emergencies and underdevelopment, even by working for a time in the developing world. The needs are overwhelming; the progress in meeting them is painfully slow. In the Eucharist, however, we are celebrating the truth which assures us that God's love for each person is stronger than any agony, any injustice, any feeling of hopelessness, stronger than evil or death. Reaching out in love to our brothers and sisters is a work that is in harmony with the unconquerable plan of God. Christ "assures those who trust in the charity of God that the way of love is open to all and that the effort to establish a universal communion will not be in vain"⁴³.

Learning to be missionary

The great Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria would begin his sermons to the people of his home village of Templederry, and virtually all his addresses in Ireland with the words, "My dear fellow missionaries"⁴⁴. The Second Vatican Council declared that, "The church on earth is by its

⁴⁰ *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 28.

⁴¹ *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 28.

⁴² *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 28

⁴³ *Gaudium et Spes*, 38.

⁴⁴ JORDAN, J., *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria*, Clonmore Reynolds, Dublin 1949, p. 186.

very nature missionary⁴⁵. Pope John Paul welcomed “a new awareness that *missionary activity is a matter for all Christians*, for all dioceses and parishes, Church institutions and associations”⁴⁶.

The hungers and longings that the Eucharist addresses in us, as individuals and as a community, are not ours alone. The world is hungry for a sense of meaning, a sense of belonging, a sense of mission and purpose. Even the most secular enterprises feel the need for a ‘mission statement’. If the truth and hope and love of the Gospel do not influence the way we, as individuals and as a community, approach our daily lives, we are contributing to a desert of meaninglessness that could starve our society of depth and hope. Bringing the Gospel to the world “is the primary service which the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity in the modern world which has experienced marvellous achievements but which seems to have lost its sense of ultimate realities and of existence itself”⁴⁷.

The needs around us are so great that no individual or parish or diocese can meet them all. The Holy Spirit has given a variety of gifts to God’s People so that together, using all those talents, we can respond in many different ways, from many different perspectives, with many different gifts. Each parish should reflect about the way or ways in which the members of their community might bring their ‘loaves and fishes’, and so “live the breaking of bread according to all its demands”.

The primary
service which the
Church can render

In ‘*How can we know the Way?*’, in the section *Reaching Out...*, I pointed to some of the many ways in which individuals, parishes and clusters might try to respond to the call to give ourselves to others as Christ did at the Last Supper and on Calvary. Since ‘reaching out’ is a response to our ‘sensing the duty to be a missionary of the event made present’⁴⁸ in the Mass, the Year of the Eucharist would be an appropriate time to look again at those suggestions.

“WE HAD HOPED...”

The disciples on the road to Emmaus were shattered because nothing seemed to have turned out as they had hoped. Their future seemed empty and depressing.

More difficult to hope

A similar sense of hopelessness is not far below the surface of our way of life. Global warming threatens unknown and frightening changes; terrorism has produced both personal and communal insecurity; our lifestyle in the affluent West cannot continue indefinitely, or be extended to the rest of the world without making unsustainable demands on the planet’s limited resources; demographic and economic changes make it increasingly doubtful that there will be adequate pensions in the future; a changing world greatly weakens the prospect that jobs can be secure and life-long; the long-term economic outlook is full of uncertainty. Young people look towards the second half of the twenty-first century, or perhaps avoid looking towards it, with an uneasy feeling that the world of their adulthood and old age will have changed in many ways, by no means all of them pleasant.

Three related characteristics of today’s world make it more difficult to hope. The first arises from a distortion of the recognition of the respect due to the beliefs of other people. Those beliefs deserve respect precisely because they are the fruit of a human being’s search for the truth:

⁴⁵ VATICAN II, *Ad Gentes*, On the Church’s Missionary Activity, 1.

⁴⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, The Church’s Missionary Mandate, 2.

⁴⁷ *Redemptoris Missio*, 2.

⁴⁸ *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 24.

“Objectively speaking, the search for truth and the search for God are one and the same”⁴⁹. Respect undermines itself, however, when it degenerates into a feeling that every belief is as good as every other belief and that, consequently, there is no truth to be found, only a vast number of equally valid opinions. If that were the case, the human search for truth would lose its meaning.

The search for truth and the search for God are one and the same

The complete truth is always beyond us; we could never fully grasp the reality of the infinite God, nor indeed the full truth about ourselves. But there is a Truth which we seek and which attracts us. There would be no hope of finding a truly satisfying meaning in life if any foundation on which we build could be no more than a doubtful, subjective opinion about a ‘truth’ that does not, in the end, exist outside our own minds.

The second characteristic is that for all the wonderful growth in possibilities, knowledge and communications that we have experienced, there is a sense in which our horizons have shrunk rather than expanded. Our reason “has wilted under the weight of so much knowledge and little by little has lost the capacity to lift its gaze to the heights, not daring to rise to the truth of being”⁵⁰.

We all live in, and a generation is growing up in, a world in which a non-religious view of life is taken as normal and obvious whereas a religious outlook is viewed with a slightly puzzled tolerance: “The impression is given that unbelief is self-explanatory, whereas belief needs a sort of social legitimisation which is neither obvious nor taken for granted”⁵¹. But humanity viewed without its Creator is not expanded and freer; it is diminished and deprived of the foundation for its hope.

Thirdly, there is a tendency to see social, economic and political life as purely secular realities. But if these are to be inspired by hope, they need to be based on a vision of the human person; they need to be at the service of a real fostering of human dignity and fullness of life. There is a fundamental contradiction in expecting people to leave their understanding of what it is to be human, their understanding of the meaning and purpose of human life, ‘outside’ when they enter into these spheres.

This does not, of course, mean that one should require others to share one’s vision, or that one should expect them to accept arguments that depend on it. It does mean that to suggest that in these spheres people should forget the reason for the hope that is in them (1 Pet 3:15) would be a recipe for a culture that is empty and for a politics that is a mere game of words rather than a service of one’s fellow human beings in all their amazing worth and dignity⁵².

In the Eucharist we bring every corner and aspect of life, however secular it may appear, to the Lord proclaiming that the deepest meaning of all that we do, all that we experience, all that we are is to be part of the journey towards the new creation into which Christ has led the way. From the Eucharist we bring a deeper understanding and a firmer commitment to live every corner and aspect of our lives as part of that journey.

The most urgent matter Europe faces

Inner emptiness, the feeling of loneliness, the absence of purpose, the loss of hope all find their root in a vision of life which sees humanity ‘apart from God and apart from Christ’. European culture is marked by a kind of untroubled apostasy among “people who have all that they need

⁴⁹ JOHN PAUL II, Message for the World Day of Peace 1991, II.

⁵⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Fides et Ratio*, On the Relationship between Faith and Reason, 5.

⁵¹ *Fides et Ratio*, 7.

⁵² Cf JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptor Hominis*, At the beginning of his Papal Ministry, 10.

and live as if God does not exist”⁵³. “Possibly the most urgent matter Europe faces, in both East and West, is a growing need for hope, a hope which will enable us to give meaning to life and history and to continue on our way together”⁵⁴.

The emptiness and longing that only God can fill cannot be suppressed, however hard we try to fill it with lesser realities. We can see many symptoms of something profoundly wrong with our society – binge drinking, drugs, a scale of values that often gives precedence to pleasure, possessions and various forms of prejudice over fundamental human values, social inequalities that deprive people of the opportunity to develop their God-given gifts, a lack of urgency about our responsibilities to the developing world, the destruction of God’s creation, which is our inheritance from the past and ought to be our legacy to the future. We are tempted to measure the health of our society by its wealth rather than by how well it helps people to grow in their own humanity. All of these are signs of our searching for shortcuts towards satisfying the hope that is within us. None of them can yield the fulfilment they seek.

A kind of
untroubled
apostasy

The one hope for each of us and for the whole human race is Jesus Christ:

Risen and living Lord, you are the ever new hope of the Church and of humanity.
You are the one true hope for the human family and for history.
Already in this life and in the life to come,
you are ‘among us the hope of glory’ (Col 1:27).
In you and with you, we find truth:
our life has meaning,
communion is possible,
diversity can become richness,
the power of the Kingdom is at work in history
and helps to build the city of humankind.
Love gives an eternal value to human efforts.
Suffering becomes salvific,
life will conquer death,
Creation will share in the glory of the children of God⁵⁵.

Dare to hope

When the disciples recognised Jesus in the breaking of the bread their weary desolation was transformed into a burning hope. ‘Our hope had been...’ they said. What they now discovered was that their hope had been too small and timid. Jesus revealed a hope that could conquer even death itself. In the Eucharist the Paschal Mystery of Jesus is present to us – his passage through death to risen life. The narrow inadequacy of a merely human hope lies in the fact that within this life every hope must be incomplete. Every relationship and achievement is threatened by death; every society, however good, is shot through with injustice and prejudice and dishonesty; the generations that have gone before us are, in any case, beyond our reach, we can do nothing to repair the oppression and the disadvantage and the pain suffered by those who have already died.

By his resurrection, Jesus enters the new creation where there will be no more mourning or crying or pain, and where all things will be made new (Rev 22:4,5) for the dead as well as the living:

The vigilant and active expectation of the coming of the Kingdom is also the expectation of a finally perfect justice for the living and the dead, for people of all times and places, justice which Jesus Christ, installed as supreme judge, will establish⁵⁶.

⁵³ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, Post Synodal Exhortation (2003), 9

⁵⁴ *Ecclesia in Europa*, 4.

⁵⁵ Message of the Second Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops. 2.

We sometimes use the phrase “I scarcely dare to hope”. The invitation of the Risen Jesus says: ‘dare to hope!’ Our faith challenges us to expand our horizons beyond anything that we can see or hear or imagine: “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him, these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God” (1 Cor 2:9,10).

The hope that is offered to us in the Eucharist is not just about a distant future. “The Eucharist is a mystery of presence, the perfect fulfilment of Jesus’ promise to remain with us until the end of the world”⁵⁷. We are in the presence of Christ himself, “the goal of human history, the focal point of the desires of history and of civilisation, the centre of humanity, the joy of all hearts, and the fulfilment of all aspirations”⁵⁸. Our hope is already being fulfilled. It is the hope for which we were made, a hope that we could never construct or achieve by our own efforts or by pursuing limited and fragile possessions, popularity or power.

In a world whose great need is for hope, when we gather in our Churches for Mass, or we visit our Churches to pray before the Blessed Sacrament, we enter the *presence* of “Christ Jesus our hope” (1 Tim 1:1). There we find our meaning, our purpose, our mission and our hope.

Jesus Christ
our HOPE

It is Jesus in fact that you seek when you dream of happiness; he is waiting for you when nothing else you find satisfies you; he is the beauty to which you are so attracted; it is he who provokes you with that thirst for fullness that will not let you settle for compromise; it is he who urges you to shed the masks of a false life; it is he who reads in your hearts your most genuine choices, the choices that others try to stifle. It is Jesus who stirs in you the desire to do something great with your lives, the will to follow an ideal, the refusal to allow yourselves to be ground down by mediocrity, the courage to commit yourselves humbly and patiently to improving yourselves and society, making the world more human and more fraternal⁵⁹.

Learning to hope

The first way of opening our hearts to the Good News of hope is to pray, listening to the word, worshipping, praising and thanking God. This attitude is found above all in the celebration of the Eucharist, as both the source and summit of our lives. In the Eucharist and in all liturgical acts, it is God who is present and at work among us – the Father speaks to us and receives our worship through his Son, Jesus, who sanctifies us, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, who makes us into the Body of Christ. We are therefore in the presence of and offering worship to the source of our hope.

In particular, the sacrament of reconciliation has an important role in the recovery of hope. One reason why there is a loss of hope is a sense of powerlessness to overcome guilt and failure:

One of the roots of the hopelessness that assails many people today is found in their inability to see themselves as sinners and to allow themselves to be forgiven, an inability often resulting from the isolation of those who, by living as if God did not exist, have no one from whom they can seek forgiveness. Those who, on the other hand, acknowledge that they are sinners, and entrust themselves to the mercy of the Heavenly Father, experience the joy of an authentic liberation and can continue life without being trapped in their own misery⁶⁰.

⁵⁶ CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*, 60.

⁵⁷ *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 16.

⁵⁸ VATICAN II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 45.

⁵⁹ JOHN PAUL II, Homily at Vigil in Tor Vergata, World Youth Day Rome 2000

⁶⁰ *Ecclesia in Europa*, 76.

The attitude of prayer, a contemplative outlook⁶¹, should mark our whole lives. The hope that can answer our longings can only come from God. Every human hope is fragile. There is no lasting hope to be found in 'fleeting and insubstantial things'⁶².

In prayer you will discover his life-giving presence. By making him the foundation of all your activity, you will thus be able to invite Europeans to an encounter with him, our true hope, the One who alone knows how to satisfy fully the yearning for God hidden in the different forms of religious quest now reappearing in contemporary Europe⁶³.

The Mass of *The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Divine Hope* points towards her as the one who continued to hope and to believe 'that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord' (Lk 1:45): "Your lowly servant placed all her trust in you: in hope she waited for, and in faith conceived the Son of man, whom the prophets foretold"⁶⁴.

THE YEAR OF THE EUCHARIST

In the course of this year, each parish and cluster should look at ways of responding to the Pope's call to "contemplate, praise and adore in a special way this ineffable sacrament"⁶⁵. A document prepared by the Congregation for Divine Worship, *The Year of the Eucharist: Suggestions and Proposals*, has been published by Veritas (2005).

In that effort of Eucharistic renewal, our model is the Blessed Virgin Mary. "She is the attentive Virgin, who receives the word of God with faith"⁶⁶; she responded with all her heart and life in her 'pilgrimage of faith'⁶⁷. Her faith "was for her the cause of blessedness and certainty in the fulfilment of the promise"⁶⁸:

If the Eucharist is a mystery of faith which so greatly transcends our understanding as to call for sheer abandonment to the word of God, then there can be no one like Mary to act as our support and guide in acquiring this disposition⁶⁹.

Particularly during the Marian month of May, which is also the month of First Communions, the relationship between Mary and the Eucharist, and the relationship between the Rosary and the Mass should be reflected upon. In his Apostolic Letter on the Rosary, Pope John Paul quoted Blessed Bartolo Longo, a great apostle of the Rosary:

Just as two friends, frequently in each other's company, tend to develop similar habits, so too, by holding familiar converse with Jesus and the Blessed Virgin, by meditating on the mysteries of the Rosary and by living the same life in Holy Communion, we can become, to the extent of our lowliness, similar to them and can learn from these supreme models a life of humility, poverty, hiddenness, patience and perfection⁷⁰.

The months of May and October would be particularly suitable for the use, especially on Saturdays, of the *Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary*⁷¹. These fine texts should be used more often.

⁶¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Evangelium Vitae*, The Gospel of Life, 83.

⁶² *Ecclesia in Europa*, 10.

⁶³ *Ecclesia in Europa*, 66.

⁶⁴ Preface of the Mass of BVM, Mother of Divine Hope.

⁶⁵ *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 29.

⁶⁶ PAUL VI, *Marialis Cultus*, To Honour Mary, 17.

⁶⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Mater*, Mother of the Redeemer, 5.

⁶⁸ *Marialis Cultus*, 17.

⁶⁹ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 54.

⁷⁰ Quoted in JOHN PAUL II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, On the Most Holy Rosary, 15

⁷¹ Veritas Publications 1987.

We intend to provide some help at diocesan level so that we may celebrate our Sunday Masses more reverently, more conscious of and more faithful to the riches of the liturgy. I hope we may all become more aware of the Spirit who prays in our hearts and of Christ who unites our prayer to his in the worship of his Father who dwells in unapproachable light. Whatever we do this year should not be merely about externals but about the deep truth. The Holy Father asks, "that every initiative be marked by a profound interiority"⁷².

The Pope speaks about spending time with Jesus, "to lie close to his breast like the Beloved Disciple and to feel the infinite love present in his heart... How often, dear brothers and sisters, have I experienced this, and drawn from it strength, consolation and support"⁷³.



It would be particularly appropriate, and I believe most fruitful, if parishes encouraged Eucharistic Adoration, whether regularly or on particular occasions during the year. Our meaning and our purpose our mission and our hope is present in the Mass. Christ is permanently present in our Churches, a reminder and fulfilment of his promise to be with us always on the journey of life, as he was with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Eucharistic Adoration is a powerful means of fostering the 'contemplative outlook'⁷⁴ that is needed in a world which lives so much on the surface.

We should also look generously at how we might respond to the Holy Father's call to respond "with fraternal solicitude to one of the many forms of poverty present in our world".

The Holy Father does not ask 'for anything extraordinary', but "if the only result of this Year were the revival in every Christian community of the celebration of Sunday Mass and an increase in Eucharistic worship outside Mass, this Year of grace would be abundantly successful". But, that is not an invitation to set our sights low; he goes on, "it is good to aim high, and not to be content with mediocrity, since we know we can always count on God's help"⁷⁵.

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⁷² *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 29,

⁷³ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 25

⁷⁴ Cf, *Evangelium Vitae*, 83.

⁷⁵ *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 29,

A Dhia, a charthanacht gan teorainn
agus a thrócaire gan miosúr,
is é do ghrá a bheir duitse teacht go dtí mé,
agus is é mo dhóchas
a bheir domsa thú a ghlacadh.
Tugaim mo chorp duit mar theampall,
mo chroí duit mar altóir,
agus m'anam duit mar phixus
Ó a Thiarna, a Uain neamhchiontaigh,
a Fhuasclóir na trócaire,
a Linbh uasail, a Íosa,
clúdaigh mé le'd fhallaing;
tabhair lóistín dom i d' Chroí,
slog mé i d' ríocht,
leigheas mé le d'chumhracht agus carthanacht;
athbheoigh mé le d' bhás;
folaigh mé i d' loitibh;
glan mé le do chuid fola;
táthaigh mé le d' ghrá
agus déan mé go hiomlán taitneamhach
de réir do NaomhChroí a Thiarna.

[Ó LAOGHAIRE, D, (ed.) *Ár bPaidreacha
Dúchais*, FÁS, Dublin 1975, p. 46]

O God, you are love without limit
and mercy without measure.
Your love led you to come to me
and my hope led me to receive you.
I give you my body to be your temple,
my heart to be your altar,
my soul to be your ciborium,
Lord, sinless Lamb,
merciful Redeemer,
noble infant Jesus,
cover me with your cloak,
give me lodging in your heart,
engulf me in your kingdom,
heal me with your fragrance and love,
give me new life by your death,
hide me within your wounds,
cleanse me in your blood,
bind me with your love,
and make me fully pleasing, Lord,
according to your Sacred Heart .

[My translation]



NOTES

- ¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Oriente Lumen*, 16.
- ² VATICAN II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 10.
- ³ JOHN PAUL II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, Apostolic Letter for the Year of the Eucharist, 29.
- ⁴ St Augustine, *Confessions*, 1,1.
- ⁵ Cf AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.1, a.6c, and ad 3.
- ⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 366.
- ⁷ *Gaudium et Spes*, 19.
- ⁸ VATICAN II, *Dei Verbum*, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, 4.
- ⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 27.
- ¹⁰ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7.
- ¹¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 14, 16.
- ¹² ST AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, 3,6; 12.12; 10.27.
- ¹³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2653.
- ¹⁴ TURNER, D., *Faith Seeking*, SCM Press 2002, p. 107.
- ¹⁵ *Dei Verbum*, 26.
- ¹⁶ *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 19.
- ¹⁷ BIANCHI, E., *Pregare la Parola* [Praying the Word], Gribaudi 1997, p. 41.
- ¹⁸ Jesus, cleanse my heart each day and make it spotless
Jesus, rule my mind by the power of your love.
Make truly clean my thoughts and the words of my mouth,
and, dear Lord God, direct my life now and forever.
- ¹⁹ *O Come Emmanuel*, tr. Thomas Helmore.
- ²⁰ Attributed to Lily Tomlin.
- ²¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 24.
- ²² *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 22.
- ²³ ST AUGUSTINE, Sermon 272.
- ²⁴ Cf. VATICAN II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, 9.
- ²⁵ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, The Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church, Ch 3.
- ²⁶ VATICAN II, *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 1.
- ²⁷ Cf Mt 25:31-46.
- ²⁸ *Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation II*.
- ²⁹ *Gaudium et Spes* 39.
- ³⁰ AQUINAS, *On the Creed*, xii, 20.
- ³¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, On the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church, 19
- ³² JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, Catechesis in our Time, 67.
- ³³ JOHN PAUL II, Message to Congress Participants, in *Eucharist for a New World*, Irish Institute of Pastoral Liturgy, p.17.
- ³⁴ *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 24.
- ³⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Homily in Limerick, 1 October 1979.
- ³⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 26.
- ³⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, At the Close of the Great Jubilee, 40.
- ³⁸ Cf. *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 25.
- ³⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Ut Unum Sint*, On Commitment to Ecumenism, 45
- ⁴⁰ *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 28.
- ⁴¹ *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 28.
- ⁴² *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 28
- ⁴³ *Gaudium et Spes*, 38.
- ⁴⁴ VATICAN II, *Ad Gentes*, On the Church's Missionary Activity, 1.
- ⁴⁵ JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, The Church's Missionary Mandate, 2.
- ⁴⁶ *Redemptoris Missio*, 2.
- ⁴⁷ *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 24.
- ⁴⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Message for the World Day of Peace 1991*, II.
- ⁴⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Fides et Ratio*, On the Relationship between Faith and Reason, 5.
- ⁵⁰ *Fides et Ratio*, 7.

- ⁵¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptor Hominis*, At the Beginning of his Papal Ministry, 10
- ⁵² JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (2003), 9.
- ⁵³ *Ecclesia in Europa*, 4.
- ⁵⁴ *Message of the Second Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops*, 2.
- ⁵⁵ CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation, 60.
- ⁵⁶ *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 16.
- ⁵⁷ VATICAN II, *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 45.
- ⁵⁸ JOHN PAUL II, Vigil at Tor Vergata, World Youth Day 2000.
- ⁵⁹ *Ecclesia in Europa*, 76.
- ⁶⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Evangelium Vitae*, The Gospel of Life, 83.
- ⁶¹ *Ecclesia in Europa*, 10.
- ⁶² *Ecclesia in Europa*, 66.
- ⁶³ Preface of the Mass of the BVM, Mother of Divine Hope.
- ⁶⁴ *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 29.
- ⁶⁵ Veritas, 2005.
- ⁶⁶ PAUL VI, *Marialis Cultus*, To Honour Mary, 17.
- ⁶⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Mater*, Mother of the Redeemer, 5.
- ⁶⁸ *Marialis Cultus*, 17.
- ⁶⁹ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 54.
- ⁷⁰ BARTOLO LONGO, in JOHN PAUL II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, On the Most Holy Rosary, 15.
- ⁷¹ Veritas Publications, 1987.
- ⁷² *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 29.
- ⁷³ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 25.
- ⁷⁴ *Evangelium Vitae*, 83.
- ⁷⁵ *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 29.
- ⁷⁶ *Ár bPaidreacha Dúchais*, ed. Ó Laoghaire, D, SJ, FÁS, Dublin 1975, p,46