



The Holy See

LIVE BROADCAST VIA SATELLITE
OF THE HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER FOR THE CLOSING
OF THE 49th INTERNATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONFERENCE
IN QUÉBEC (CANADA)

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Foconi Hall
Sunday, 22 June 2008*

*Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

While you are gathered for the 49th International Eucharistic Congress, I am glad to join you via television and thus to participate in your prayer. I would first like to greet Cardinal Marc Ouellet, Archbishop of Quebec, and Cardinal Jozef Tomko, my Special Envoy to the Congress, as well as all the Cardinals and Bishops present. I also extend my cordial greetings to the important figures of civil society who have desired to take part in the liturgy. I extend affectionate thoughts to the priests, the deacons and all the faithful present, and likewise to all the Catholics of Quebec, of the whole of Canada and of the other continents. I do not forget that your City is celebrating the 400th anniversary of its foundation. It is an occasion for each one to remember the values that inspired the pioneers and missionaries in your Country.

"The Eucharist, gift of God for the life of the world" is the theme chosen for this new International Eucharistic Congress. The Eucharist is our most beautiful treasure. It is the Sacrament *par excellence*; it ushers us into eternal life in advance; it contains the entire mystery of our salvation; it is the source and summit of the action and life of the Church as the Second Vatican Council recalled (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 8). It is therefore particularly important that pastors and

faithful be constantly committed to deepening their knowledge of this great Sacrament. In this way each one will be able to affirm his faith and carry out his mission in the Church and in the world ever better, remembering that the Eucharist bears fruit in one's personal life, in the life of the Church and the world. The Spirit of truth bears witness in your hearts; may you too witness to Christ among men and women, as the Gospel acclamation of this Mass says. Thus, participation in the Eucharist does not distance our contemporaries. On the contrary, since it is the expression par excellence of God's love, it calls us to join forces with all our brothers and sisters to confront today's challenges and make the earth a place that is pleasant to live in. This requires that we constantly fight to ensure that everyone is respected, from conception until natural death, that our rich societies welcome the poorest and restore dignity to all, that everyone has food and can enable his family to survive and that peace and justice shine out on all the continents. These are some of the challenges that must mobilize all our contemporaries, and from the Eucharistic mystery Christians must draw the strength to confront them.

The "Mystery of Faith": this we proclaim at every Mass. I would like everyone to make a commitment to study this great mystery, especially by revisiting and exploring, individually and in groups, the Council's text on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, so as to bear witness courageously to the mystery. In this way, each person will arrive at a better grasp of the meaning of every aspect of the Eucharist, understanding its depth and living it with greater intensity. Every sentence, every gesture has its own meaning and conceals a mystery. I sincerely hope that this Congress will serve as an appeal to all the faithful to make a similar commitment to a renewal of Eucharistic catechesis, so that they themselves will gain a genuine Eucharistic awareness and will in turn teach children and young people to recognize the central mystery of faith and build their lives around it. I urge priests especially to give due honour to the Eucharistic rite, and I ask all the faithful to respect the role of each individual, both priest and lay, in the Eucharistic action. The liturgy does not belong to us: it is the Church's treasure.

Reception of the Eucharist, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament - by this we mean deepening our Communion, preparing for it and prolonging it - is also about allowing ourselves to enter into communion with Christ, and through him with the whole of the Trinity, so as to become what we receive and to live in communion with the Church. It is by receiving the Body of Christ that we receive the strength "of unity with God and with one another" (St Cyril of Alexandria, *In Ioannis Evangelium*, 11: 11; cf. St Augustine, *Sermo 577*). We must never forget that the Church is built around Christ and that, as St Augustine, St Thomas Aquinas and St Albert the Great have all said, following St Paul (cf. 1 Cor 10: 17), the Eucharist is the Sacrament of the Church's unity, because we all form one single body of which the Lord is the head. We must go back again and again to the Last Supper on Holy Thursday, where we were given a pledge of the mystery of our redemption on the Cross. The Last Supper is the locus of the nascent Church, the womb containing the Church of every age. In the Eucharist, Christ's sacrifice is constantly renewed, Pentecost is constantly renewed. May all of you become ever more deeply aware of the importance of the Sunday Eucharist, because Sunday, the first day of the week, is the day when

we honour Christ, the day when we receive the strength to live each day the gift of God.

I would also like to invite pastors and the faithful to take a renewed interest in their preparation for receiving the Eucharist. Despite our weakness and sin, Christ wants to make his dwelling place in us. This is why we must do everything in our power to receive him with a pure heart, continuously rediscovering through the Sacrament of forgiveness that purity which sin has stained, "that [our] minds be attuned to [our] voices" (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 11), according to the Council's invitation. Sin in fact, especially serious sin, impedes the action of Eucharistic grace within us. Moreover, those who cannot receive Communion because of their situation will find a saving power and effectiveness in a Communion of desire and from participation at the Eucharist.

The Eucharist has a very special place in the life of Saints. Let us thank God for the history of holiness of Quebec and of Canada, which has contributed to the missionary life of the Church. Your Country honours in particular its Canadian martyrs, John Brébeuf, Isaac Jogues and their companions who were able to give their lives for Christ, thereby associating themselves with his sacrifice on the Cross. They belong to the generation of men and women who founded and developed the Church in Canada, with Marguerite Bourgeoys, Marguerite of Youville, Marie of the Incarnation, Marie Catherine of St Augustine, Bishop François de Laval, founder of the first diocese in North America, Dina Bélanger and Kateri Tekakwitha. Learn from them and, like them, be fearless; God accompanies and protects you; every day make an offering for the glory of God the Father and play your part in the construction of the world, proudly remembering your religious heritage and its social and cultural outreach, and taking care to spread around you the moral and spiritual values that come to us from the Lord.

The Eucharist is not a meal with friends. It is the mystery of a covenant. "The prayers and rites of the Eucharistic sacrifice revive the whole history of salvation continuously before the eyes of our soul, in the course of the liturgical cycle and make us enter its significance ever more deeply" (St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross [Edith Stein], *Wege zu inneren Stille*, Aschaffenburg, 1987, p. 67). We are called to enter into this mystery of a covenant by conforming our lives ever more closely each day to the gift received in the Eucharist. It has a sacred character, as the Second Vatican Council recalls: "every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the Priest and of his Body, which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others. No other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 7). In a certain way, it is a "heavenly liturgy", an anticipation of the banquet in the eternal Kingdom, announcing the death and Resurrection of Christ "until he comes" (1 Cor 11: 26).

In order that the People of God may never lack ministers to give them the Body of Christ, we must ask the Lord to make the gift of new priests to his Church. I also ask you to pass on the call to the priesthood to young men, so that they will joyfully and fearlessly respond to the Lord. They will not be disappointed. May the family be the origin and cradle of vocations. Before I conclude, I joyfully announce to you the venue of the next International Eucharistic Congress. It will be held in Dublin,

Ireland, in 2012. I ask the Lord to enable each one of you to discover the depth and grandeur of the mystery of faith. May Christ, present in the Eucharist, and the Holy Spirit invoked upon the bread and the wine, accompany you on your daily journey and in your mission. May you be ready for God to work within you, after the example of the Virgin Mary. As I entrust you to the intercession of Our Lady, of St Anne, Patronness of Quebec, and of all your Country's Saints, I impart an affectionate Apostolic Blessing to you all, as well as to all those present who have come from the different countries of the world.

Dear friends, as this significant event in the life of the Church draws to a conclusion I invite you all to join me in praying for the success of the next International Eucharistic Congress, which will take place in 2012 in the city of Dublin! I take this opportunity to greet warmly the people of Ireland, as they prepare to host this ecclesial gathering. I am confident that they, together with all the participants at the next Congress, will find it a source of lasting spiritual renewal.

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