



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP
AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS**

Consistory Hall

Friday, 13 March 2009

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers,

I receive you with great joy and heartfelt gratitude on the occasion of the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. On this important occasion I am pleased in the first place to offer my cordial greeting to Cardinal Antonio Cañizares Llovera, Prefect, whom I thank for the words with which he has described the work you have done in these days and expressed the sentiments of all those present here today. I extend my affectionate greeting and cordial gratitude to all the Members and Officials of the Dicastery, starting with Archbishop Malcolm Ranjith, Secretary, with the Undersecretary, and to all the others who in their various offices carry out their service for the "regulation and promotion of the sacred liturgy" (*Pastor Bonus*, n. 62) with competence and dedication. At the Plenary Meeting you have reflected on the Eucharistic Mystery and more specifically, on the theme of Eucharistic adoration. I well know that after the publication of the Instruction *Eucharisticum Mysterium* on 25 May 1967 and the promulgation on 21 June 1973 of the Document "*De sacra communione et cultu mysterii eucharistici extra Missam*", insistence on the theme of the Eucharist as an inexhaustible source of holiness was one of the Dicastery's priority concerns.

I therefore willingly accepted the proposal that the Plenary Assembly should address the theme of Eucharistic adoration, trusting that a renewed collegial reflection on this process might help to make clear, within the limits of the Dicastery's competence, the liturgical and pastoral means with which the Church of our time can promote faith in the Real Presence of the Lord in the Holy

Eucharist and guarantee the celebration of Holy Mass the full dimension of adoration. I stressed this aspect in my Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, in which I gathered the fruits of the Eleventh Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod celebrated in October 2005. In it, highlighting the importance of the intrinsic relationship between the celebration of the Eucharist and adoration (cf. n. 66), I cited St Augustine's teaching: "*Nemo autem illam carnem manducat, nisi prius adoraverit; peccemus non adorando*" (*Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 98, 9: CCL 39, 1385). The Synod Fathers did not omit to express concern at a certain confusion which arose after the Second Vatican Council about the relationship between Mass and the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament (cf. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, n. 66). This Apostolic Exhortation echoes what my Predecessor, Pope John Paul II said concerning the deviance that has sometimes contaminated post-conciliar liturgical renewal, demonstrating "an extremely reductive understanding of the Eucharistic mystery" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 10).

The Second Vatican Council shed light on the unique role that the Eucharistic mystery plays in the life of the faithful (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, nn. 48-54, 56). As Pope Paul VI said on various occasions: "the Eucharist is a very great mystery, in fact, properly speaking and in the words of the Sacred Liturgy, the *mystery of faith*" (*Mysterium Fidei*, n. 15). In fact, the Eucharist is present at the Church's very origins (cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 21) and is the source of grace that constitutes an incomparable opportunity both for the sanctification of humanity in Christ and for the glorification of God. In this sense, on the one hand all the Church's activities are ordained to the mystery of the Eucharist (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 10: *Lumen Gentium*, n. 11; *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 5; *Sacramentum Caritatis*, n. 17) and, moreover, it is by virtue of the Eucharist that "the Church ever derives her life and on which she thrives" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 26), today too. Our task is to perceive the most precious treasure of this ineffable mystery of faith "not only in the celebration of Mass but also in devotion to the sacred species which remain after Mass and are reserved to extend the grace of the sacrifice" (Instruction *Eucharisticum mysterium*, n. 3, g). The doctrine of the transubstantiation of the bread and the wine and of the Real Presence are truths of faith that are also visible in Sacred Scripture itself and were subsequently confirmed by the Fathers of the Church. In this regard, Pope Paul VI recalled that "the Catholic Church has held firm to this belief in the presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the Eucharist not only in her teaching but in her life as well, since she has at all times paid this great Sacrament the worship known as 'latria' which may be given to God alone" (*Mysterium Fidei*, n. 55; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1378).

It is appropriate to remember in this regard the different meanings of the word "adoration" in the Greek and Latin languages. The Greek word *proskýnesis* means the act of submission, the recognition of God as our true measure and by whose law we agree to abide. The Latin word *adoratio*, on the other hand, denotes the physical contact the kiss, the embrace which is implicit in the idea of love. The aspect of submission foresees a relationship of union because the one to whom we submit is Love. Indeed, in the Eucharist, worship must become union: union with the living Lord and then with his Mystical Body. As I said to the young people on the Marienfeld

Esplanade during the 20th World Youth Day in Cologne on 21 August 2005, "God no longer simply stands before us as the One who is totally Other. He is within us, and we are in him. His dynamic enters into us and then seeks to spread outwards to others until it fills the world, so that his love can truly become the dominant measure of the world" (Mass for the conclusion of the World Youth Day, Cologne). In this perspective I reminded the young people that in the Eucharist one lives the "fundamental transformation of violence into love, of death into life, [which] brings other changes in its wake. Bread and wine become his Body and Blood. But it must not stop there; on the contrary, the process of transformation must now gather momentum. The Body and Blood of Christ are given to us so that we ourselves will be transformed in our turn" (*ibid.*).

In his Apostolic Letter *Spiritus et Sponsa* on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* on the Sacred Liturgy, my Predecessor Pope John Paul II urged the faithful to take the necessary steps to deepen their experience of renewal. This is also important concerning the topic of Eucharistic adoration. This deepening will only be possible through greater knowledge of the mystery in total fidelity to sacred Tradition and increasing liturgical life within our communities (cf. *Spiritus et Sponsa*, 4 December 2003, nn. 6-7). In this regard I particularly appreciate the fact that the Plenary Assembly also reflected on the subject of the formation in the faith of the whole People of God with special attention to seminarians, in order to increase growth in a spirit of authentic Eucharistic adoration. In fact, St Thomas explains "that in this sacrament are the true Body of Christ and his true Blood is something that "cannot be apprehended by the senses' but only by faith, which relies on divine authority" (*Summa Theologiae*, III, 75, 1; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1381).

We are living the days of holy Lent which not only constitute a journey of a more intense spiritual apprenticeship but are also an effective preparation to celebrate Holy Easter better. Recalling three penitential practices very dear to biblical and Christian tradition prayer, alms-giving and fasting let us encourage one another to rediscover and live fasting not only as an ascetic practice but also as a preparation for the Eucharist and a spiritual weapon with which to fight any possible confused self attachment. May this intense period of liturgical life help us to distance ourselves from all that distracts the mind and to intensify what nourishes the soul, opening it to love of God and of neighbour. With these sentiments, from this moment I express my good wishes to all of you for the upcoming Easter festivities and, as I thank you for the work you have done at this Plenary Session and for all the work of the Congregation, I impart my Blessing to each one of you with affection.

