

# G R I S T

Diocese of New Ulm

Social Concerns Office

May, 2007

from } **Pope Benedict XVI's  
Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist  
The Sacrament of Charity**

[www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/apost\\_exhortations/index\\_en.htm](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_exhortations/index_en.htm)

*The Holy Father's extensive meditation on the Eucharist, issued 2/22/07, deserves the attention of Catholics everywhere. Here are excerpts (emphasis added) indicating that a Eucharistic spirituality summons us to works of charity, justice, reconciliation, peace and protecting creation.*

...Each celebration of the Eucharist makes sacramentally present the gift that the crucified Lord made of his life, for us and for the whole world. **In the Eucharist Jesus also makes us witnesses of God's compassion towards all our brothers and sisters. The eucharistic mystery thus gives rise to a service of charity towards neighbor**, which "consists in the very fact that, in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know. This can only take place on the basis of an intimate encounter with God, an encounter which has become a communion of will, affecting even my feelings. Then I learn to look on this other person not simply with my eyes and my feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ." In all those I meet, I recognize brothers or sisters for whom the Lord gave his life, loving them "to the end" (*Jn 13:1*). Our communities, when they celebrate the Eucharist, must become ever more conscious that the sacrifice of Christ is for all, and that the Eucharist thus compels all who believe in him to become "bread that is broken" for others, and to work for the building of a more just and fraternal world. Keeping in mind the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, we need to realize that Christ continues today to exhort his disciples to become personally engaged: "You yourselves, give them something to eat" (*Mt 14:16*). **Each of us is truly called, together with Jesus, to be bread broken for the life of the world.** #88

... "I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become, his own." The relationship between the eucharistic mystery and social commitment must be made explicit.

**The Eucharist is the sacrament of communion between brothers and sisters who allow themselves to be reconciled in Christ**, who made of Jews and pagans one people, tearing down the wall of hostility which divided them (cf. *Eph 2:14*). Only this constant impulse towards reconciliation enables us to partake worthily of the Body and Blood of Christ (cf. *Mt 5:23-24*). In the memorial of his sacrifice, the Lord strengthens our fraternal communion and, in a particular way, urges those in conflict to hasten their reconciliation by opening themselves to dialogue and a commitment to justice. **Certainly, the restoration of justice, reconciliation and forgiveness are the conditions for building true peace. The recognition of this fact leads to a determination to transform unjust structures and to restore respect for the dignity of all men and women, created in God's image and likeness. Through the concrete fulfillment of this responsibility, the Eucharist becomes in life what it signifies in its celebration.** As I have had occasion to say, it is not the proper task of the Church to engage in the political work of bringing about the most just society possible; nonetheless she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the struggle for justice. The Church "has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper."

...The sacrifice of Christ is a mystery of liberation that constantly and insistently challenges us. I therefore urge all the faithful to be true promoters of peace and justice: **"All who partake of the Eucharist must commit themselves to peace-making in our world** scarred by violence and war, and today in particular, by terrorism, economic corruption and sexual exploitation." All these problems give rise in turn to others no less troubling and disheartening. We know that there can be no superficial solutions to these issues. Precisely because of the mystery we celebrate, we must denounce situations contrary to human dignity, since Christ shed his blood for all, and at the same time affirm the inestimable value of each individual person. #89

**We cannot remain passive before certain processes of globalization which not infrequently increase the gap between the rich and the poor worldwide.** We must denounce those who squander the earth's riches, provoking inequalities that cry out to heaven (cf. *Jas* 5:4). For example, it is impossible to remain silent before the "distressing images of huge camps throughout the world of displaced persons and refugees, who are living in makeshift conditions in order to escape a worse fate, yet are still in dire need. Are these human beings not our brothers and sisters? Do their children not come into the world with the same legitimate expectations of happiness as other children?" **The Lord Jesus, the bread of eternal life, spurs us to be mindful of the situations of extreme poverty in which a great part of humanity still lives: these are situations for which human beings bear a clear and disquieting responsibility.** Indeed, "on the basis of available statistical data, it can be said that less than half of the huge sums spent worldwide on armaments would be more than sufficient to liberate the immense masses of the poor from destitution. This challenges humanity's conscience. To peoples living below the poverty line, more as a result of situations to do with international political, commercial and cultural relations than as a result of circumstances beyond anyone's control, our common commitment to truth can and must give new hope."

The food of truth demands that we denounce inhumane situations in which people starve to death because of injustice and exploitation, and it gives us renewed strength and courage to work tirelessly in the service of the civilization of love. From the beginning, Christians were concerned to share their goods (cf. *Acts* 4:32) and to help the poor (cf. *Rom* 15:26). The alms collected in our liturgical assemblies are an eloquent reminder of this, and they are also necessary for meeting today's needs. The Church's charitable institutions, especially *Caritas*, carry out at various levels the important work of assisting the needy, especially the poorest. Inspired by the Eucharist, the sacrament of charity, they become a concrete expression of that charity; they are to be praised and encouraged for their commitment to solidarity in our world. #90

The mystery of the Eucharist inspires and impels us to work courageously within our world to bring about that renewal of relationships which has its inexhaustible source in God's gift. **The prayer which we repeat at every Mass: "Give us this day our daily bread," obliges us to do everything**

**possible, in cooperation with international, state and private institutions, to end or at least reduce the scandal of hunger and malnutrition afflicting so many millions of people in our world, especially in developing countries.** In a particular way, the Christian laity, formed at the school of the Eucharist, are called to assume their specific political and social responsibilities. To do so, they need to be adequately prepared through practical education in charity and justice. To this end...it [is] necessary for dioceses and Christian communities to teach and promote the Church's social doctrine. In this precious legacy handed down from the earliest ecclesial tradition, we find elements of great wisdom that guide Christians in their involvement in today's burning social issues. This teaching, the fruit of the Church's whole history, is distinguished by realism and moderation; it can help to avoid misguided compromises or false utopias. #91

**Finally, to develop a profound eucharistic spirituality that is also capable of significantly affecting the fabric of society, the Christian people, in giving thanks to God through the Eucharist, should be conscious that they do so in the name of all creation, aspiring to the sanctification of the world and working intensely to that end.** The Eucharist itself powerfully illuminates human history and the whole cosmos. In this sacramental perspective we learn, day by day, that every ecclesial event is a kind of sign by which God makes himself known and challenges us. The eucharistic form of life can thus help foster a real change in the way we approach history and the world. The liturgy itself teaches us this, when, during the presentation of the gifts, the priest raises to God a prayer of blessing and petition over the bread and wine, "fruit of the earth," "fruit of the vine" and "work of human hands." With these words, the rite not only includes in our offering to God all human efforts and activity, but also leads us to see the world as God's creation, which brings forth everything we need for our sustenance. **The world is not something indifferent, raw material to be utilized simply as we see fit. Rather, it is part of God's good plan, in which all of us are called to be sons and daughters in the one Son of God, Jesus Christ** (cf. *Eph* 1:4-12). **The justified concern about threats to the environment present in so many parts of the world is reinforced by Christian hope, which commits us to working responsibly for the protection of creation...** #92