

## **Eucharist and Ecology – Manila, 2016**

*Your Eminences, My Lord Archbishops and Bishops, Rev. Fathers and Brothers and sisters in the Consecrated Religious Lives, Dear Pilgrims, My Brothers and Sisters:* I bring you all warm greetings from the Eucharistic heart of Jesus, and wish you all a blessed pilgrimage and a refreshing and restoring encounter with Jesus in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

### ***Introduction***

I have been assigned a topic that invites us to delve into the depths of what it means to be truly Catholic. I say this because, as you well know, in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church the fathers at the Second Vatican Council called the Eucharist the “summit and source” of the Christian life.<sup>1</sup> The Eucharist is a multifaceted jewel set in the very crown of Catholicism. Like any jewel it can be viewed from many angles, seen with the aid of light shining on it from various directions and therefore can be appreciated in any number of ways. But as the “summit and source” of the Christian life specifically, the Eucharist is both the center and pulsating heart of all of our worship and prayer, and the sacred action that derives from and returns us to daily life through, with and in the eucharistic Christ. The Eucharist is integral to the very essence of Catholicism. It is the sacrament that also integrates all the facets of our life of faith. The Eucharist is heaven on earth and invites us to share even now in the fulness of God’s glory in heaven forever. In the meantime we are fed on the bread of heaven and the chalice of eternal salvation.

I say all of this especially in light of our Holy Father’s encyclical *Laudato si’, On Care for Our Common Home*.<sup>2</sup> This document is among the most comprehensive of any papal encyclicals because in it the pope integrates a number of issues, ideas and ideals:

- from environment to immigration, from the dangers of climate change to the urgency of food distribution,
- from political action on behalf of our common home to prayer and spirituality steeped in an awareness of creation,
- from actions to stop pollution and deforestation to contemplation of the goodness of and praise for the God of all creatures great and small,
- from placing the poor at the center of our lives – not the periphery – to our concern for the cosmos in which we live.

Allow me to try to sketch the dynamic of how the celebration of the Eucharist derives from human life and returns us to life lived more fully in God in what follows. As a way of focusing my remarks I will use some of the texts of the prayers and the rites the priest prays and performs at Mass because, in our Catholic faith, “what we pray in the liturgy is what we believe.”<sup>3</sup>

### ***Names for and about God.***

The God we believe in is a God who acts. We believe in the biblical God of the covenant, the God of creation and the God of redemption. Ever since God invited Abraham and Sarah into a

covenant relationship all of us in the Judaeo-Christian tradition are related to God in and through that relationship and are related to one another and every living creature as sharers in the covenant. The biblical phrase “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob” is really a short hand way of saying that God is a relational God and that we are related to each other and to all creatures on this good earth, as Pope Francis reminds us again and again in *Laudato si*.<sup>4</sup>

When the priest takes the bread and wine and places it on the altar at Mass he says:

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation,  
for through your goodness we have received  
the bread we offer you:  
fruit of the earth and work of human hands  
it will become for us the bread of life...

fruit of the vine and work of human hands  
it will become our spiritual drink.

Blessed be God forever.

During the earthly ministry of Jesus, sharing meals at table were moments of important divine self-disclosure and revelation. For example, in the gospel of St. Luke many of the most poignant moments of Jesus’ self revelation occurred in the context of feeding and being at table: from the manger as a place where animals are fed (Lk. 2:7,12), to the story of Mary and Martha (Lk. 10:38-42), to the parable of the lost coin, the lost sheep and the prodigal son (Lk. 15:1-32), to the disciples recognizing the risen Christ at table in the breaking of the bread (Lk. 24:13-35). The early Christians adopted and adapted Jewish ritual practices as their own and used some of the very same Jewish liturgical phrases in Christian liturgy. Among them is the acclamation “Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation.” As we prepare the bread and wine at the altar, we recall Abraham, who shared his food with three mysterious visitors (Gen. 18:8), Moses, who ate and drank with God on Sinai and did not die (Ex. 24:11), and Jesus, who when breaking bread on Sunday evening, showed forth his wounds (Lk. 24:31).

“Blessed are you...” is linked to the words we use to address God at the beginning of every Eucharistic prayer: “Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God.” When we use this phrase we pray along with Abraham, who obeyed God’s covenant call (Gen. 12:4), with Moses, who received the Torah (Ex. 19:20), and with Jesus, who was the Word made flesh (John 1:1). Among the eucharistic prayers that express explicit praise for creation is the fourth, in which we acclaim:

The one God living and true,  
existing before all ages and abiding for all eternity,  
dwelling in unapproachable light;  
...who alone are good, the course of life,  
[who] have made all that is  
so that you might fill your creatures with blessings

and bring joy to many of them by the glory of your light.

Very fittingly the prefaces of all the eucharistic prayers prayed at Mass end by referring to how the glory of God is reflected in “heaven and earth,” an earth made and declared “good” by God in the book of Genesis (1:31). We join the prophet Isaiah and give voice to his words as we acclaim:

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts.  
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest. (Is. 6:3)

Alongside the familiar assertions about the God who saves and redeems are the biblically based titles about the God of the covenant and the “Lord God of all creation.”

### *Paschal Offerings.*

All liturgy is paschal. This is to say that liturgy is always about the dying and rising of Christ and our incorporation into and continued participation in Christ’s paschal dying and rising. This is begun in baptism and deepened whenever we celebrate the sacraments and all acts of liturgy. This incorporation and appropriation is summarized in the phrase “paschal mystery,” where “mystery” does not mean a problem to be solved, but a confounding reality that is overwhelmingly mystery-filled as a gift from God that we are to immerse ourselves in again and again. As we pray in the preface on Easter:

For he is the true Lamb  
who has taken away the sins of the world;  
by dying he destroyed our death,  
and by rising, restored our life. (Easter Preface I)

At the risk of sounding like an English teacher may I ask you to note two things about this phrase? The first is the pronouns. In faith we can acclaim that by dying and rising Christ destroyed our death and restored our life. Liturgy is always plural, always about “we,” “us” and “our” taking part in the redemptive events of Christ for us and for our salvation (as we pray in the Creed Sunday after Sunday). The second thing to notice about the rhetoric of this phrase is that the death and resurrection of Christ are cited to be active events that we experience here and now – dying and rising. It is in the Eucharist most especially that we experience Christ’s paschal mystery as an ongoing, not an “over and done with,” event. This paschal mystery combines the past – when it occurred in human history – with the present – when we experience it here and now, and the future – when Christ will come again at the end of time to bring time to an end.

One of the central dynamics at work in the Eucharist is summarized in the word offering – what God has offered and offers to us and what we offer back to God. In effect this is His own Son’s death and resurrection. As our holy father reminds us in his letter announcing the “Year for Mercy,” God always intended to save us and redeem us. We use these two terms again and again in the liturgy. This is because “salvation” is a healing metaphor, and “redemption” is an economic metaphor to describe the face and action of God toward us. While we experience

salvation and redemption in a number of ways we do so especially in the Eucharist, which has often been called “the sacrament of the sacraments” – in effect the premier sacrament. In the mystery-filled dynamic that is the Eucharist we humans offer back to God what God has freely offered to us – His own Son’s death and resurrection. As the holy father reminds us Christ’s saving death and resurrection has overcome the sin and death we humans have inherited from Adam and Eve. To accomplish this God the Father sent us his Son, like us in all things but sin. The pope reminds us that “Jesus is the face of the Father’s mercy.” Jesus accomplished our redemption (being “bought back” from a state sin) and reconciliation (being made one with God, each other, and all creation). Jesus accomplished all of this in obedience to his Father’s will and in doing so overcame the disobedience of Adam. Where sin abounded after the sin of Adam, now mercy abounds the more through the sacrifice of God’s very own Son, the second Adam (Rom. 5:20 and 1 Cor. 15:45). As we acclaim in the Easter proclamation each year at the Easter Vigil (the *Exsultet*):

... Jesus Christ, our Lord, his Son, his Only Begotten  
who for our sake paid Adam’s debt to the eternal Father,  
and, pouring out his own dear Blood,  
wiped clean the record of our ancient sinfulness.

Christ’s act of obedience as the new Adam led to his death and resurrection. By redeeming us with his own blood, in effect, Christ took the fear and pain out of suffering and death and by accepting suffering and death led us to a new kind of life in and through the resurrection. God the Father established that the death and resurrection of His Son would be the way we would be saved. We share in Christ’s death and resurrection in and through the act of the Eucharist. Through the Eucharist we offer back this saving sacrifice to the Father. This is summarized in text of the revered Roman Canon we hear at Mass:

...as we celebrate the memorial of the blessed Passion,  
the Resurrection from the dead,  
and the glorious Ascension into heaven  
of Christ, your Son, our Lord,  
we, your servants and your holy people,  
offer to your glorious majesty  
from the gifts you have given us,  
this pure victim,  
this spotless victim,  
this holy Bread of eternal life  
and the Chalice of everlasting salvation.

In the Eucharist the particular way we participate in the paschal mystery and the saving sacrifice of Christ is by dining on the Eucharistic bread and cup. This means that another dynamic at work in the Eucharist about offering concerns the bread and wine used in this sacrament. This returns us to the prayers used at the presentation of the gifts of bread and wine at the altar in the Eucharist. Again they are:

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation,

for through your goodness we have received  
the bread we offer you:  
fruit of the earth and work of human hands...  
fruit of the vine and work of human hands...

These prayers remind us that all that another aspect of sacramentality that grounds the Eucharist is not only the act of dining, but the use of the goods of this earth that at Mass become the food of everlasting life. A premise of the celebration of sacramental liturgy is that we use the good things from this earth to worship God. We have been given to us by God, especially as noted here, by the “God of all creation” and the “fruit of the earth.” Almost all the liturgies we celebrate involve the earth and our companions on the earth. For example, the welcoming of the light of day and acknowledging the shadows of evening shape Morning and Evening Prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours. We use water in baptism. Why? Because it is the only primal element in the universe (except air) without which we cannot live. (Hence the important debates about hydration and nutrition for those who are elderly or ill.) Is it any wonder that it is used for sacramental initiation? The element – water – that sustains human life is the element we use to initiate us into the very life of God, our entrance to eternal life.

But there is another level of meaning behind the use of bread and wine at the Eucharist. These gifts are from the earth, but are also the result of human “work.” “Work” here means human ingenuity, productivity, and “manufacture” – which literally means something “made by hand.” That some central elements used in the liturgy are the “work of human hands” like oil, as well as bread and wine, respects humans’ ingenuity to produce things that literally reproduce in themselves the paschal process of dying and rising. As Pope Francis reminds us in *Laudato si’* humans are to “have dominion” over the earth (cf. Gen 1:28), to “till it and keep it” (Gen 2:15). He deepens these assertions by saying: “We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us. This allows us to respond to the charge that Judaeo-Christian thinking, on the basis of the Genesis account which grants man ‘dominion’ over the earth (cf. Gen 1:28), has encouraged the unbridled exploitation of nature by painting him as domineering and destructive by nature. This is not a correct interpretation of the Bible as understood by the Church” (n. 67).

He then asserts that (Gen. 2:5) “tilling” refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while “keeping” means caring, protecting, overseeing, and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations. This is part of the theology that underlies our working with fellow creatures to manufacture bread and wine for the Eucharist.

There is a rich theology of creation in reflecting on the “bread-ness” of the bread and the “wine-ness” of the wine we consume in the Eucharist.

Among the things we offer in the Eucharist as the work of human hands is the sweat of the human brow. Cardinal Basil Hume (former archbishop of Westminster, London, England) once remarked, “no work, no Mass.” This phrase summarizes part of the premise of the sacramentality of the sacrament of the Eucharist, namely, that human work goes into making and manufacturing all the things we will use for the Eucharist, especially bread and wine. This is to say that the

worship and honor we *offer* to God in the Eucharist begins long before the liturgy in church begins. It begins in the liturgy of human life as blessed by God when humans work to produce the bread and wine for the Eucharist – from planting to harvesting to baking and delivering these gifts to the church for the Eucharist. The talents we humans have for thought and work are brought to bear on the manufacturing of what we need to celebrate the Eucharist. What we are and use outside of the liturgy is brought into the act of liturgy to be transformed.

Simply put, what lies behind the manufacture of the bread and wine for the Eucharist is that they are *paschal processes*. There is a dying and rising in planting, harvesting, baking or fermenting – all of which comprise the foundation for the celebration of the Paschal mystery in the Eucharist and for our participation in the dying and rising of Christ in and through the Eucharist.

In effect there is an important (often missed) parallel between the paschal process involved in manufacturing bread and wine and the fact that through dining on consecrated bread and wine is the uniquely Eucharistic means we have to participate in Christ's paschal dying and rising, acclaimed in the Roman Canon as:

the holy Bread of eternal life  
and the Chalice of everlasting salvation.

In a parallel way we can say that there is a spirituality derived from every act of the Eucharist in that what we do at Mass shapes how we live our lives. But lest this seem too energetic – not to say Pelagian – I would argue that a chief aspect of all eucharistic participation is to allow the paschal dying and rising enacted through what occurs at the altar table to be the real measure of anything that is of real value in life. The challenge is twofold. First, it is to allow what we enact in the Eucharist to be the measure of our lives. In effect, we are to view life through the lens of the paschal mystery, which mystery helps us evaluate what is really important in life. It is this lens that allows us to look at apparent defeats – sickness, suffering and setbacks in life, even death itself – and to evaluate them against the paschal mystery. Secondly a requisite consequence of eucharistic enactment is to share the goods of this earth with the poor and the needy. This evidences one of the important life dimensions of the Eucharist. It is a key building block in developing a spirituality of the Eucharist derived from the liturgy.

### ***Food Distribution and Just Working Conditions.***

#### **Food Distribution.**

In *Laudato si'* the holy father links a theology of ecology with food distribution, especially for the poor. In a very poignant section of the encyclical the pope offers us a piercing challenge, not to say condemnation, by asserting that “we know that approximately a third of all food produced is discarded, and ‘whenever food is thrown out it is as if it were stolen from the table of the poor’.”<sup>5</sup> This phrase is reminiscent of the challenge offered by some Latin American theologians when they state that you cannot celebrate the Eucharist with stolen bread. This reference to food brings us back to the celebration of the Eucharist where the presentation of gifts of bread and wine on the altar represent the collecting (and distribution) of gifts for the poor. The first

summary description of the way the early Christians celebrated the Eucharist comes to us from St. Justin the Martyr in the middle of the second century. He notes that the wealthy offer gifts for the poor at the time of the presentation of the eucharistic gifts. The custom of having deacons collect and distribute these gifts is attested in liturgical literature through the time when the (permanent) diaconate faded from the practice of the Roman Church.

### Diakonia in the Eucharistic and the Ministry of Diaconate:

One of the contributions of the restore (permanent) diaconate is evident in the relationship of the deacon's service at the altar and in a life of service outside of Mass especially to the poor, the marginalized, the imprisoned, the disenfranchised. What the deacon does in the liturgy is derived from and leads to what he does outside the liturgy. This very ministry images for us the kind of ministerial life which eucharistic participation presumes. The Eucharist as the body of Christ for the unity of the church should challenge us to overturning some of the selfishness in life to self-giving and surrender of the self so that others may eat and be cared for by the (same) Lord. Christ's paschal victory began with his humble acceptance of suffering and death. The deacon's ministry reflects the Lord when it is humble service at the altar and in all of life as a consequence of what occurs at the altar table. Like all good church ministry the deacon's ministry is meant to be a mirror for all of us of the ways we should live our lives in service both in the liturgy celebrated in church and in the living out of that liturgy in the liturgy of life. In effect, this is to say that the deacons are the permanent personification of the intrinsic relationship of liturgy and life, and the Eucharist specifically as the "summit and source" of the Christian life.

The diaconate is not the only important restoration. The presentation of gifts for the poor has been restored as an important part of the celebration of the Eucharist at the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, and it is both a traditional practice and a reminder of how the celebration of the Eucharist links sanctuary and marketplace, altar and dining at home, consecration of bread and wine and feeding the poor, sheltering the homeless and giving refuge to the homeless. The directions for that Mass in the Missal state:

At the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, there may be a procession of the faithful in which gifts for the poor may be presents with the bread and wine. (*Roman Missal*, Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, n. 14).

At the very end of the Roman Canon the priest names a number of saints, acclaims "Christ our Lord" and then says:

Through whom  
You continue to make all these good things, O Lord,  
You sanctify them, fill them with life,  
Bless them and bestow them on us.

This part of the prayer is from a much longer part of the end of the Canon when the priest blessed a number of the foodstuffs collected during the Mass such as cheese, oil, fruit, etc.<sup>6</sup> The deacons were then responsible to distribute the food to the poor, the very same deacons who were also sent forth to bring communion to the home bound.<sup>7</sup> Once again we have the

coincidence of service derived from the celebration of the sacrament, and of sharing the Eucharistic food which is first bread and wine, “fruit of the earth” and “fruit of the vine.”

This is to say, the taking and collecting of gifts for the Eucharist always implies the sharing of some of those gifts with the poor and needy. The symbolism of the deacon as one who ministers both at the altar and to the poor outside the liturgy personifies and exemplifies this ritual. To share one’s talents and offerings at the Eucharist reflects one’s talents and generosity to others outside the celebration of the Eucharist. From the perspective of “sacramentality” as articulated here we can say that there is a keen interrelationship between preparing and sharing food at the Eucharist with sharing food in everyday life – especially at the daily and domestic “ritual” of taking meals together.

### **An African Parenthesis: *the offertory processions in dance***

You may have heard of or experienced the very elaborate offertory processions with dancing at African Eucharistic celebrations. They recall the joyful celebration of gratitude to God for the fruit of human labour, as in the Old Testament (Ps.126). But bringing the fruits of their harvest in gladness and joy also refers also recalls the Eucharistic gesture of offering once life and all that sustains earthly life to God in exchange for what sustains life eternally. The joyful offertory procession, therefore, also celebrates faith and trust in God who bestows life and nourishes it.

### Just Working Conditions.

The articulation of the phrase “work of human hands” is a constant reminder that the Eucharistic liturgy derives from creatures on the earth and that human work is noble and part of humans’ self expression. At the same time it can also be an important reminder that all humans share in the dignity of being daughters and sons of God and deserve both humane working conditions and a living wage for their work. As early as Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) the official magisterium of the Catholic church has insisted on a just wage for a just day’s work and for just working conditions. That these teachings have never been fully implemented (to our mutual shame) has required that more recent papal teachings reiterate and deepen what Pope Leo taught. These include Pope Paul VI in 1972 (*Octogesima Adveniens*), Pope John Paul II in 1991 (*Centesimus Annus*), and Benedict XVI in 2009 (*Caritas in Veritate*). This relationship is at the heart of Pope John Paul II encyclical in 1981 on human work (*Laborem Exercens*).

In addition to the suffering humans still experience in doing what humans do is the impoverishment that the earth itself can experience because of unfair work practices. Again our holy father cites pollution, deforestation and ecological imbalances that result from unjust practices. For example, the holy father speaks this way about pollution in *Laudato si’* (n. 20):

Some forms of pollution are part of people’s daily experience. Exposure to atmospheric pollutants produces a broad spectrum of health hazards, especially for the poor, and causes millions of premature deaths. People take sick, for example, from breathing high levels of smoke from fuels used in cooking or heating. There is also pollution that affects everyone, caused by transport, industrial fumes, substances which contribute to the acidification of soil and water, fertilizers, insecticides, fungicides, herbicides and



agrottoxins in general. Technology, which, linked to business interests, is presented as the only way of solving these problems, in fact proves incapable of seeing the mysterious network of relations between things and so sometimes solves one problem only to create others.<sup>8</sup>

This leads to his now often used phrase “the throwaway culture.” Here the pope combines a critique of unchecked free market approaches to the economy that destroy this good earth with a challenge to us all personally about the ways we “use and abuse” fellow companions on the earth – plants, animals, the earth itself.

Another aspect of the holy father’s concern for humanity regards leisure in general, and the Sabbath in particular.<sup>9</sup> In fact this concern reaches as far back as when he was archbishop in Buenos Aires as reflected in the Latin American Bishops’ Conference document on evangelization in 2007.<sup>10</sup>

The requirement of the Sabbath observance derives from the Old Testament and is a hallmark of Jewish observance to this day. That it begins at table in the evening by invoking “Lord, God of all creation” is, again, poignant and rich for us Jews and Christians theologically.

There is a fairly new shopping center just outside of the New Gate in the city of Jerusalem. It is filled with numerous stores, and is a remarkable architectural achievement. What is very poignant, especially for a western Christian, is to see the neon sign that says “24/6!” That is the Sabbath in present day “up in lights.” But as we all know, the Sabbath rest is not that simple, especially in a “24/7” *internet culture*. I often wonder whether the sweatshops where mass produced goods result in a de-humanization of too many of our brothers and sisters are replaced in other cultures with the “electronic sweatshops” of our Internet machines that lead to an equally de-humanized society. Joseph Pieper wrote the book *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*. I truly wonder what is the basis of our culture without the presumption of leisure, which leisure led to personal integration and societal cohesion. Prophetically and poignantly Pope Francis takes this to another level when he speaks of the *internet* in *Laudato si’* and the quality of human relationships (“*When media and the digital world become omnipotent, their influence can stop people from learning how to live wisely, to think deeply and to love generously. .... they also shield us from direct contact with the pain, the fears and joys of others and the complexity of their personal experiences. ..We should be concerned that alongside the exciting possibilities offered by these media, a deep and melancholic dissatisfaction with interpersonal relations, or a harmful sense of isolation, can also arise*”. n. 47).

The Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is meant to be framed by leisure, the kind of sacred leisure that the Sabbath prescriptions insured. To celebrate the Eucharist with and for each other is part and parcel of the kind of “human” ecology which popes have called for since Pope John Paul II and the integral ecology so forcefully argued by Pope Francis in *Laudato si’*:<sup>11</sup> See, how Pope Francis treats this:

236. It is in the Eucharist that all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation. Grace, which tends to manifest itself tangibly, found unsurpassable expression when God

himself became man and gave himself as food for his creatures. The Lord, in the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation, chose to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter. He comes not from above, but from within, he comes that we might find him in this world of ours. In the Eucharist, fullness is already achieved; it is the living centre of the universe, the overflowing core of love and of inexhaustible life. Joined to the incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God. Indeed the Eucharist is itself an act of cosmic love: “Yes, cosmic! Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world”. The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation. The world which came forth from God’s hands returns to him in blessed and undivided adoration: in the bread of the Eucharist, “creation is projected towards divinization, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator himself”. Thus, the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation.

237. On Sunday, our participation in the Eucharist has special importance. Sunday, like the Jewish Sabbath, is meant to be a day which heals our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with the world. Sunday is the day of the Resurrection, the “first day” of the new creation, whose first fruits are the Lord’s risen humanity, the pledge of the final transfiguration of all created reality. It also proclaims “man’s eternal rest in God”. In this way, Christian spirituality incorporates the value of relaxation and festivity. We tend to demean contemplative rest as something unproductive and unnecessary, but this is to do away with the very thing which is most important about work: its meaning. We are called to include in our work a dimension of receptivity and gratuity, which is quite different from mere inactivity. Rather, it is another way of working, which forms part of our very essence. Serving God and working are all expressed by same verb in OT Israel (*'bodah*). It protects human action from becoming empty activism; it also prevents that unfettered greed and sense of isolation which make us seek personal gain to the detriment of all else. The law of weekly rest forbade work on the seventh day, “so that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your maidservant, and the stranger, may be refreshed” (Ex 23:12). Rest opens our eyes to the larger picture and gives us renewed sensitivity to the rights of others. And so the day of rest, centered on the Eucharist, sheds it light on the whole week, and motivates us to greater concern for nature and the poor.

### ***Import of the Celebration of the Eucharist.***

That we celebrate the Eucharist by using gifts from human life and human productivity are among the theological statements always being made at the Eucharist about the sacramentality of all of life. Then, on a deeper level we can say that we need the perpetuation of Christ’s paschal victory through sacramental liturgy in order to put the world into proper perspective as both graced filled and flawed, as reflective of God’s grace but also as standing in need of complete redemption. That we do this in the celebration of the eucharistic liturgy is to suggest that regular engagement in

sacramental liturgy prevents us from becoming too optimistic about the world – a temptation not always overcome in some contemporary approaches to what we have come to call “creation theology” and “creation spirituality.” But when liturgy and sacraments are celebrated regularly and are regarded as essential to Catholic doctrine and practice, then theologies and spiritualities of creation achieve proper theological balance even as they receive proper theological emphasis in the very fact of doing the liturgy.

The celebration of sacramental liturgy does a number of things, among which are the following:

(1.) It substantiates the contemporary emphasis on the theology of creation and places it on a truly theological ground in that it always stresses that the things of this earth used in liturgy are from God’s goodness. This is to say they are both natural symbols from God’s providence (water) or the results of human manufacture from what the earth has produced (bread, wine). These are not objects, they are the means we humans need to use in order to articulate our faith in the triune God. Sacramental liturgy regularly places on our eyes a prism through which to view creation and the world, a prism that is biblical and paschal. It is biblical in the sense that it makes us “see” the world as created and sustained by the God of the covenant – God the creator and redeemer. It is paschal in the sense that we “see” all things not through rose-colored glasses, but through lenses that enable us to evaluate everything in life from the perspective of Christ’s paschal mystery. Especially in an incarnational world view, to view the world as sacramental means that even as we name its flaws we are confident in its final perfection from Christ’s paschal victory.

(2.) Sacramental liturgy prevents us from being pessimistic about the world and world events. By its very shape and structure sacramental liturgy is a ritual experience that reflects an optimistic approach to human life. In the end “all will be well.” In the meantime we need sacramental liturgy to put the world into focus and perspective. Opportunities for experiences of hope abound in the celebration of sacraments – hope in the act of liturgy and hope derived from the act of liturgy which enables us to deal with and face into human life. Among other examples in the eucharistic liturgy the singing of the “holy, holy, holy” acclamation is insightful and instructive. Every time we celebrate the Mass we acclaim “heaven and earth are full of your glory...” Even the earth is a locus where God’s glory is seen and experienced.

(3.) Sacramental liturgy articulates our belief that we worship God by using the things of this world. This means that sacramental liturgy is always both anthropological and cosmic; it articulates what we believe about the human person and the cosmos. Or better, through sacramental liturgy human persons put their lives and the world itself into proper perspective. We use “daily and domestic things” in liturgy, specifically in the Eucharist food and dining, which things are both from creation and the result of human productivity, which things reflect back on the goodness, generosity and largesse of the God we worship. We use them to put order into (what is sometimes) the chaos of human life and to set us in proper relation with the world and all who dwell in it.

To my mind, among the things which the enactment of the Eucharist accomplishes is that bread and wine, taken and shared, are the regular ritual reminders of what it means to share in God’s very life and grace in all of human life. It is the liturgical taking of food and drink, the liturgical

act of blessing food and drink, the liturgical act of sharing the Eucharist as food and drink that puts human dining into perspective and gives it its depth. This is to say that the very manufacturing of these foods, the ritual proclamation of the eucharistic prayer, and the sharing of these gifts in eucharistic communion not only articulate what the sacrament of the Eucharist means, but they also derive from the prior experience of sacramentality in human life (where sacramentality means “experiencing God in and through the world and all that dwell on it”) when we use words and actions to communicate with each other and to sustain life. In both God is at work. The sacrament of the Eucharist articulates and specifies for believers that here and now God is operative in all of their lives. Sacramental liturgy thus provides the lens we need in order to view all of reality, which reality is always integrative of the sacred and secular and of what is both fully divine and fully human.

For me, the task is to make sure we view liturgy as a deep and strong ritual expression of the fact that God lives among us prior to, in a unique way within, and following upon sacramental engagement. The function of sacramental liturgy in its uniqueness is less about bringing to the world what we have experienced in the liturgy (as important as that truly is) than it is to underscore how what we do in liturgy derives from the world and everyday life, the liturgical ritualization of which helps us order our lives and our world once more in God’s image and likeness. From the perspective of sacramentality one can say that sacraments are less doors to the sacred than they are the experience of the sacred in and through human life, which experience is shaped by the liturgical action of the Eucharist.

Every time we take bread and wine in the act of doing the Eucharist we articulate the theology of the goodness of creation and our need for food to sustain us as the “pilgrim church on earth” until we are fed at the “Supper of the Lamb.” In the meantime, the very taking, blessing and sharing of bread and wine make the central theological statement about our place in the cosmos. All sacramental liturgy makes sense in the first place because the use of goods from the earth remind us of our place in this world even as we yearn for it to pass away.

Having a wide-angle lens on as much of life as possible is true to the Catholic principle of sacramentality. Part of the challenge which celebrating sacramental liturgy can offer is to help us reflect back on the world in which we live and to ponder our care for it as well as our concern for those who dwell on it. This means taking seriously our obligation of being in communion with and caregivers for our common home. We are never to presume that we are its masters or that we are its lords. We are fellow companions, responsible to succeeding generations for our care of and for it.

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation,  
for through your goodness we have received  
the bread we offer you:  
fruit of the earth and work of human hands  
it will become for us the bread of life...

fruit of the vine and work of human hands  
it will become our spiritual drink.

Blessed be God forever.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, n. 11, quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1324.

<sup>2</sup> See, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html).

<sup>3</sup> The adage *lex orandi, lex credendi* shortens the original dictum from Prosper of Aquitaine (ca. 390-455) *legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*.

<sup>4</sup> This is a rich and recurring theme in *Laudato si'*, and one that requires that we rethink and reimage how we understand plants, animals and all other living things as companions.

<sup>5</sup> *LS*, n. 50. Here the holy father cites his own catechesis on June 5, 2013, three months into his papacy.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. the precedent of consecrating chrism at the end of the Roman Canon on Holy Thursday and of blessing milk and honey at Pentecost at this same point in the liturgy is attested to in the text of the Roman Canon in R.C.D. Jasper and G. J. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1987), 166.

<sup>7</sup> This practice is attested as early as the third century document, *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus of Rome*, n. 24.

<sup>8</sup> The holy father continues:

N. 21. Account must also be taken of the pollution produced by residue, including dangerous waste present in different areas. Each year hundreds of millions of tons of waste are generated, much of it non-biodegradable, highly toxic and radioactive, from homes and businesses, from construction and demolition sites, from clinical, electronic and industrial sources. The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth. In many parts of the planet, the elderly lament that once beautiful landscapes are now covered with rubbish. Industrial waste and chemical products utilized in cities and agricultural areas can lead to bioaccumulation in the organisms of the local population, even when levels of toxins in those places are low. Frequently no measures are taken until after people's health has been irreversibly affected.

<sup>9</sup> This was also a concern of Pope John Paul II in *Dies Domini* (1998).

<sup>10</sup> See, <http://www.celam.org/aparecida/Ingles.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Clearly a major contribution of *Laudato si'* is chapter four on human ecology.”