





Beloved faithful,

May the peace, joy and blessings of the Advent and Christmas season be with you and your loved ones!

As we are in the midst of the liturgical season during which we contemplate the great mystery of Christ drawing Himself so intimately to us via the Incarnation, I wanted to invite you to join me in reflecting upon how Jesus continues to make Himself present to us ever anew through the great mystery of the Eucharist.

May our encounter with the Lord in the Eucharist inspire us to seek to encounter Him in all those whom we serve - our brothers and sisters in Christ - who bear the image and likeness of God. Toward these ends, I wished to share with you an address that I delivered earlier this year at the 2015 Eucharistic Congress of the Archdiocese of Atlanta.

I pray that this holiday season and these reflections might serve to reassure us of Jesus' presence among us and remind us of our Christian mandate to recognize Him in others.

Blessed Advent and Merry Christmas!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Lynch', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Most Reverend Robert N. Lynch  
Bishop of St. Petersburg

Archdiocese of Atlanta  
2015 Eucharistic Congress  
**Always Be He Whom You Receive**

The theme for this year's Congress--**I Will Be With You Always**--gives voice to Jesus' commission to the disciples:

***Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of time*** (Matthew 28:19-20).

In Matthew's Gospel, these are Jesus' last words to His disciples--words He offers them at the end of His time on earth as He departs and ascends and returns to the Father. They are, then, Jesus' words of farewell to His closest friends to whom He has entrusted the continuation of His ministry...and these words can be said to be addressed to us as well!

Loving the disciples--and us--as He does, Jesus offers words of reassurance: ***I Will Be With You Always***. However, Jesus also gives to them--and us--a task...a mission: ***Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...***

The theme for this year's Congress conveys two profound aspects of our Eucharistic faith: 1) the reassurance of Jesus' perpetual presence to us through His real presence in the Eucharist and 2) the Eucharist's commissioning of us to an apostolate of justice unto the world. In other words, the Eucharist speaks to us--as Jesus spoke to the disciples--of the interconnection between His ongoing presence and our Christian mission to the world.

## **Jesus' Presence in the Eucharist — I Will Be With You Always**

Central to our Catholic faith is the conviction that Jesus is really, truly and substantially present to us in the Eucharist. Therefore, the Eucharist is, indeed, the source and summit of our faith (The Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, #10). Being in the presence of another affords us an encounter with that person. An encounter with another should be transformative, i.e., we are moved to behave and act in a manner respective of the one we encounter.

Consider the difference of how you might act if you enter a room and believe that you are alone...versus entering a room aware of the presence of another. Through the Eucharist Jesus takes the initiative to generously make Himself present to us and to afford us an encounter with Him. Christ makes His presence among us actively visible and tangible...by extending among us on earth in visible form the function of His bodily reality which is in heaven--This is precisely what the sacrament is: the earthly extension of the body of the Lord.<sup>i</sup> In those words from Ascension Thursday Jesus reassured His disciples that He would be with them always. He assures us, too, of the same by using the sacrament as the means by which He continuously extends to us His ongoing presence and grace. Jesus' heavenly saving activity which is invisible to us becomes visible in the Eucharist. Jesus utilizes the sacrament as a means to bridge the gap between us and Him thereby making an encounter with Him possible even after His Ascension--The sacrament is an earthly prolongation of the glorified Christ...the face of redemption turned visibly to us.<sup>ii</sup> To receive the sacrament, therefore, is to encounter Jesus.

Not only does Jesus make Himself present to us in the Eucharistic species, His presence in the Eucharist is further assured by His presence to us in the gathered Eucharistic assembly; the act of remembrance (*anamnesis*) by which we recall the Jesus Event in a manner that renders the Event present to us anew, calling us to commit ourselves to sharing this Good News with others; the priest who acts in the person of Jesus; and the proclamation of the word (Scripture) through which we encounter the WORD (Jesus).

*Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister...but especially under the Eucharistic species. By His power He is present in the sacraments...He is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for He promised: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20) (The Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium, #7).*

### **The Missionary Aspect of the Eucharist — Our Christian Call to Social Justice**

To encounter Jesus, then, is to be transformed.

Immediately prior to the passages in Matthew cited above, the Gospel tells us that the disciples were at a mountain in Galilee processing the mystery of Jesus' Resurrection. Upon initially seeing the Risen Christ the Gospel reports that the disciples worshipped Jesus, but still doubted. It is only when Jesus approaches and speaks to them--affords them an encounter--that the disciples are transformed, moving from

uncertainty to missionary zeal. So, too, it is with us. As Jesus approaches us in the Eucharist, affording us an encounter with Him, He speaks to us through His Word proclaimed and commissions us--just as he did the disciples--with a missionary mandate to go forth and to share our faith with others.

*From the Liturgy, the Church...receives the mission to proclaim and to spread among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God and to be on earth the initial budding forth of that Kingdom (The Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium, #2).*

The Acts of the Apostles records that the disciples were, indeed, transformed by their encounter with Christ and did as He instructed them--They went forth to all peoples giving witness to the faith and calling for social justice (e.g., The undoing of Babel--Acts 2; Communitarian Living/the Ananias and Sapphira Episode--Acts 4-5; The missions of Paul--Acts 13f; etc.). Furthermore, Acts also speaks of how Jesus empowered them for this mission by bestowing upon them His help by giving them the gift of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost--Acts 2). Note that prior to receiving the Spirit/Jesus' help the disciples are locked in an attic in fear...And that after receiving the Spirit/Jesus' help they are empowered to go forth to share the teachings of Jesus with peoples from all nations. Likewise, (T)he Eucharist bestows upon us Jesus' help--grace--and the gift of the Holy Spirit (*epiclesis*--prayer which calls down the Holy Spirit to transform both the bread and wine into Jesus' body and blood and to transform the assembly **into becoming whom they receive** that we may go forth and do the same). The liturgy, then, equips us with the gifts of Jesus which enable us to express and to manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the Church (The Second Vatican

Council's Decree on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, #'s 2 and 5).

*...I wish to briefly reaffirm the fact that the Eucharist constitutes the soul of all Christian life. In fact, Christian life is expressed in the fulfilling of the greatest commandment, that is to say, in the love of God and neighbor, and this love finds its source in the Blessed Sacrament...the Eucharist signifies this charity, and therefore recalls it, makes it present and at the same time brings it about...there also springs up within us a lively response of love...we enter upon the path of love...and serves the love to which we are called to in Jesus Christ... (Saint Pope John Paul II, The Mystery and Worship of the Eucharist, *Dominicae Cena*e, #5).*

The very names for our celebration of the Eucharist convey to us our mission: "Mass" is derived from the Latin term meaning to send...and our celebration of the Eucharist ends with the words *Ite missa est*--Go/You are sent...reminding us of the missionary mandate that the Risen Lord bestowed upon the disciples--and us; "Liturgy" is derived from the Greek terms for people and work (*laos* and *ergon*, respectively), thus meaning the people's work; "Eucharist," itself, is derived from the Greek verb meaning to give thanks--to give thanks for the redemptive gift of Jesus to us by extending it to others.<sup>iii</sup>

*The Eucharist is not something static; the gift becomes the obligation...a life that demands to be lived...We receive Christ, not to keep Him to ourselves but to give Him to others so that they may recognize Him in us.*<sup>iv</sup>

If we are to be a Eucharistic people we, like the disciples, must make the mission of Jesus our own mission. *Those who*

*celebrate the death and Resurrection of Jesus must join Him in doing the justice of God and become with Him advocates and agents for the in-breaking of God's Kingdom. Liturgy without action on behalf of justice is incomplete and unfinished.<sup>v</sup> We must go forth and point to and make Jesus present, His Kingdom and the true nature of the Church. If we do so, the central vision for the Church espoused by the Second Vatican Council--that the Church, itself, is the People of God; a Servant; Missionary by Nature; a Sacrament--can be actualized. We must live our lives in a manner which reveals how what we celebrate on Sunday is lived out Monday through Saturday. The world ought to be able to look at us and see and experience the love of Jesus. We must afford the world an encounter with Jesus...and we can do this by living out the mission of social justice to which the Eucharist commends us.*

*Receiving the Bread of Life, the disciples of Christ ready themselves to undertake with the strength of the Risen Lord and His Spirit the tasks which await them in their ordinary life. For the faithful who have understood the meaning of what they have done, the Eucharistic celebration does not stop at the church door. Like the first witnesses of the Resurrection, Christians who gather each Sunday to experience and proclaim the presence of the Risen Lord are called to evangelize and bear witness in their daily lives. Given this, the Prayer after Communion and the Concluding Rite--the Final Blessing and Dismissal--need to be better valued and appreciated, so that all who have shared in the Eucharist may come to a deeper sense of the responsibility which is entrusted to them. Once the assembly disperses, Christ's disciples return to their everyday surroundings with the commitment to make their whole life a gift, a spiritual*

*sacrifice pleasing to God* (Saint Pope John Paul II, *The Mystery and Worship of the Eucharist, Dominicae Cenaе*, #45).

The lay faithful have an indispensable role to play if the true nature of the Church is to be made manifest. The vision of the Church espoused at the Second Vatican Council will sink or swim depending upon how we, the baptized, live our faith. If the world is to look to the Church and see and experience Jesus, then those in the Church who are the Church's point of contact with the world must live their lives in a manner that points to and makes present Jesus.

When the world looks to the Church, they must see also the lay faithful who live their vocations in the midst of the world. Therefore, the laity themselves must be sacraments--they must act in ways that point to and make Christ present, thereby affording the world an encounter with Jesus (See Saint Pope John Paul II, *On The Eucharist, Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, #22). Living within the world the laity are called by God and led by the Spirit to act as a leaven of the Gospel within the world thereby contributing to its sanctification (The Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, #34).

*The lay apostolate, however, is a participation in the salvific mission of the Church itself. Through their baptism and confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself. Moreover, by the sacraments, especially holy Eucharist, that charity of God and man which is the soul of the apostolate is communicated and nourished. Now the laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth. Thus every*

*layman, in virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon him, is at the same time a living instrument of the mission of the Church itself “according to the measure of Christ’s bestowal” (The Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, #33).*

The world may be indifferent or even hostile to explicit attempts to proselytize. Therefore, we must present the faith to the world in a manner that it is more likely to receive and accept, i.e., by practicing social justice. People of reason and good will who may not share our faith might be more open and more receptive to solidarity; respect for human dignity; rights of workers/just wages; the just distribution of goods and natural resources; environmental stewardship; healthy marriage and family life; a preferential option for the poor, marginalized, social outcasts; etc. Think of social justice/the principles of Catholic Social Teaching as the means by which we can share with the world the teachings of Jesus.

The Eucharist, in turn, is like a school of social virtue. By participating in the Eucharist we learn and rehearse social justice and are commissioned to go forth and to share this with others. Note that we need not turn the Eucharist into a pep rally for social justice...rather that social justice is intrinsic to the very nature of the Eucharistic celebration. As illustration:

**Assembly**--Take note of our diversity and plurality as we gather together: male/female; black/white/Hispanic/Asian; old/young; healthy/sick; etc.--An expression of both our catholicity and a lesson of solidarity...

**Greeting**--We acknowledge Jesus’ indwelling in each and every person’s spirit, thereby challenging us to be

mindful that every human being bears the image and likeness of God and to respect human dignity.

**Proclamation of the Word**--Hebrew Scripture consistently speaks of God's deliverance of the oppressed (Exodus); powerfully warns against separating worship of God from justice unto others (Prophets); advocates the wisdom of justice and folly of injustice (Wisdom); whereas the New Testament gives voice to Jesus' own example and teachings: the Beatitudes (Luke 6); Foot Washing (John 13); Matthew 25; the prolific care for the sick, disabled and mentally ill (Mark); etc. Justice is a constitutive aspect of the proclaimed word!

**Preaching/Homily**--Effective preaching illustrates how the Gospel *kerygma* is to be applied to the injustices of our time and affords a dialogue between God and His people.

**Anamnesis**--Our communal act of remembrance of Jesus' Passion reminds us that God is to be found in the one who suffers: the sick; marginalized; rejected; outcast; etc.--teaching us of a preferential option...

**Our Father/Prayers**--The seminal prayer of our faith which we recite at every Eucharist challenges us to strive for God's will and Kingdom (marked by peace, justice and righteousness) to be realized on earth, while our prayers of petition shed light on the injustices of our time.

**Peace**--Our exchange of peace reminds us that we are to be agents of the Prince of Peace...If you want peace, work for justice (Pope Paul VI)!

**Distribution of the Host**--All who come forward are received by Jesus and receive the Host or a blessing--a lesson in distributive justice. Furthermore, how can we give witness to our love for Jesus via the sharing of a meal, then be indifferent to issues of poverty and hunger?

*The authentic sense of the Eucharist becomes of itself the school of active love for neighbor...The Eucharist educates us to this love in a deeper way; it shows us, in fact, what value each person, our brother and sister, has in God's eyes, as Christ offers Himself equally to each one...If our Eucharistic worship is authentic, it must make us grow in awareness of the dignity of each person. The awareness of that dignity becomes the deepest motive of our relationship with our neighbor. We must also become particularly sensitive to all human suffering and misery, to all injustice and wrong, and seek the way to redress them effectively...From this concept of Eucharistic worship there then stems the whole sacramental style of the Christian's life...The sacraments give the lives of Christians a sacramental style (Saint Pope John Paul II, The Mystery and Worship of the Eucharist, *Dominicae Cenae*, #'s 5-7).*

As disciples of Jesus we are to begin with the Eucharist. The Eucharist affords us an encounter with Jesus whereby we receive His grace and learn social justice. Grace and social justice are gifts which are meant to be shared with others. As we share these gifts with others, the grace that the Eucharist provides us will animate, nourish and sustain our apostolate/mission unto the world. Therefore there ought to be a dialectic between our liturgical life and our daily life.

The world needs us to be a Eucharistic people...a people of social justice. For the world needs the encounter with Jesus

which we--thanks to Jesus' reassurance, abiding presence to us, and mission assigned to us--are able to provide. As we ready ourselves for the Year of Mercy announced by Pope Francis, let us recommit ourselves to the Eucharist, the source and summit of our faith from which all our power flows, and to the mission to which it commissions us. Let us commit ourselves to Pope Francis' call for us to be a church marked by a missionary impulse to go forth out of our comfort zones to those on the peripheries--to encounter others face to face--taking on the dirt, smell, bruises and hurts of the sheep...to be a church for the poor (The Joy of the Gospel, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #'s 27, 20 24, 88 and 198). In doing so we will discover the brilliance of Jesus' words which we began with today--not only does the Eucharist reassure us of Jesus' ongoing presence among us, but if we go forth to all to share our faith we will discover that He remains present to us in and through those whom we serve, for they are the prolongation of the Incarnation for each of us (Pope Francis, The Joy of the Gospel, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #179). Again, as Pope Francis recently opined: A Eucharistic people ought not just kneel before Jesus in the Eucharist but also kneel before Him in the poor. In his first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul suggests that to celebrate the Eucharist while being indifferent to injustices in our midst is paramount to dismembering/re-crucifying Jesus!

*Do you wish to honor the Body of Christ? Do not ignore Him when He is naked. Do not pay Him homage in the temple clad in silk, only to neglect Him outside where He suffers cold and nakedness. He Who said, "This is My body" is the same One Who said, "You saw me hungry and you gave me no food" and "Whatever you did for the least*

*of My brothers, you also did for Me...” The temple of our afflicted neighbor’s body is more holy than the altar of stone on which you celebrate the holy sacrifice...<sup>vi</sup>*

Allow me to close with offering a syllogism composed by the great pioneering figure of the Liturgical Movement in the United States and zealous proponent of the Eucharist-justice interconnection, Virgil Michel, O.S.B., for us to take with us and to ponder:

*...the liturgy is the indispensable source of the true Christian Spirit...the true Christian spirit is indispensable for social regeneration...Hence the conclusion: The liturgy is the indispensable basis of Christian social regeneration.<sup>vii</sup>*

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<sup>i</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P. *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*. (Kansas City, Missouri: Sheed and Ward, 1963) 41.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>iii</sup> Michael S. Driscoll, “Eucharist and Justice” in *Sacraments and Justice*, ed. Doris Donnelly (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2014) 37-39.

<sup>iv</sup> Godfrey Diekmann, O.S.B. “The Theology of Worship” in *Theology Digest* 10 (1962) 140-141.

<sup>v</sup> Gilbert Ostdiek, O.F. M. “Liturgical Catechesis and Justice” in *Living No Longer for Ourselves*, eds. Kathleen Hughes, R.S.C.J. and Mark R. Francis, C.S.V. (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991) 175.

<sup>vi</sup> John Chrysostom. “Homily on the Gospel of Matthew 50:3-4” in *Sacraments and Justice*, ed. Doris Donnelly, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2014) 40.

<sup>vii</sup> Virgil Michel, O.S.B. “Liturgy as the Basis of Social Regeneration” in *Orate Fratres* 9 (1934-1935) 545.

