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THE EUCHARIST

AND MISSION

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I am extremely pleased to be here among you and to deliver this address on the Eucharist and Mission. I consider it an unique privilege to speak about what is so dear to my heart, and I thank the organizers for giving me this opportunity.

Our God is the God of history, a God of relationship, a God who communicates with mankind. His creative act itself is an act of relationship. Through this act of love He shared His life with human beings. Human beings continue this creative act by sharing their love with one another.

Sin is the absence of this love in the lives of human beings. When this love is absent, we are not experiencing the true God, nor are we able to build an authentic human community.

The Holy Scriptures point out to the breakdown in human beings' relationship with God such as in the case of Adam and Eve which caused them to lose the Paradise of happiness or when Cain killed

his brother and brought death into the world for the first time.

Jesus came to give us once again this transforming experience of God as love. As the Gospel according to John tells us, *“for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life”* (John 3:16). Everything that Jesus did, his miracles, his teachings, his whole life was a proclamation of God’s love. In his death and resurrection he was like the grain of wheat which falls to the ground and dies and by dying produces much fruit (Jn 12:26)

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Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI describes this so beautifully in his first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (n.12), when he says: *“His death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form.”*

The institution of the Eucharist, the day before he died, was the symbolic recapitulation of Jesus’ life which reached completion in the total self-gift of himself by dying on the cross.

He commanded his disciples to *“do this in memory of me”*, and entrusted them with the task of making this last day become a reality in their lives

until he will come again in glory to transform the whole universe into the new heaven and the new earth where there will be the perfect love relationship between God and human beings, and among human beings.

The Church is the community that, following in the footsteps of those first disciples and apostles, continues down the centuries to fulfil this mission in the world.

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When we celebrate the Eucharist we proclaim the great redemptive act of Christ and we commit ourselves to continue his work in the world by living a life of love and sharing. This is what the early Christians did in order to show their identity. They recognized the Lord in the breaking of the Bread and they were recognized as Christians by their sharing of the bread (Acts 2, 44-47) The Eucharist, therefore, was an act by which they expressed their religious identity, an identity based on their relationship to God and to their fellow human beings.

When the Disciples of Christ translate the love of God - which they experience in Christ in the Eucharist - into their everyday lives, into their relationship with each other and with other human be-

ings, then they are building a new society, a new creation.

Pope John Paul II expresses this same idea in a more deeply theological way in *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (n. 35) when he says that *“the profound relationship between the invisible and the visible elements of ecclesial communion is constitutive of the Church as the sacrament of salvation.”*

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Allow me to put it another way by sharing with you the story of my own people who were transformed into a new creation after they came to believe in the Risen LORD and accepted JESUS as the only Saviour of the World.

Up to 163 years ago, the tribal peoples of the Central and North East India had not yet heard of JESUS. They were poor and totally illiterate. The rich landlords and the powerful people oppressed and exploited them mercilessly. The poor Tribals were left without any hope of justice. Many fled to the Assam Tea Gardens or to the forests of the Andaman Islands in the search for survival. Those who remained in the ancestral lands were on the verge of extinction, and had lost the very will to live.

At this juncture in their history, God heard their cry and in 1845 sent some Christian missionar-

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ies to Ranchi, the heartland of the Tribals. For four years the missionaries laboured in vain. Then one fine day four Tribals approached them because they had heard that these missionaries were preaching about a man who was killed and is still alive. So they wanted to see him. They came to the missionaries and said: “We want to see JESUS”. Their constant question was: where is JESUS? We want to see Him? The missionaries did not know what to do and these tribals got angry and called them cheats and liars. Then the missionaries invited them to prayer and finally they were baptized.

Some thirty years later in 1869 the Archbishop of Calcutta (now Kolkata) sent the first Jesuit missionaries to these Tribal people. Four years later a group of six Tribal families, numbering 28 persons were baptized in the Catholic Church. But the real movement of grace started with the arrival of the servant of God, Fr. Constant Lievens, S.J., now known as the apostle of Chotanagur, the land of the Tribals.

When this Jesuit came, there were only 56 Catholics in the territory. He lived only seven years but by the time he died, due to overwork, exhaustion and tuberculosis, there were 80,000 (eighty thousand) baptized Catholics and more than twenty thousand catechumens in the area!

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How did this happen? What was difference between these Jesuit Missionaries and first missionaries who came thirty years before them? The answer is: The Eucharist, the way the catholics understood, celebrated and lived the Eucharist made all the difference. Many of the first Christians embraced the Catholic faith because of this.

The Loreto Sisters were the first Religious women to arrive to help the missionaries in the work of evangelization. Four Christian girls from an educated family studying in the boarding school with the Loreto Nuns in Ranchi embraced the Catholic faith and in 1897 founded in Ranchi the first indigenous Religious Congregation of The Daughters of St. Anne's. This indigenous congregation of women now has more than a thousand Sisters spread in 23 Indian dioceses and also in dioceses outside India. The simple nuns played a very important role in the work of evangelization.

This young Church in the Tribal lands has grown so much that today it constitutes 10% of the whole Catholic population of India which is 18 million. Though materially poor, it is nevertheless self sufficient in many aspects and has its own nuns, priests and bishops. One of the Characteristics of this Church has been that these tribal Catholics became

bearers of the Faith wherever they went. For this reason, this extraordinary growth of the Church in the tribal lands has become known as the 'Miracle of Chotanagpur'.

Many do not know Blessed Mother Teresa too is part of this miracle too. Among the Jesuits working in the Kolkata mission, that included Ranchi, there were two Albanians. When these Jesuits returned home to Albanian on a visit, they gave talks to school children in an effort to promote missionary vocations and to raise funds for their mission.

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One of those who heard them was a teenage school girl called Agnes - the future Mother Teresa; she was then 13 or 14 years old. She listened attentively to one of the missionaries who told about what was happening among the Tribals in Ranchi, and she decided to come to India to work among the Ranchi tribals. At that time she had only one way to come to India, and that was to become a Loreto nun, because that order had nuns working in Kolkata and in Ranchi too. So she joined the Loreto order in Ireland and from there came to Kolkata, India.

When I was a young Bishop, one day I had the privilege to take Mother Teresa in my car. She was accompanied by three of her Missionaries of Charity

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Sisters. From them I came to know that Mother Teresa had worked till past midnight re-organizing their community. She was sitting next to me in the front seat and naturally I was feeling timid sitting next to someone like her. But being a true Mother she told me to sit comfortably. This gave me courage. I said: Mother I was told that you worked very late last night. You are not young any more. From where do you get the strength to do all that you are doing? Her reply came with the speed of bullet: JESUS in the Eucharist.

I believe this has been and is the secret of the success of Mother Teresa and of the Missionaries of Charity. Whenever she opened a new community anywhere in the world, she always called it one more Tabernacle. Mother Teresa is an example of how much the Mission of the Church is nourished and driven by the Eucharist.

Now let us then take a look at that mission.

1. THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes* n.1) teaches that the life and mission of the Church is closely related to the world into which Je-

sus sent his disciples to continue the task entrusted to him by the Father.

Among the many characteristics of today's world in which the Church has to carry out her mission I would like to highlight three: the socio-economic disparity; religious pluralism; and diversity of cultural identities.

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The Church must dialogue with all these aspects of human society with a view to building up communion among all peoples. In his Message for the 81st World Mission Sunday 2007, Pope Benedict teaches that the missionary task of the Church, the first service she owes people in today's world is *“to guide and evangelize the cultural, social and ethical transformations; to offer Christ's salvation to the people of our time in so many parts of the world who are humiliated and oppressed by endemic poverty, violence and the systematic denial of human rights.”*

*A. The Mission of the Church and the Socio-economic
reality of the world*

As we look around the world today, we see a tremendous gap between rich and poor, we see that humanity is restless, dissatisfied, in constant search of a better life and above all of a future that can assure them security, happiness and peace. This is the

reality in spite of the fact that the world has made great progress in the fields of technology and science and there is a greater well-being today than in the past, while the scientific ethos promises a future that will be ever better.

What then is the real meaning of this thirst we find among so many people across the globe? What is the meaning of this restless search of humanity today? What is it that prevents humanity from building up a new society where all its dreams and longings will find fulfilment?

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An analysis of the needs of the human person reveals that the following underlying currents are present in this search and struggle:

- i) There is a need for personal fulfilment, a need for the realization of the values of justice, truth, freedom, love, equality, and peace within human societies
- ii) There is a strongly felt need to build a more just world order and a new humanity
- iii) There is a great need for communion with fellow human beings

We as Christians know that Jesus came to redeem the world and transform humanity it into a

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new society in which all the above needs will be fulfilled. He did this not as a mere social worker, but as a living sign of the Love of God. He died and rose from the dead to prove that he is such a sign. He established a community, the Church, to continue to be this sign in the world until the world is finally transformed by the love of God. He gave us the Eucharist as a memorial, as a continued manifestation in the world of this Love. That is why we, Christians celebrate the Eucharist until He comes again in glory to finally establish God's Kingdom.

B. Mission of the Church and Religious pluralism

One of the most striking phenomena in the world today is the growth and revival of the other world religions. They have come to centre stage in an unexpected way: Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism and Christianity and most forcefully in the 400 million strong Pentecostal groups.

It is clear to all that the Church has to undergo a change in her attitude towards them, a new approach is required. If in the past – up to the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) she considered them in a rather negative way, today she is called by the Spirit to build up a dialogical relationship with them. In-

ter-religious dialogue has become part and parcel of her mission of evangelization in the modern world.

And she has to share with them her own rich experience of God in Christ rather than taking a negative doctrinal approach to them. The experience of Christ in the Eucharist who gathers all the peoples of the world into one family through his love is a very important factor in her mission in the multi-religious context of the world. It is Jesus in the Eucharist who teaches us the true lessons of dialogue and communion, lessons that sometimes we are slow to learn.

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*C. The Mission of the Church and
the multicultural world.*

Christ came to gather together all the nations of the world into the Kingdom of God, and the mission of the Church is to continue that work until the end of history when Christ comes again in glory to finally bring that about.

God has endowed every people with his gifts. Each people, each nation, has its own way of expressing the divine gift of life and existence.

The Church, following in the footsteps of her Lord and Master, strives to eliminate from the world all types of discrimination among peoples and seeks to foster communion among all as is envisaged in the book of Revelation (Rev. 21, 1-7; 22-27).

The Eucharistic experience enables the Church to see the presence of God in all the temporal realities. The life of sharing into which the Eucharist initiates the People of God opens new horizons and facilitates the building of a human community in which rivalry and discrimination have no place.

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2. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE EUCHARIST AND THE MISSION THE CHURCH.

Pope John Paul II in his 2004, Mission Sunday Message called “Eucharist and Mission”, insisted that *“around Christ in the Eucharist the Church grows as the people, temple and family of God: one, holy, Catholic and apostolic. At the same time she understands better her character of universal sacrament of salvation and visible reality with a hierarchical structure.”*

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This is clearly evident in the life of the early Christians for whom the Eucharist was central to their existence as a community. They met often for this common feast. They gathered in the private houses of fellow Christians. They listened to the teaching of the Apostles, prayed together, conversed about their own problems, shared a meal and commemorated the Lord who was present in their midst in the breaking of the bread in memory of him.

As a consequence of this Eucharistic sharing their care and concern for one another developed and grew. They shared their possessions and became visible as true disciples of Jesus. This fellowship meal and the life of sharing were the hallmarks of their religious identity. They understood the symbol instituted by Jesus Christ as a call to build up a new society based on the dual commandment of love: love of God and love of neighbour.

The life of sharing was so essential to the Eucharistic community that for the Apostle Paul, a celebration in which this spirit of love and sharing were absent was not the Lord's Supper. (1 Cor.11, 20).

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The Eucharist lost much of its meaning if it did not inspire and promote compassion, mercy and love. This is expressed beautifully in the Acts of the Apostles: *“There was not a single needy person among them”* (Acts 4, 34).

That is the reason why the early Christians were so acceptable to many people, especially the poor and the marginalised. Christianity was a dynamic movement towards the liberation of mankind from selfishness and exploitation, which are at the root of the unjust society. All were meant to equal in the believing community and this was symbolized by the Eucharistic meal. This was not an easy ideal to be reached. This was a spirituality developed in the midst of the ordinary everyday life with its daily struggles and, at that time also, in the midst contestation and persecution.

Ordinary men and women lived this Christian spirituality and began the process of building a new society, a new human family as envisaged by Jesus Christ.

The early Church Fathers placed very great stress on this community building and on the social dimension of the Eucharist. *“Do you wish to honour the Body of Christ? Do not despise him when*

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he is naked. Do not honour him here in the Church building with silks, only to neglect him outside, when he is suffering from cold and from nakedness. For he who said, 'This is my Body' is the same who said, 'You saw me, a hungry man, and you did not give me to eat'. Of what use is it to load the table of Christ? Feed the hungry and then come and decorate the table. You are making a golden chalice and you do not give a cup of cold water? The Temple of your afflicted brother's body is more precious than this Temple (the church). The Body of Christ becomes for you an altar. It is more holy than the altar of stone on which you celebrate the holy sacrifice. You are to contemplate this altar everywhere, in the street and in the open squares" (St. John Chrysostom).

The Second Vatican Council's constitution on the liturgy ushered in a change in the life of the worship of the Church. It transformed the Eucharistic celebration by insisting on three main aspects of that celebration:

- i) Eucharist as an act of the community. The Council's document, *Sacrosanctum Concilium (n.1)*, explained the motivation for the changes being made. It said they aimed "to foster whatever can promote union among

all who believe in Christ; to strengthen whatever can help to call the whole of mankind into the household of the Church” and it (n.7) reminded that Christ is present, “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)”

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- ii) The same Constitution maintained that the faithful participate actively in the celebration of the Eucharist. It pointed out (n.14) that *“Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. 2:4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.”* That same text (n.48) reminded people that *“the Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; on the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers*

they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration.”

- iii) The Fathers at the Second Vatican Council also taught that the effect of participating in the Eucharistic celebration is the building up of a community of love and sharing (GS n. 38). Their document on the liturgy (n.37) described the Eucharist as *“a memorial of His death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is eaten, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us”*.

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These changes indicate how the Church’s mission is nurtured and strengthened by the Eucharist.

We are celebrating this Eucharist Congress with the theme, *“Eucharist as the gift of God for the life of the World”*. As disciples of Jesus, living in a period of the Church’s life when the thrust towards the evangelizing mission is acquiring prominence again we must make sure that our Eucharistic life gives us a renewed sense of mission. We are celebrating the Eucharist in a world that is torn apart by discrimination, dehumanized by exploitative socio-economic

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structures, often dominated by the selfishness of human greed and avarice, which at times, have unfortunately even been justified by religious principles.

The Good News that the world needs today is a society based on brotherhood and sisterhood and lived in sharing. Then the true God, the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has made us also His children in Jesus Christ will appear in our midst. Our Eucharistic celebration should enable us to work towards that ideal. How shall we achieve it? How can we celebrate in a way that will help us to arrive at this goal? These are the reflections that we shall make together as the disciples of Jesus around the Eucharist, which is not only a memorial of His saving death and resurrection, it is also His Living presence among us.

Pope John Paul II expressed this beautifully in his Encyclical Letter:

Dominum Et Vivificantem, "Through the Eucharist the Holy Spirit accomplishes that "strengthening of the inner man" spoken of in the Letter to the Ephesians. Through the Eucharist, individuals and communities, by the action of the Paraclete-Counselor, learn to discover the divine sense of human life, as

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spoken of by the Council: that sense whereby Jesus Christ "fully reveals man to man himself", suggesting "a certain likeness between the union of the divine persons, and the union of God's children in truth and charity". This union is expressed and made real especially through the Eucharist, in which man shares in the sacrifice of Christ which this celebration actualizes, and he also learns to "find himself.. through a... gift of himself" through communion with God and with others, his brothers and sisters."

3. THE EUCHARIST AS THE SOURCE OF THE MISSION.

Christian mission consists in communicating God's love to all peoples so that all may be united in one community with God our Father.

This is very clearly expressed by Jesus: *"I revealed your name to those whom you gave me out of the world. They belonged to you, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word"* (John 17, 6).

The goal of Jesus' mission is to make all the peoples of the world share in the life of God.

This is being done today through the Eucharist by which Jesus continues his mission through the ministry of the Church. Through Baptism people are joined with Christ in his death and resurrection,

through Confirmation they receive his Spirit, and through the Eucharist they are constantly nourished by his life as Son of God and by the life of Christian witness. They share this life with all those who come into contact with them, until all are filled with the same life of Christ. This is what we proclaim at every Mass: *'we proclaim your death O Lord, until you come'*. The Eucharist is, therefore the source of Christian life and mission.

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Let us examine the dynamics by which this takes place:

- a) The Church fulfils her mission by loving others as Christ loved her. Christ laid down his life for the world. This is symbolized in the Eucharist: *this is my body given for you* In the Eucharist the Church participates in this self-giving love and is thus enabled to continue his mission.
- b) The Church fulfils her mission with the constant assistance of the Holy Spirit. In the Eucharist the Church receives the Spirit of Jesus who died and rose from the dead. The apostolic energy of the Church comes from this Spirit.

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c) In a society that is governed by the principles of consumerist globalization, and the promotion of a culture of death, the Church is called to promote the globalization of love and solidarity by promoting a culture of love and sharing. In the Eucharist, which proclaims the self-giving of Christ so that all may have the fullness of life, the dynamics of a new globalization which unites all human beings and the whole of creation is daily proclaimed.

This is what is meant by the new evangelization which Pope John Paul II launched at the beginning of the new millennium, with the Eucharist as its source and centre. I am sure it would be our common desire that a new missionary spirit that transforms the world emerges from this Eucharistic Congress.

d) The heart of the Good News is Jesus, dead and risen. In our evangelization we proclaim Christ; we not only perform the miracles of Christ, but proclaim the loving kindness of God.

In the Eucharist we recognize this Christ in the breaking of the bread and we proclaim him as one who is alive and present in our

apostolic activities. Without the Eucharist we cannot truly proclaim him as living because we do not have an experience of him present in our midst. The Eucharist is therefore, necessary for the authenticity and effectiveness of our evangelizing mission.

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e) The goal of our mission is full communion between God and human beings, and between human beings, expressed through a life of love and sharing. The daily celebration of the Eucharist initiates us into this communion: we are united with God by receiving the body of the Son of God; we are united among ourselves by receiving the body of Christ in the form of the communion that we have shared; we are united with the whole of creation because the bread that we share in the Eucharist is the fruit of the earth, that earth which God created as a sign of his love and which we distorted through our sinful use of it. By becoming the body of Christ, it is once again capable of manifesting God's love. By participating in it, we commit ourselves to restore the Divine goodness to the whole creation.

f) By the death and resurrection of Christ, God made a new covenant with the whole human-

ity. Every Eucharistic celebration and participation renews this covenant. Every participant in the Eucharist becomes the promoter of this covenant among all peoples by practicing the terms of this covenant which is nothing other than the commandment to love. The symbolic liturgical act becomes real life-centred commitment.

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The evangelizing mission of the Church continues by building up communities that are free from all types of injustice, discrimination, oppression and exploitation, communities that are truly humanizing.

- g) The Eucharist makes our evangelizing mission in a multi-religious society very effective. The Christian community that participates in the Eucharist acquires an unconditional openness to the presence of God. They can approach people of any religion with a positive attitude and share with them their own experience of God. Dialogue becomes the method of communication with people of other religions. This will result in communion with people of other faiths without in any way compromising one's own faith convictions. Those who have experienced Jesus in the

Eucharist can share the same love with which they are loved by Jesus in their relationship with others irrespective of their faith, just as Charles de Foucault did with the peoples of the desert in North Africa.

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4. THE EUCHARIST BUILDS UP THE COMMUNITY OF MISSION

Pope Paul VI in his exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (n. 28) connects the Eucharist with Mission: *“For in its totality, evangelization - over and above the preaching of a message - consists in the implantation of the Church, which does not exist without the driving force which is the sacramental life culminating in the Eucharist”.*

From the very beginning of the Church we see that the Eucharist builds communities of mission, whether this mission is exercised in the form of proclaiming the Gospel or as a martyrdom of faith-witnessing, as we have seen, for example, in China and many other countries in the past century.

The connection between the Eucharist and the communities of mission rests on a basic characteris-

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tic of Christian mission itself. The Christian missionary is first and foremost a witness of Christ and not a mere pupil that has learnt the truths about Christ. A witness is one who has experienced what he communicates. The Eucharist is the source of this witnessing power. There the Christian meets the living Christ and becomes capable of proclaiming what he has seen, heard and touched. We shall see how this actually happens in every Eucharistic celebration, especially in the parish

a) The community that gathers for the celebration

The Sunday Eucharistic celebration is the gathering of the whole community. It is an occasion in which the members of the community can know the Lord more deeply and know one another, meet one another and become aware of the need for communion and solidarity. It is not a mere opportunity for fulfilling an obligation of worship. This means that they have to move beyond their anonymous presence in the church. One cannot live the Christian life alone, in splendid isolation from everyone else.

This means that the Sunday worshipper has to come to realize that the God whom he or she has come to meet is one who has entered into their lives and shares His love with them so that they may be-

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come visible signs of this love through their love and concern for one another. The true God, the God of the Christians, is the God who is present in the midst of His people. Hence to meet Him there is no other means than to live a life of love and concern for one another.

Benedict XVI in one of his first Pastoral Visits as Pope, to Bari in May 2005 said in his homily, *“The Sunday precept is not an externally imposed duty, a burden on our shoulders. On the contrary, taking part in the Celebration, being nourished by the Eucharistic Bread and experiencing the communion of their brothers and sisters in Christ is a need for Christians, it is a joy; Christians can thus replenish the energy they need to continue on the journey we must make every week”.*

b) The community that listens to the Word

This community of love is strengthened in their faith in such a way that they become capable of proclaiming it with their lives. The liturgy of the Word does not only instruct people in the truths of faith, it deepens their faith in such a way that they become capable of translating it into love.

Their faith is placed in the context of community where they have to become witnesses to this

faith; they have to be transformed in such a way that they can be leaven in the midst of the society in which they live.

The Lineamenta for next October's Synod of Bishops on the Word of God tells us that *"The Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi of Pope Paul VI still has a timely character in teaching the art of proclamation. Likewise, the Encyclical Letter Deus Caritas Est of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, emphasizes the close connection of charity with the proclamation of the Word of God. Logically speaking, after having received the Word of God which is love, proclaiming the Word would be impossible without putting love into practise through acts of justice and charity. These are only a few tasks and goals of particular importance in treating the evangelizing mission of the Word of God."* (n. 25)

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c) The community that brings the bread and wine.

The bread and wine that they bring to the altar is the symbol of their daily life of interaction with one another. They are not mere ritual elements. They represent the community with its life of relationships.

In the early Church these were taken from the table of sharing and thus expressed their relationship among themselves.

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Today, I believe it is again necessary to emphasize the social and communitarian dimension of the bread and wine that is brought to the altar. This can be done in the following manner. In the first place it is ideal that the faithful bring these gifts to the altar as a symbol of their own lives. Moreover, together with the bread and wine, it would be good if they bring other gifts which express the concern for the community. The offertory collection could be given a greater community building significance. The community gathered together as the body of Christ should realize that there are members among them who do not experience God's love because there are not enough people who translate this love into human love and sharing.

By bringing the bread and wine we proclaim our own readiness to contribute our share to build up the body of Christ, the community of brothers and sisters in Christ in our parish.

d) The community is transformed into a self-giving community at the consecration.

The centre of the Eucharistic celebration is the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. The bread and wine, which the community brought, is now made into the self-giving

body of Jesus. This self-giving first took place on Calvary; now this self-giving has to take place in the community which is the body of Christ in today's world. By proclaiming the self-giving of Christ in the bread and wine brought by the community the community allows itself to be consecrated and to become the visible signs of the self-giving of Christ in the world of today.

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So we may say that through the consecration, the new society built on self-giving and sharing is coming into existence in our world. Hence, consecration is not only a moment to adore Jesus who becomes present on the altar, it is especially a moment in which the community of the Christians, the visible body of Jesus today, becomes a self-giving community. The community joins with Christ in his self-giving by which the world will be transformed and a new society will come into existence.

e) The birth of a new community of the Spirit.

At the beginning of creation the Spirit of God hovered over the primordial waters and the whole universe came into existence by the power of this same Spirit. At the new creation, inaugurated by the resurrection of Christ, the Spirit of Christ is poured over humankind in order to enable it to give birth to

a new world. The agent of this new creation is the Church, the Spirit-filled community.

At Holy Communion, Jesus, the Incarnate Word who died and rose from the dead and who is filled with the Spirit of God, enters into our hearts, fills us with his Spirit in order to make us become collaborators with him in building up a new society founded on love and sharing.

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f) The community that is sent in mission.

The end of the Mass is not the conclusion of an act of worship. It is the beginning of the mission of the Church.

I am here reminded of the words of John Paul II, "*Certainly 'no Christian community can be built up unless it has its basis and centre in the celebration of the most Holy Eucharist' (Ecclesia de Eucharistia, n. 33; cfr Presbyterorum Ordinis n. 6). At the end of every Mass, when the celebrant takes leave of the assembly with the words "Ite, Missa est", all should feel they are sent as "missionaries of the Eucharist" to carry to every environment the great gift received.*¹

We are sent out into the world to make the symbols of the Eucharistic worship become realities

¹ Message of His Holiness, John Paul II, for World Mission Sunday 2004, "Eucharist and Mission"

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of a Eucharistic life. We go out into the world after the Eucharist challenged by the word of God, prophetically charged by the Spirit of the risen Lord and committed to work for the transformation of the world. This is the meaning of the phrase: We proclaim your death O Lord, until you come. That is, we are going out to continue the work of Christ to bring about the Kingdom of God where Divine love will be translated into human love, where Divine life will be manifested in communion, where creation will be transformed into a new earth and new heaven in which all the peoples of the world will live as brothers and sisters. The Eucharist empowers us to do this. This is the ultimate goal of all our Eucharistic celebrations.

**g) Eucharist and the evangelizing mission
of the parish community**

The parish is a leaven that transforms the whole of society in a given area. There will be people of other religions and ideologies living there. All of them must be able to experience the Gospel through the Christian community. The Eucharist has the role to leaven the Christian community.

We do not bring the people of other religions into our Eucharistic celebration; but we participate in the Eucharist in such a way that we are imbued

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with the self-giving love of Christ, which is the core of the Gospel and we carry this love to all our brothers and sisters. They will thus experience the Good news of Jesus Christ through us, and in their turn, they will contribute towards the transformation of society. Our Eucharistic experience will, thus have a missionary dimension.

The people of other faiths and ideologies should see us as a community that is capable of living in love and sharing, as it was the case with the early Christians. The Eucharist plays an important role in this in as much as it imbues us with the self-giving Spirit of Christ and makes us become Spirit-filled and Spirit-led communities.

h) The Eucharist and the creation of a new society

The selfish interests of individuals is achieved at the cost of the common good. The spirit of competition, which is the norm of progress and growth, exalts the powerful and mighty; it fosters the growth in the number of the poor and the oppressed classes. It affirms the individuals and destroys the community. It presents consumerism as a value and creates poverty as the permanent lot of many men and women of today. It is necessary to bring in the value of self-giving and sharing as the guiding norm for building

up the society. The participation in the Eucharist should empower us to become agents that build up a society based on self-giving, not on selfishness. Where there is sharing, there no one will be in need, where there is greed and selfishness there everyone will be always in need because nothing can satisfy selfish people.

CONCLUSION

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The Eucharist has a power that can challenge any situation that is opposed to the Kingdom of God. Jesus faced death and inaugurated the new Kingdom of God through his resurrection. The early Christian community found their genuine identity and their strength to bear witness to the Gospel in their Eucharistic gathering. They were able to face the challenges of the most powerful empire that opposed the Christian message.

Let us try in this Eucharistic Congress to discover the power of the Eucharist as a force for transformation not only of our own lives but also of the whole of society; and to bring out its potentiality to make our Christian life credible and our Christian witness powerfully convincing.

Let us resolve to make the Eucharist the building power of our parishes and of our small Christian

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communities. If this is systematically done both by the pastors through their animation and by the faithful through their active involvement in the Sunday celebrations, our Christian communities will give rise to a new society in their parish territory. The new society which we need is not a mere industrially or technologically advanced social set-up, rather it is a society in which acceptance of one another, love for one another and mutual sharing will become the law and style of life. Only Christians who experience week after week the unconditional self-giving love of Christ in the Eucharistic celebration can do this.

May our parishes, transformed by the Eucharist, become leaven in the midst of the world, heralding a new society, free from oppression corruption, discrimination, exploitation and poverty and may they be filled with the fruits of mutual love, mutual acceptance and mutual sharing.

Before I conclude, let me return to the story of the Tribals in India. Over the years, a paradigm shift has taken place in the thinking of our people, so that their strong faith in Jesus Christ continues to liberate, transform, and empower them, as they live and interact in daily life with people of other religions, cultures, and ethnic groups, in an India buffeted by

forces of globalization, consumerism, communalism, war and terrorism.

I want to repeat what I said at the First Asian Mission Congress in 2007 (?) during the sharing on the Story of Jesus of the tribal people, *“Here were people that were “no people”. They were mercilessly trampled under foot. Their will to live was crushed to powder and dust. But once they accepted Jesus, they rose again with him in baptism. ...Again and again I have heard Catholic aboriginal/indigenous Eucharistic Crusade children saying: “ham krusvir kissi se kam nahin – We Eucharistic Children are not inferior to anyone!”². Indeed, today they are a force to reckon with.*

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Indeed the sacraments of the Church, especially the Holy Eucharist, the word of God, and the experience of fellowship in the parishes, small communities, and spiritual movements of the Church, enable me as a Bishop, and the priests, religious and the laity that I know, to fulfill the insightful words of the International Theological Commission:

“What gives Christians their identity and makes them different from other people is their remem-

² Cardinal Telesphore P. Cardinal Toppo, *A Story of Jesus among the Tribals of Central India*, Asian Mission Congress, (2006)

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brance and expectation of Jesus Christ. The memories and hopes of the pilgrim people of God in time and space give them their own unique identity and special character, protecting them always and everywhere from the dangers of dissolution and loss of identity. Through its shared memory and expectation of Jesus Christ, the people of God knows by faith, truths and realities that other peoples neither know, nor can ever know about the meaning of existence and human history".³

Truly Christ transformed the Passover meal into the centre of the Christian life, into the experience of the presence of the risen Christ in the midst of His People. The Eucharist is not a mere remembrance of a past event; rather, it is our participation in the ongoing life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the affirmation of our hope that He shall come again in glory. Let us strive to witness this reality is our mission in today's world.

Thank you.

³ L'Osservatore Romano, 12-1-85