

THE MOST HOLY EUCHARIST IN OUR LIFE AND THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Just a few weeks ago the Church witnessed the canonization of Pope John Paul II.

In his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, written nearly 35 years ago, he laid out a blueprint for his pontificate which spanned over a quarter of a century. While addressing many points of theology and philosophy, the focus is on Jesus Christ in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist.

In describing the Eucharist, the pope points out a four aspects which allow us to ‘flesh out,’ in a way, this great Mystery of mysteries. He begins by echoing the words of the Second Vatican Council that the “*Eucharist is the center and summit of the whole of sacramental life, through which each Christian receives the saving power of the Redemption*”. This first aspect reminds us that our spiritual lives hinge on the Eucharist, and must be centered on the Eucharistic Presence of Jesus Christ.

In considering the relationship of the Persons of the Most Holy Trinity, the next aspect is proposed - namely that the “*Eucharist is the most perfect Sacrament*” by which we can contemplate and participate in the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the Eucharist, we receive Jesus Christ, who offers Himself to the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The third aspect is “*that the Eucharist builds the Church*”. In this we are told that what is ancient remains ever new by the re-presentation Christ’s redeeming Sacrifice on the Cross. The Eucharist unites us as members of the Body of Christ, while at the same time building-up and regenerating the community of believers so that we may be One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic.

The final aspect is that the “*Church lives by the Eucharist.*” Just as physical life requires nourishment, our spiritual life demands the Bread of Life. The Blessed Sacrament embodies a three-fold mystery of Sacrifice, Communion, and Presence - the details of which are not only beyond words, but remain beyond the grasp of human knowledge. For anyone to assume to ‘know it all’ is to limit the magnitude and meaning of Christ’s abiding presence in this Most Blessed Sacrament.

These four aspects can provide us much material for reflection, especially in our participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. When we recognize the Eucharist as the high point of our prayer, we allow ourselves to be immersed in the infinite graces flowing from the altar. As our relationship to God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is strengthened by supernatural grace, our human relationships are also built-up and renewed in Christ. And when we realize our need for our ‘daily bread’ in the Eucharist, we move beyond our own limitations and can truly live as disciples of Jesus Christ.