

In The School of Mary

(Papal documents condensed by Deacon William Wagner)

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Pope John Paul II

Ecclesia de Eucharistia, Encyclical on the Most Holy Eucharist, Holy Thursday,
April 17, 2003

Some Preliminary Remarks:

I propose to condense this encyclical much as I did the encyclical on the Rosary. It will give us an opportunity to read in capsule format concerning what the Holy Father has written more extensively in the encyclical. May it be the stimulus for us to read the document in its entirety!

It is worthy of note that Pope John Paul II has now the fourth longest reign among all popes beginning with St. Peter, himself. It is also very significant that he is one of the very few remaining, active members of the church hierarchy to have taken a critical role in the Second Vatican Council. He was intimately involved in the writing and development of some its documents of importance. He worked along side some of the great theologians of our era, Henri de Lubac, Yves Congar, Karl Rahner, Jean Danielou, and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, to name a few.

This Pope has written often and well over the 25 years of his Pontificate, and not without cause. He has set the sights of the Church in the direction, which the Council spelled out for it in great detail. Knowing the Council from its heart, he has guided the Church with a view to engaging the world in a challenging and sometimes provocative way. With unwavering consistency, and with perennial trust in the Mother of God, he has ceaselessly urged the Church (that's us) to renew itself so that it might be ever more reflective of the living presence of Christ in the world.

This living presence is encountered in a unique way in the Eucharist, the subject of this encyclical. May it be to our great benefit that we now walk with the Holy Father as he explains this *Mysterium Fidei*, the Mystery of Faith.

Ecclesia de Eucharistia vitam suam trahit. Papal letters of various types take their name from the first two or three words of the opening sentence. Hence, we have the title of this encyclical.

INTRODUCTION

"The Church draws her life from the Eucharist." So intense is this association that the Second Vatican Council will say that the Eucharistic Sacrifice is the **source and summit** of the Christian life. To

quote Vatican II as the Holy Father himself does: "For the most holy Eucharist contains the Church's entire spiritual wealth: Christ himself, our Passover and living bread."

It was a moving experience for the Holy Father during the Great Jubilee to be able to offer Mass in the Cenacle of Jerusalem, that Upper Room where Jesus himself 2000 years before first pronounced those life saving words. The Pope found himself in that very place following the Lord's command, "Do this in memory of me."(Lk 22:19)

So began what we now know as the Great Easter Triduum. The Church was born of this paschal mystery. The Acts of the Apostles recounts how the early Church devoted itself with regularity "to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, **to the breaking of the bread**, and the prayers." It has been so through the ages.

The very blood, which was offered in anticipation at the Last Supper, began to flow and fall upon the ground later that evening in the garden across the Kidron valley from the Upper Room as "his sweat became as drops of blood." Tradition would place some of the ancient, gnarled olive trees of present day Gethsemane as witnesses to this hallowed event.

Although deeply disturbed in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus does not flee his "hour". With every Eucharistic celebration, the priest is joined with his people in celebration of this paschal mystery. "They are almost tangibly returned," the Holy Father says, "to his 'hour'." He notes further that through this *mysterium fidei*, this *mystery of faith*, there is brought forth in the Church a mysterious oneness in time between the *Triduum* and the passage of the centuries.

The celebration of every Mass should lead to a profound amazement and gratitude not only in the Church but most especially within the minister of the Eucharist himself. "It is he," the Holy Father emphasizes, "that puts his voice at the disposal of the One who spoke these words in the Upper Room." He, and every priest who shares this role, continues to fulfill the Lord's desires throughout the generations.

By means of ***Ecclesia de Eucharistia*** John Paul II wishes to re-ignite this Eucharistic amazement in all of us. Harkening back to two previous encyclicals, he points out, "The Eucharist is both a 'mystery of faith' and a 'mystery of light'. Whenever the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the faithful can in some way relive the experience of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: 'their eyes were opened and they recognized him'(Lk 24:31)."

The program, which the pope sets before us at the opening of this third millennium, is "to contemplate the face of Christ" and to do so "with Mary."

The Holy Father introduces a personal tone as he recalls his own 25 yrs. in the papacy and the many locations, great and humble, where he has celebrated the Eucharist. He realizes its cosmic dimension uniting heaven with earth. The Pope notes how, through the priestly ministry of the Church in this great mystery of faith, the eternal Son returns redeemed to the Father what first came from the hands of God the Creator.

John Paul adds that the Eucharist, as Christ's saving presence in the community of the faithful and its spiritual food, is the most precious possession that the Church can have in her journey through history. For this reason the Church has always expressed a "lively concern" for the Eucharist. He enumerates the many significant encyclicals and documents issued over the past one hundred years by his predecessors. He points to his own apostolic letter, *Dominicae Cenae* directed to all the ministers of the Eucharist at the beginning of his Pontificate, as the basis for his currently more developed instruction.

The Pope continues by praising the reform inaugurated by the Council, which has ushered in a more active and fruitful participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar on the part of the laity. Additional happy results have followed, such as *the faithful's adoration of the Blessed Sacrament* as a daily practice in many places, as well as participation in Eucharistic processions on the feast of Corpus Christi.

"Unfortunately," the Holy Father laments, "alongside these lights, there are *shadows*." He then enumerates some of the abuses that must be dealt with. The Pontiff concludes the introduction saying, "The Eucharist is too great a gift to tolerate ambiguity and depreciation.

The Mystery of Faith:

In the first chapter of his encyclical the Holy Father stresses the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist. The identity is plainly stated, "It is the sacrifice of the Cross perpetuated down the ages."

The Eucharist is Christ's self gift to us in his sacred humanity, his gift par excellence. This gift transcends all times as it participates in the divine eternity. The sacrifice was offered to the Father. Only after Christ had given us the means of participating in it "as if we were present there," did he return to the Father. The Holy Father wishes to join us all in adoration of this great mystery.

The Pope says that the Eucharist is not merely the gift of his body and blood offered as food but its essentially sacrificial nature is brought out by the words the Savior adds, "which is given for you", "which is poured out for you". Hence, the Mass is at the same time inseparably the sacrifice of the Cross and the sacred banquet of communion.

John Paul reiterates some time honored truths: namely, that the Eucharist is not merely a faith-filled remembrance but that the Church experiences a real contact; that the Eucharist applies its effects to all of all ages; that the sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice. The Pope quotes St. John Chrysostom, the fourth century Bishop of Jerusalem, as saying, "We always offer the same Lamb, not one today and another tomorrow, but always the same one...".

The Holy Father concludes our thoughts for today, “The Mass makes present the sacrifice of the Cross; it does not add to that sacrifice nor does it multiply it; ...it is the definitive redemptive sacrifice always present in time.” In essence, the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist is bound to the Cross.

The Eucharist, the Son's sacrificial offering to the Father on our behalf, is his gift to the Father. The Father accepted this self gift and in exchange granted the gift of new, immortal life in the Resurrection. The Holy Father follows up this important understanding, “In giving his sacrifice to the Church, Christ has also made his own the spiritual sacrifice of the Church, which is called to offer herself in union with the sacrifice of Christ.”

Fathers of the Church, such as Saint Ambrose and Saint Cyril of Alexandria, are one with the Pope in reminding us that the memorial re-presentation is ours in a very significant way. John Paul tells us that the Eucharistic Sacrifice makes present the entire passover event, the passion, death, and resurrection that crowned his sacrifice.

We come at this point to a doctrine of the Eucharist that has generated no little interest in modern day Catholic society. The “T” word, **TRANSUBSTANTIATION**, has been under attack in some quarters. The Holy Father sees fit at this juncture to use the very words of Pope Paul VI in his encyclical of some years ago, in which he spelled out precisely what the Church meant when it referred to the **real presence** of Christ in the Eucharist. In speaking of the special presence involved in this sacramental re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice, Pope Paul said, “[it] is called ‘real’ not as a way of excluding all other types of presence as if they were ‘not real’, but because it is a presence in the fullest sense: a *substantial* presence whereby Christ, the God-Man, is wholly and entirely present’. We note the word, *substantial*. Hence we have the word, “trans-substantiation”.

Chapter 1

The Holy Father introduced a most significant word, *transubstantiation*. It defines precisely what we believe happens in the miracle of the Eucharist. He quotes the Council of Trent: “The consecration of the bread and wine effects the change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood.” Any alteration in that understanding is not Catholic.

This meaning is inescapable. St. Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem in the latter part of the fourth century, explained it to his people this way: “Do not see in the bread and wine merely natural elements, because the Lord has expressly said that they are his body and his blood: faith assures you of this, though your senses suggest otherwise.” Centuries later in the Eucharistic hymn we still sing today, the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas Aquinas, penned those beautiful words, *Adoro te devote, latens Deitas (Devotedly I adore you, O Hidden Deity)*.

Every explanation of this reality must maintain an objective reality independent of the mind. After the change effected by the consecration, the bread and wine cease to exist and have truly become the body

and blood of the Lord Jesus. Pope John Paul harkens back to the words of the Savior himself reminding us that this is no mere metaphorical food: "My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." (Jn 6:53) It is the body and blood of the living Jesus.

Ultimately, this Eucharistic sacrifice tends toward union in Holy Communion. In the *Roman Missal* the celebrant prays: "Grant that we who are nourished by his body and blood may be filled with his Holy Spirit, and become one body, one spirit in Christ." And so it is.

In the concluding paragraphs of this first chapter, the Holy Father tells us that the Eucharist is the veritable "anticipation of heaven, the 'pledge of future glory'." St. Ignatius, a very early successor Bishop to Peter at Antioch, defined the Eucharistic Bread as a "medicine of immortality, an antidote to death." Pope John Paul explains it this way: "Those who feed on Christ in the Eucharist need not wait until the hereafter to receive eternal life: *they already possess it on earth*, as the first fruits of a future fullness which will embrace man in his totality."

The Eucharist expresses and reinforces our communion with the Church in heaven. The Pope says that in celebrating the sacrifice of the Lamb (the Mass) we are united to the heavenly "liturgy" and become part of that celestial throng which cries out: "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev 7:10)

This means that we are implanted with the seed of a living hope in our daily commitment to the work before us leading to the expectation of a "new heavens" and a "new earth." (Rev 21:1) John Paul says that this is the hope that must shine forth amidst the many problems that "darken the horizon of our time."

Finally our Pontiff points out how significant it is that, while the Synoptic Gospels recount the institution of the Eucharist, the Gospel of John in the "washing of the feet" brings out its profound meaning in portraying Jesus as the teacher of communion and of service. In the Eucharist not only are our lives to be changed but in view of the great Christian hope of eternal life, we also must become *truly Eucharistic*; committed to transforming the world around us.

The Eucharist Builds the Church (Chapter II):

Vatican II says that "the Eucharist is at the center of the process of the Church's growth." Again in its words the Pope adds, "As often as the sacrifice of the Cross ... is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out."

As the Covenant of Sinai, in the sprinkling of blood, laid the foundation for the old covenant, the actions and words of Jesus at the Last Supper laid the foundation of the new messianic community. The Eucharist was there "*as a causal influence*" at the foundation of the new covenant. At the invitation of Jesus the Twelve Apostles, the seeds of the new Israel, formed the beginnings of the sacred hierarchy. At this Eucharist they were the first to receive sacramental communion. Until the end of the age through succeeding generations we, the Church, are to be built up in the same manner.

The Holy Father further tells us that during the Eucharistic Sacrifice we experience a "full sharing" in sacramental communion. In his words not only does "*each receive Christ*," but also "*Christ receives each*

of us.” In a very real sense there is a mutual “abiding” of Christ and of each of his followers: “Abide in me, and I in you.”(Jn 15:4)

John Paul says that because of this unique union, the mission of the Church, the People of the New Covenant, stands in continuity with the mission of Christ. In and through Eucharistic Communion, the goal of evangelization finds fulfillment in the communion of mankind with Christ and in him with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Eucharistic Communion while confirming the Church in her unity as the body of Christ is, at the same time, continually fortified through the sanctification of us, the faithful, by the divine Paraclete Himself.

We conclude this relatively short chapter with the Pope noting the fraternal communion which results from participation in the Eucharist. The *unifying power* of the body of Christ in building human community counters the seeds of disunity occasioned by sin.

In addition the Holy Father says, “Worship of the Eucharist outside of the Mass is of inestimable value for the life of the Church.” He reminds Pastors that promoting adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is their responsibility through personal witness. The Pope lauds the time spent before the Blessed Sacrament as an experience of John resting on the breast of Jesus. He speaks of his own personal experience of prayer and adoration before this Most Holy Sacrament and how he has drawn strength and consolation from it.

The Magisterium of the Church along with significant saints such as Alphonsus Ligouri have repeatedly advocated this form of devotion. John Paul along with Pope Paul VI emphasizes that “In the course of the day the faithful should not omit visiting the Blessed Sacrament.” These visits are a sign of gratitude, an expression of love, and an acknowledgement of the Lord’s presence.

Apostolicity of the Eucharist and the Church (Chapter III):

Of the four marks of the Church, one, holy, catholic and apostolic, the Holy Father feels called now to take up its apostolicity. As the Church is, so is the Eucharist.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church assigns three ways in which the Church is apostolic. In the first sense the Church remains founded on the Apostles and in like manner the Eucharist is similarly grounded; commanded to be handed down to us through their successors.

In the second sense the Holy Father, referring to *the Catechism*, indicates that it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that the “good deposit” of the faith is forwarded down to us. So too the Eucharist is celebrated in conformity with that faith even as it has been defined ever more precisely over the years by the Magisterium of the Church. The Pope emphasizes that this faith remains unchanged and it is essential for the Church that it remain so.

In the final sense we see that the Church has received her apostolic teaching from the Apostles themselves. Succession from the Apostles through the Sacrament of Holy Orders is essential for the Church to exist “in a proper and full sense”. Pope John Paul says that the Eucharist also expresses this apostolicity even as the faithful join in its offering because of their royal priesthood received in Baptism.

However, he clarifies that it is only the ordained priest, acting in the person of Christ, who brings about the sacrifice and offers it to God in the name of the people.

Last time the Holy Father introduced the term, “in the person of Christ,” which carries a critically precise meaning especially with regards the Eucharist. It means more than simply acting “in the name of” or “in the place of” Christ. No, the *ordained* priest is *sacramentally identified* with Christ and no one in the gathered assembly can substitute for him. It must be essentially so in order to link the Eucharistic consecration to the sacrifice of the Cross and the Last Supper.

The Pope takes pains to point out that a priest as president of the assembly is an absolute necessity. He is a gift which we (*and here I add my own specification*), the assembly of St. Bartholomew, “*receive through episcopal succession going back to the Apostles.*” Nothing, and no one, can substitute for the priest.

Pope John Paul notes that other ecclesial communities (other denominations), suffer from a lack of full unity which should flow from Baptism. Specifically because of the lack of the sacrament of Orders, we believe that they “*have not preserved the genuine and total reality of the Eucharistic mystery.*” As a result Catholics may not receive the communion of other faiths. The Pope says that to do so would create an ambiguity about the nature of the Eucharist and consequently, we would fail in our duty to bear witness to the truth. Without demeaning in any way our separated brethren’s beliefs, the Eucharist is an essential with which ecumenism must come to grips and face squarely “head-on”.

As we saw in our last installment the Priest is absolutely essential for the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. At the same time it is the Eucharistic Sacrifice that effectively “makes” the Priest. The Holy Father notes how it gives unity to the Priest’s life since the Eucharist is at its very heart and center. He recalls Vatican II’s recommendation that the Priest celebrate the Eucharist daily for it is always “an act of Christ and the Church.”

John Paul reminds Priests of their role in stimulating vocations. He tells them that it is in the Eucharist that the prayer for vocations is most closely united to the prayer of Christ, the Eternal High Priest. While at the same time it is also in the diligent carrying out of their Eucharistic ministry that young men will find a powerful example and incentive for responding generously to God’s call.

The Pope says that parishes find their identity in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. However, for this to occur the presence of a presbyter who alone can celebrate *in persona Christi* is required. Solutions, which call upon others to lead the community in prayer, are but temporary while it awaits a priest. It is always incumbent upon such leadership “to keep alive in the community a genuine ‘hunger’ for the Eucharist.” In the final analysis, no Christian community comes about unless centered in the celebration of the most Holy Eucharist.

The Eucharist and Ecclesial Communion (Chapter IV):

In this chapter the Holy Father turns his attention to the reality of the communion which the Church is called to promote between herself and the Triune God and among the faithful. This happens through

identification with the Father's only begotten Son in Holy Spirit. The cultivation of this desire for union with God began the practice of making "spiritual communions" (acts of desire for communion), a practice already fostered in the 16th century by Saint Theresa of Avila when one was unable to receive Holy Communion or go to Mass.

The Eucharist however is not the starting point of this communion but presupposes it as it is the expression of both its invisible and visible dimension. The invisible speaks of our union with the Father and among ourselves while the visible entails our union with the teaching of the Apostles, the Sacraments and the Church's hierarchical order.

Invisible communion is an ever growing in the life of grace which makes us "partakers in the divine nature." (2 Pet 1:4) Keeping this invisible unity in tact is a necessity as the Apostle Paul warns, "Let a man examine himself..." (1 Cor 11: 28) St. John Chrysostom a few centuries later would raise his voice as well in protest of anyone approaching the "sacred table with a sullied and corrupt conscience." Echoing the Council of Trent, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that anyone "conscious of a grave(mortal) sin must receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to communion." When this situation is flagrant and public, the Church has an obligation to intervene.

We should give thanks to the Holy Trinity, the Holy Father says, for an ardent desire felt by the faithful throughout the world for unity among all Christians. He further says that this longing prompts us to turn to the Eucharist.

Nevertheless, in the Eucharist we find a paradox. The Eucharistic Sacrifice prays that the Father of Mercies will grant the fullness of the Holy Spirit so that we might "become one body one spirit in Christ." Yet it is not possible to celebrate together the same Eucharistic liturgy until the bonds of communion are fully established. Still we do have this burning desire to celebrate the one Eucharist in the Lord.

Happily, when it is not a matter of bringing about intercommunion but of grave spiritual need for an individual not in full communion with the Catholic Church, the administration of the Eucharist is possible. Pope John Paul II says that it is a source of joy that an individual Christian who holds the same faith as ourselves in regards to the sacrament of Eucharist and additionally Penance and Anointing of the Sick, greatly desires them and freely requests them, may in fact receive them. Conversely in certain instances and particular circumstances, Catholics may request the same sacraments from ***Churches with a valid sacrament of orders.***

The Dignity of the Eucharistic Celebration (Chapter V):

In the synoptic accounts of the Last Supper we are struck by the simplicity and the solemnity with which Jesus instituted this great sacrament. A previous account of the woman anointing Christ's body with a precious oil anticipates in a sense the honor due the sacrament and the infinite mystery of his person therein.

The Holy Father notes how the story of the Last Supper presents with a certain sobriety and solemnity the words spoken by Christ over the bread and wine while tying them to the handing over of his

body and the shedding of his blood. In doing this the New Testament ritual of the early Church already exhibited an understanding of its distinct origin in the Old.

Following the example of the woman and her anointing of Jesus, the Church over the centuries “feared no ‘extravagance’ devoting her best”, when it came to the Eucharistic celebration. John Paul explains, “Though the idea of a “banquet” naturally suggests familiarity, the Church has never yielded to the temptation to trivialize this “intimacy” with her Spouse... the “banquet” always remains a sacrificial banquet marked by the blood shed on Golgotha. The Eucharist is truly a “sacred banquet” in which the simplicity of the signs conceals the unfathomable holiness of God.”

Through the years then, interior devotion toward this great Sacrament has found expression externally through liturgy, architecture, painting, music, etc. Here the Holy Father touches on something especially pertinent for our times; namely, that the design of altars and tabernacles was not simply motivated by artistic inspiration but even more so by a clear understanding of this Mystery of Mysteries.

The Holy Father continues by giving thanks to the Church of the East for having preserved in its sacred art a remarkable sense of mystery. In the patrimony of both the East and the West that truly belongs to all believers is a sense of hope toward a fullness of communion and worship which would, in effect, make of the Church an icon of the Most Holy Trinity.

While the Church has always left ample room for freedom of expression, the Eucharistic mystery expressed in sacred art requires a submission to the norms of the Church. That development in art which took place in more ancient heritages continues to take place in the “younger” Christian places. These adaptations can and do foster a healthy inculturation by transforming the society in which they find themselves. For this reason, as this work progresses it must do so in close association with the mind of the Church. The treasure of the Faith is too precious to be left to a ‘willy nilly’ experimentation resulting in its impoverishment. John Paul II is insistent that because the Sacred Liturgy celebrates one Faith, the heritage of the whole Church, it cannot be determined by local Churches in isolation from the universal Church.

The Pope laments the abuses which crept into the post-conciliar liturgical reform through a misguided sense of creativity and adaptation. Unauthorized innovations were introduced which became a source of suffering for many. It is very clear that the Liturgy is never anyone’s private property, whether of the celebrant or the community. We are called to a renewed sense of urgency to follow the liturgical forms that give witness to the one universal Church made present in every celebration of the Eucharist.

In order to bring about more clarity in this regard the Holy Father is having a document drawn up by the proper curial office, which will include prescriptions of a juridical nature. The Liturgy deals with too great a mystery to be treated lightly by a disregard for its sacredness and its universality.

At the School of Mary, Woman of the Eucharist (Chapter VI)

When thinking of the relationship between the Church and the Eucharist, we must also consider Mary, Mother and model of the Church. Given the interior disposition of her soul, Mary surely is the

“woman of the Eucharist.” The Holy Father cannot help but surmise that she must have participated in the celebration of many a Eucharist in first century Christianity.

In a certain sense Mary lived the Eucharistic faith even before the institution of the Eucharist. Pope John Paul sees a continuity between the passion and resurrection, and what occurred in the Annunciation. In her own person she as it were anticipated what happens to all who sacramentally receive the body and blood of Jesus in Communion.

At the occasion of the Visitation the Holy Father considers Mary to be the first living “tabernacle” of the Incarnate Christ who is adored by Elizabeth. Further, the enraptured gaze of Mary at the sight of her Lord in her arms on the night of the Nativity models well for us our attitude upon receiving his Eucharistic presence in Holy Communion.

In his closing remarks of this section the Holy Father recalls for us how Mary finds herself in a spiritual communion throughout her life at Christ’s side, and not only on Calvary. She made her own in an original way the sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist. What must have been Mary’s thoughts when she heard repeated by the apostles the very words of self-offering uttered by Jesus at the Last Supper: “This is my body, given for you!” What were her feelings as she received Eucharistically that same body which she had once conceived beneath her heart!

The Pope’s meditation uncovers for us how through John we are conjoined with Mary at the foot of the cross: This is your son; ...this is your Mother. At the same time he says that Mary as Mother of the Church is equally present at each of our Eucharists. The *Magnificat* read in a “Eucharistic key” helps us to understand the close connection between *Mary* Mother of the Church, *we* the Church and the *Eucharist*. The Pope says that the Eucharist has been given to us in a sense so that our life, like that of Mary, may become a *Magnificat* as well.

With this summation we have arrived at the first of the last two installments. The Holy Father now remembers with joyous heart his fiftieth anniversary as a priest coming as it does in his twenty-fifth year as the Pope. He calls to mind how each day through the grace of ordination he has been able to gaze upon the Eucharistic presence he himself has confected. “Where,” in the words of the Pontiff, “time and space have in some way ‘merged’ and the drama of Golgotha is re-presented in a living way.”

“*Ave verum corpus,*” his heart sings, “*natum de Maria Virgine, vere passum, immolatum, in cruce pro homine.*” (Hail true body, born of the Virgin Mary, truly having suffered; immolated on the cross for mankind.) Here we are at the “heart of the world,” the “Church’s treasure.” “*Adoro te devote, latens deitas*” (Humbly I adore you, O Hidden Deity) We join our voices with John Paul’s.

The Holy Father recalls for us how we are confronted with a great and transcendent mystery. As we enter upon this third millennium it is not a matter of inventing a new program. The program already exists in the Gospel and Christ is its center. “In him, the Pope says, “we live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfillment in the heavenly Jerusalem.” The Eucharist is our all. To disregard it would be to succumb to our own deficiency.

The essential elements of the Eucharistic Mystery: sacrifice, presence and banquet may not in any way be diminished. The Holy Father says that it must be lived in its integrity. We must be truly conscious of this great gift; eager to hand on to the future the great treasure that it is.

There can be no excess in our care for this mystery, for in this sacrament is recapitulated the whole mystery of our eternal salvation. It is in the school of the saints that we are taught the Eucharist as a lived reality in daily life. Especially in Mary do we see the transforming power of the Eucharist. She, in effect, is the epitome of what we all want to be.

The Pope says that in the presence of this mystery, reason finds its limits but the heart, opened to God's grace, knows the response that is required. It bends low "in adoration and unbounded love."

And so, we have come to the end of this great Papal document on the Eucharist. As with so many of John Paul's writings, it is most advantageous to reread them. I recommend just that with this one as well. Much more remains to be mined from it. This has only been rendered you so as to wet the appetite. *Bon appetit.*