

Reviving Eucharistic Coherence in an Era of Incoherence

Keynote Address for the 25th Annual Conference of
Our Sorrowful Mother's Ministry, Vandalia, Illinois

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PREFATORY REMARKS

As Bishop of this Local Church, it is a good to be with you for this the 25th Annual Conference of Our Sorrowful Mother's Ministry. I congratulate all of you on celebrating the Silver Jubilee of this ministry, whose mission is to bring people closer to Christ, and there can be no better way to do that than by devotion to His—and our—Sorrowful Mother. This year also marks the Tenth Anniversary of this Sanctuary of Our Sorrowful Mother, which I had the privilege of dedicating on June 24, 2012, the Solemnity of the Birth of Saint John the Baptist. As we celebrate these significant milestones, I especially commend Debbie Pryor and Vanessa Keck, who founded Our Sorrowful Mother's Ministry, prompted by their fervent desire to provide a place of love and mercy that encourages reconciliation with one another and with God. Thank you!

The theme of your conference this year is, "As the Family Goes, So Goes the Whole World in Which We Live." That certainly is true, which is evident in a negative way in the recent increases in crime and the decay of our society, while at the same time we see broken marriages and the devastating effect this has on children.

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The antidote to this decay is for families to turn to God in prayer. We have all heard the saying, “The Family that prays together, stays together,” first used during the Roman Catholic Family Rosary Crusade by Father Patrick Peyton. There is much truth to that saying as well. Of course, it is good for families to pray the Rosary together, but it is even more important for families to participate in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass together, since the Eucharist is the “source and summit of the Christian Life,” as we are reminded in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.¹ Many of my pastors in our diocese report, unfortunately, that the vast majority of parents with children in our Catholic schools do not attend Mass on Sunday. Our Catholic schools exist primarily to hand on the Catholic faith to the next generation, but that mission is undermined by parents who drop off their children at the Catholic school expecting us somehow to instill Catholic values in them, but totally contradict our efforts by neglecting to take their children to Mass on Sunday. We must redouble our efforts to convince parents that it is essential for them to bring their children to Mass every Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation.

At last year’s conference for Our Sorrowful Mother’s Ministry, the topic for my talk was, “Seeking Eucharistic Coherence in an Era of Incoherence.” I pointed out that the phrase “Eucharistic coherence” was used by the Latin American bishops in their 2007 Aparecida Document, in which they insisted on “Eucharistic coherence” in their Catholic communities. I noted that then-Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, now Pope Francis, played a crucial role in the development of the “Aparecida Document,” which was issued by the bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean after the fifth general conference of

CELAM. I quoted paragraph 436 of the Document, which is instructive, given current issues:

We hope that legislators, heads of government, and health professionals, conscious of the dignity of human life and of the rootedness of the family in our peoples, will defend and protect it from the abominable crimes of abortion and euthanasia; that is their responsibility. Hence, in response to government laws and provisions that are unjust in the light of faith and reason, conscientious objection should be encouraged. We must adhere to "eucharistic coherence," that is, be conscious that they [i.e., the aforementioned legislators, heads of government, and health professionals] cannot receive Holy Communion and at the same time act with deeds or words against the commandments, particularly when abortion, euthanasia, and other grave crimes against life and the family are encouraged. This responsibility weighs particularly over legislators, heads of governments, and health professionals.

I concluded by saying that, in seeking Eucharistic coherence in an incoherent era, it is important to remember that the ultimate goal is conversion and readmission to communion, not exclusion and permanent expulsion from the community of faith. Even when a difficult decision must be made not to admit someone to Holy Communion until there has been repentance and reconciliation, such discipline does not contradict the love by which it is motivated.

Picking up where I left off last year on the topic "Seeking Eucharistic Coherence in an Era of Incoherence," I would slightly re-word the title of my topic this evening as, "Reviving Eucharistic Coherence in an Era of Incoherence" in light of the fact that that the Catholic Bishops of the United States in the last year have launched a Eucharistic Revival and have issued a doctrinal statement on the meaning of the Eucharist in the life of the Church.

THE MYSTERY OF THE EUCHARIST

In November of 2021, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops at our meeting in Baltimore approved a document on the meaning of the Eucharist, entitled, *The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church*. It has the essentials of the doctrine and the discipline on the Eucharist and will be helpful as we prepare for the Eucharistic Revival that is being planned in our dioceses across our nation over the next three years.

Since much of the reporting on the meeting was distorted through the secular media, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the main points of what this document actually says. I encourage you to read the entire document, along with a free two-hour online course on the new document presented by Bishop Andrew Cozzens, which is available online at www.usccb.org.²

Contrary to what you may have seen in the headlines of newspapers, this document was not primarily about the eligibility of certain Catholic politicians to receive Holy Communion. The main purpose of this document is in relation to the Eucharistic Revival announced by the U.S. Catholic Bishops.³ The criteria for the worthy reception of Holy Communion are discussed, but they flow from the foundational understanding of the meaning of the Eucharist, as explained by Christ Himself when He said, “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you” (n. 4, quoting Jn 6:53).

First of all, it is important that we understand the Eucharist as a sacrifice “because all that Jesus did for the salvation of humanity is made present in the celebration of the Eucharist, including his sacrificial death and resurrection” (n. 14).

The core belief of Catholics about the mystery of the Eucharist is our faith in the Real Presence of Christ: “The reality that, in the Eucharist, bread and wine become the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ without ceasing to appear as bread and wine to our five senses is one of the central mysteries of the Catholic faith. This faith is a doorway through which we, like the saints and mystics before us, may enter into a deeper perception of the mercy and love manifested in and through Christ’s sacramental presence in our midst. While one thing is seen with our bodily eyes, another reality is perceived through the eyes of faith. The real, true, and substantial presence of Christ in the Eucharist is the most profound reality of the sacrament” (n. 21).

It is also important to understand the relationship of Holy Communion, with a capital “C”, to communion, with a small “c”, which refers to the bond of unity we share with Christ and with other members of the Catholic community. “The Sacrament of the Eucharist is called Holy Communion precisely because, by placing us in intimate communion with the sacrifice of Christ, we are placed in intimate communion with him and, through him, with each other” (n. 25). When that communion with Christ and the Christian community is ruptured through sin, our suitability to receive Holy Communion is adversely affected until we repent, confess our sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and receive absolution from a priest.

Our response to God’s great gift of the Eucharist is thanksgiving and worship. An essential part of our grateful response to God’s generous gift of Himself in the Eucharist is how we treat other people. “As Christians, we bear the responsibility to promote the life and dignity of the human person, and to love and to protect the most vulnerable in

our midst: the unborn, migrants and refugees, victims of racial injustice, the sick and the elderly” (n. 38).

Our failure to love God and our neighbor as we should is called sin. “One is not to celebrate Mass or receive Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin without having sought the Sacrament of Reconciliation and received absolution. As the Church has consistently taught, a person who receives Holy Communion while in a state of mortal sin not only does not receive the grace that the sacrament conveys; he or she commits the sin of sacrilege by failing to show the reverence due to the sacred Body and Blood of Christ. St. Paul warns us that whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself (I Cor 11:27-29). To receive the Body and Blood of Christ while in a state of mortal sin represents a contradiction. The person who, by his or her own action, has broken communion with Christ and his Church but receives the Blessed Sacrament, acts incoherently, both claiming and rejecting communion at the same time. It is thus a counter-sign, a lie -- it expresses a communion that in fact has been broken” (n. 47).

Last year’s document on *The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church* repeated what the U.S. Bishops stated in 2006 in our document, *“Happy Are Those Who Are Called to His Supper”*: *On Preparing to Receive Christ Worthily in the Eucharist*: “If a Catholic in his or her personal or professional life were knowingly and obstinately to reject the defined doctrines of the Church, or knowingly and obstinately to repudiate her

definitive teaching on moral issues, however, he or she would seriously diminish his or her communion with the Church. Reception of Holy Communion in such a situation would not accord with the nature of the Eucharistic celebration, so that he or she should refrain." The document on *The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church* then adds this comment: "Reception of Holy Communion in such a situation is also likely to cause scandal for others, weakening their resolve to be faithful to the demands of the Gospel" (n. 48).⁴

Next comes a discussion of the concepts of "visible communion" and "invisible communion": "One's communion with Christ and His Church, therefore, involves both one's 'invisible communion' (being in the state of grace) and one's 'visible communion.' St. John Paul II explained: 'The judgment of one's state of grace obviously belongs only to the person involved, since it is a question of examining one's conscience. However, in cases of outward conduct which is seriously, clearly and steadfastly contrary to the moral norm, the Church, in her pastoral concern for the good order of the community and out of respect for the sacrament, cannot fail to feel directly involved. The *Code of Canon Law* refers to this situation of a manifest lack of proper moral disposition when it states that those who "obstinately persist in manifest grave sin" are not to be admitted to Eucharistic communion.' It is the special responsibility of the diocesan bishop to work to remedy situations that involve public actions at variance with the visible communion of the Church and the moral law. Indeed, he must guard the integrity of the sacrament, the visible communion of the Church, and the salvation of souls" (n. 49).

The last point that I would like to emphasize about the document on *The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church* concerns the importance of making a good examination of conscience, saying, “Before we receive Holy Communion, we should make a good examination of conscience to ensure that we are properly disposed to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord. If we find that we have broken communion with Christ and his Church, we are not properly disposed to receive the Eucharist. However, we should not despair since the Lord in his mercy has given us a remedy. He loves us and deeply desires to forgive us and to restore our communion with him. . . . In the words of Pope Francis, we say to all Catholics in our country: ‘Don’t be afraid to go to the Sacrament of Confession, where you will meet Jesus who forgives you’” (n. 50).

These highlights from the USCCB document on *The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church* should be kept in mind as dioceses and parishes across the country engage in the National Eucharistic Revival over the next two years. Our Diocese is planning to participate in this Eucharistic Revival by observing a Year of the Eucharist, which will be opened at our former Cathedral, Saints Peter and Paul Church in Alton, on December 8, 2022, then conclude December 8, 2023, at our current Cathedral in Springfield. Parish activities throughout the Eucharistic Year will be encouraged, such as Corpus Christi processions, the Eucharistic miracle display, Eucharistic adoration, and study of Eucharistic documents. Our Diocesan Eucharistic Year will also include the Centennial Celebration of the transfer of the See City of our Diocese from Alton to Springfield on October 28, 2023, at the Bank of Springfield Center in Springfield, an indoor venue that seats almost 8,000 people. I have asked pastors not to schedule any

weddings or Saturday evening Masses that day, so that people from all over our diocese could come to take part in the event. Prior to the celebration of the Jubilee Mass, at which I will be the main celebrant, joined by the priests of our diocese, we will have some prominent Guest Speakers, including Bishop Robert Barron, Founder of Word on Fire and Bishop of Winona-Rochester in Minnesota, and Doctor Scott Hahn, Professor of Biblical Theology and the New Evangelization at Franciscan University of Steubenville. The Eucharistic Revival will culminate with a National Eucharistic Congress July 17-21, 2024, in Indianapolis, from which it is planned that the entire Church in the United States “will be sent on mission to share the gift of our Eucharistic Lord with their local communities and beyond.”⁵

I encourage all of you to take part in this Eucharistic Revival. As we promote a greater understanding and appreciation for the Real Present of Our Lord in Holy Communion, may we remember that the “Lord is generous to us with his grace; and so we, by his grace, should always humbly ask him to give us what we need. . . . Let us adore Jesus who ever remains with us, on all the altars of the world, and lead others to share in our joy!” (nn. 58-59).

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1324.

² For the text of the document as well as video resources, see: <https://www.usccb.org/resources/mystery-eucharist-life-church>.

³ See: <https://www.usccb.org/resources/national-eucharistic-revival-my-flesh-life-world-bishop-andrew-cozzens>, and <https://www.eucharisticrevival.org/>.

⁴ USCCB, *“Happy Are Those Who Are Called to His Supper”*: *On Preparing to Receive Christ Worthily in the Eucharist* (2006), p. 11, citing the *Code of Canon Law*, can. 916: “A person who is conscious of grave sin is not to celebrate Mass or receive the body of the Lord without previous sacramental confession unless there is a grave reason and there is no opportunity to confess; in this case the person is to remember the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition which includes the resolution of confessing as soon as possible.” Quoted in *The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church*, n. 48.

⁵ National Eucharistic Congress, “Mission, Vision, Timeline,” accessed online September 21, 2022, at <https://www.eucharisticrevival.org/mission-vision-and-timeline>.