ECCLESIADEEUCHARISTIA

ECCLESIA DE EUCHARISTIA

Introduction: The Mysterious Character of the Eucharist and the Church

1. “The Church draws her life from the Eucharist.” This truth lies at the heart of the *mysterium ecclesiae*. The “divine sacrament” has accompanied the Church since Pentecost, filling her with trusting hope as “the source and summit of the Christian life” and “the Church’s entire spiritual wealth” (Vat. II). In the Sacrament of the Altar the Church fully discovers Christ’s boundless love.

2. This most holy Sacrament was instituted in the Cenacle of Jerusalem. The Pope, who celebrated Mass there in 2000, quotes the scriptural account. Those words (the *mysterium eucharisticum*), perhaps not understood by the Apostles at the Last Supper, became clear upon the completion of the *mysterium paschale*.

3. The Church was born of this *mysterium paschale*, as the Acts of the Apostles makes clear. Two millennia later we continue to relive that earliest image of the Church at every celebration of the Eucharist. The institution of the Eucharist sacramentally anticipated the Lord’s shedding of blood from the Agony in Gethsemane to Golgotha.

4. Whenever the Eucharist is celebrated at the Holy Sepulchre, there is an almost tangible return to the “hour” of Christ, that moment toward which he had always looked—that “holy hour” of our Redemption, of His Cross and glorification. Every Mass harks back in spirit to that place and that hour when only John, Mary, and the faithful women were present.

5. In the proclamation of the *mysterium fidei* at Mass, the Church reveals her own mystery (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*) as she points to Christ in the mystery of His Passion. Her foundation and wellspring is forever gathered, foreshadowed and concentrated in His Eucharistic gift, which brought about a mysterious “oneness in time” between the paschal triduum and all the centuries since then. The celebrant (who says again what Christ said in the Upper Room) and the faithful should be filled with profound amazement and gratitude.

6. “I would like to rekindle this Eucharistic ‘amazement’...in continuity with the heritage of the Jubilee..., *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, and its Marian crowning, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*.” Contemplating Christ’s face with Mary—the Church’s “program” for the third millennium—means that we recognize Him in the many forms of His presence, above all in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood, as the disciples did in Emmaus. Thus is the Church fed and enlightened by Christ in the Eucharist.

7. Every year on Holy Thursday the Pope has sent a letter to all priests; in this, his 25th anniversary year, he wishes to extend his Eucharistic reflection to the whole Church, both to
thank the Lord for the gifts of the Eucharist and the priesthood and to point out “with new force” the centrality of the Eucharist. By proclaiming this a Year of the Rosary, he also wishes us to contemplate “the Eucharistic face of Christ” with him “at the school of Mary.”

8. The Pope recalls his celebrations of the Eucharist, from his first pastoral assignment in a Polish village to St. Peter’s in Rome, and places where he has traveled throughout the world, from mountain and seaside chapels to stadiums and city squares. This gives the Pope a powerfully universal and even “cosmic” experience because the Eucharist is always celebrated “on the altar of the world,” embracing and permeating all creation by uniting heaven and earth. This is why the Son of God became Man: to redeem all creation and restore it to its Creator in one supreme act of praise. The Eternal High Priest continues to do this through the Church’s priestly ministry. This redemptive restoration is truly the **mysterium fidei** accomplished in the Eucharist.

9. In the Church’s journey through history, the Eucharist is her “most precious possession,” as we see her repeating authoritatively in conciliar and papal documents, especially the decrees of Trent and the encyclicals of Popes Leo XIII, Pius XII, and Paul VI. The Pope also cites the Vatican II constitutions on the Church and on the Sacred Liturgy, and his own apostolic letter, *Dominicae Cenae*. This new encyclical takes up the thread of that document with “even greater emotion and gratitude.”

10. These Magisterial pronouncements have been matched by the interior growth of the Christian community. The Pope cites in particular the liturgical reform initiated by Vatican II, widespread adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and Corpus Christi processions. But there are also shadows which the Pope notes with “profound grief”: abandonment and abusive treatment caused by “an extremely reductive understanding” that strips the Eucharist of its sacrificial meaning, reducing it to a mere fraternal meal; by obscuring the necessity of a ministerial priesthood; and by ecumenical initiatives which are contrary to sound discipline. The Pope hopes this encyclical will help to **banish the dark clouds of unacceptable doctrine and practice** because **“the Eucharist is too great a gift to tolerate ambiguity and depreciation.”**

**Chapter One: The Mystery of Faith**

11. The Eucharist “is not only a reminder, but the sacramental representation” of the Lord’s Passion and Death. It is the gift par excellence left to the Church by Christ, the gift of Himself and His saving work which transcends all times. This sacrifice is so decisive for the salvation of the human race that He returned to the Father only after leaving us the means to share in it as if we had been present. This is the faith lived down through the ages by Christians and constantly reaffirmed by the Magisterium.

12. The Church draws her life from this redeeming sacrifice, which ap-
plies the reconciliation Christ won for all to each one who receives its fruit. The Mass neither adds to the sacrifice nor multiplies it. As a memorial celebration (memorialis demonstratio) it makes present Christ’s unique and definitive sacrifice. The sacrificial nature of the mysterium Eucharisticum is not separate from the Cross, nor only an indirect reference to it.

13. Because it repeats the original sacrifice of Golgotha, the Eucharist is a sacrifice in the strict sense; it is not as if Christ were simply offering spiritual food to the faithful. First and foremost, it is His gift to the Father. The Church is called to offer herself in union with this sacrificial gift, as Vatican II taught.

14. Christ’s Passover includes not only his Passion and Death, but also His Resurrection, which crowned it. Christ becomes the “bread of life” as the living One who has risen. As the Fathers taught, the Eucharist applies the Resurrection to our lives.

15. Christ’s presence in the sacrament is called “real” because unlike other forms of presence, it is a “substantial presence,” as the Council of Trent taught. This is the mysterium fidei which surpasses our understanding and can only be received in faith, as the Catechism teaches. We shall continue to sing with St. Thomas Aquinas “adoro te devote, latens Deitas”—hidden God. This truth has inspired theologians down the centuries to strive in a laudable way for an ever deeper understanding by joining their critical thinking to the Church’s living faith.

16. The saving efficacy of the sacrifice is fully realized when the Lord’s Body and Blood are received in Holy Communion, its intrinsic end. Jesus Himself reassures us in His Eucharistic discourse that this union is a true banquet in which He offers Himself as nourishment (John 6). This is no “metaphorical” food.

17. Through our Communion in His Body and Blood, Christ also grants us His Holy Spirit, as St. Ephrem teaches. In the liturgy of the Mass the Church implores this divine Gift, already poured out in Baptism and sealed in Confirmation.

18. The Eucharist anticipates the final Coming of Christ in glory and gives us a foretaste of the fullness of the heavenly joy He promised. The Eucharist speaks of confident waiting, but in it we already possess eternal life as the first-fruits of that future embrace in its totality. The Eucharist is also the pledge of our bodily resurrection at the end of the world. Receiving His glorified Body, we “digest, as it were, the secret of the resurrection.”

19. The “eschatological tension” kindled by the Eucharist expresses and reinforces our communion with the Church in heaven. This is an aspect of it which merits greater attention: in celebrating Mass we are united liturgically to the heavenly Jerusalem in a manner that “pierces the clouds of our history and lights up our journey.”

20. In consequence, the Eucharist spurs us on our journey and “plants
a seed of living hope in our daily commitment to the work before us.” Expectancy of heaven should increase, not lessen, our sense of responsibility for the world. “I wish to reaffirm this forcefully at the beginning of the new millennium, so that Christians will feel more obliged than ever not to neglect their duties as citizens of this world.” Ours is the task of building a more human world, a world fully in harmony with God’s evangelical plan. This chapter closes with mention of some problems that “darken the horizon of our time”—peace, solidarity, defense of human life....

The Lord wished to remain with us as the promise of a humanity renewed by His love. **All who take part in the Eucharist must be committed to making their lives more completely “Eucharistic.”**

**Chapter Two: Building the Church**

21. The Eucharist is at the center of the Church’s growth (Vat. II), just as it was present at her very origins: with Jesus and His Apostles at the Last Supper. This detail is notable because it shows that He wanted to associate them mysteriously in the Sacrifice about to be completed on the Cross. His actions and words laid the foundation of the new messianic community, the People of the New Covenant. The Apostles were the first to eat and drink in a Sacramental Communion with the Son of God that will continue until the end of the age: “do this in remembrance of Me.”

22. Our incorporation into Christ at Baptism is renewed and consolidated by sharing in the Eucharist. “We can say not only that each of us receives Christ, but also that Christ receives each of us” in an abiding sublime friendship. Thus united to Christ, the People of the New Covenant becomes a “sacrament” for humanity—the light and salt that signifies the salvation He won for all. The Church’s mission is in continuity with Christ’s mission. She draws from the Sacrifice of the Cross and Communion in His Body and Blood the spiritual power she needs to accomplish that mission. **The Eucharist is thereby the source and the summit of evangelization.**

23. Eucharistic Communion also confirms the Church in her unity as the Body of Christ, as we see it expressed by St. Paul (I Corinthians) and by St. John Chrysostom in his commentary. The argument is compelling: Our union with Christ is not only a personal gift and grace, but makes it possible to share in the unity of His Body, the Church. In this union the Son and the Holy Spirit act as one, as we see in the Liturgy of St. James. The Paraclete fortifies the Church and sanctifies her faithful in the Eucharist.

24. The gift of Christ and the Spirit fulfills a yearning for fraternal unity present in every human heart while elevating it far beyond the simple experience of sharing a meal. This unifying power of the Eucharist creates a human community that combats the seeds of disunity so deeply rooted in humanity as a result of sin.
25. Worshipping the Eucharist outside of Mass, which is of inestimable value for the Church, is possible because Christ remains present as long as the species of bread and wine remain. **Pastors have the responsibility to encourage and set the example for Eucharistic adoration, especially exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.** The Pope expresses his own testimony of the strength, consolation, and support to be derived from spending time in spiritual converse, silent adoration, and heartfelt love before Christ present in the Eucharist. This form of prayer, a priceless treasure, is recommended by the Magisterium and supported by the example of the saints (e.g. St. Alphonsus). Whoever wishes to contemplate the Face of Christ in the spirit the Pope has proposed in recent documents cannot fail to practice this aspect of Eucharistic worship. Visiting Christ in the Blessed Sacrament every day is a sign of gratitude, an expression of love, and a recognition of the Lord’s presence (Paul VI).

Chapter Three: The Apostolicity of the Church and the Eucharist

26. Since the Eucharist builds the Church, and the Church makes the Eucharist, it follows that we can apply to the Eucharistic mystery the same words with which we profess the Church to be “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.” It is above all its apostolicity that we consider next.

27. Like the Church, the Eucharist is founded on the Apostles, in the sense that Christ entrusted it to them to be handed down to us by their successors. The Eucharist is also apostolic because it is celebrated in conformity with the unchanging faith of the Apostles.

28. Finally, the Eucharist is apostolic because the ordained priest who offers it to God in the name of all the people receives his ministry in an uninterrupted succession from the Apostles through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Thus only priests recite the Eucharistic prayer at Mass while the people, who share in the common priesthood of the faithful, participate in faith and in silence.

29. The ministerial priest acts in the person of Christ when he brings about the Eucharistic Sacrifice, as the Church has always taught. The phrase, “in persona Christi,” means more than a simple substitution for Christ; there is a specific sacramental identification of the priest with the eternal High Priest, the Author and principal Subject of the Sacrifice. This ministry, like the Eucharist itself, is a gift that radically transcends the power of the assembly and is essential for validly linking the Eucharistic consecration to the Last Supper and the Sacrifice of the Cross. This ministry cannot arise from the community; it is a gift it receives through Episcopal succession going back to the Apostles.

30. This teaching has been the subject of fruitful ecumenical dialogue in recent decades; we must give thanks for the significant progress it has achieved and continue to hope for a full sharing of faith one day. But in the present reality, ecclesial communities lacking the Sacrament of Holy Orders also lack that full-
ness of unity with us. As a consequence, Catholic faithful must refrain from receiving the communion distributed in their celebrations so as not to condone an ambiguity about the nature of the Eucharist, fail to bear witness to the truth, and impede further progress toward full visible unity. **Ecumenical celebrations and prayer in common cannot substitute for the Mass.** While non-Catholic liturgical services may be praiseworthy and even prepare for our common goal of full communion, they cannot replace Eucharistic Communion. When we assert that the power to consecrate the Eucharist has been entrusted only to Catholic bishops and priests, we do not intend to belittle our separated brethren, for in the communion of the one body of Christ this gift redounds to the benefit of the whole People of God.

31. The Eucharist is the center and summit of the Church’s life, and therefore also of the priesthood; indeed, it is the very reason for the sacramental priesthood, for the two sacraments were instituted together. Because of the wide variety of pastoral duties entrusted to priests in the social and cultural conditions of the modern world, there is a real risk that they may lose their focus. How important, then, it is for their spiritual life, as well as for the good of the Church and the world, that priests celebrate Mass daily. This will make all their activities truly Eucharistic. The centrality of the Eucharist in priestly life is also the basis of its centrality in promoting priestly vocations. Diligence in carrying out the Eucharistic ministry, along with active participation of the lay faithful, provides young men with a powerful example and incentive in responding to God’s call.

32. Every Christian community expresses and affirms its identity above all through the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. How distressing it is, then, when a parish has no priest to lead it. Under such circumstances, it is praiseworthy for members of the faithful to lead their brothers and sisters in prayer, but such remedies are temporary. The sacramental incompleteness of these services should inspire the community to beseech the Lord with greater fervor to send it a priest; it also serves as an incentive for a more adequate promotion of vocations (without lowering the standards demanded of candidates).

33. When the scarcity of priests requires non-ordained members of a parish to care for its pastoral needs, they have a responsibility to keep alive in the community a genuine hunger for the Eucharist so that no opportunity for occasional celebrations of Mass is ever overlooked.

Chapter Four: The Eucharist and Ecclesial Communion

34. The concept of an “ecclesiology of communion” with the Triune God and all the faithful has been called the fundamental idea of Vatican II by the world’s bishops in synod. It is not by chance that the Eucharist is called Communion, for it leads all the sacraments in perfecting union with God. Desire for the Eucharist has led to the practice of “spiritual
communion,” so often recommended by the saints.

35. The Eucharist does not initiate communion, but presupposes, consolidates, and brings it to perfection, both in its invisible and visible dimensions: our bond with the Trinity and among ourselves, and with the hierarchical Church’s teaching and sacraments. The profound relation between these two dimensions constitutes the Church as the “sacrament of salvation.” Only in this context can there be a legitimate celebration of the Eucharist and true participation in it.

36. Invisible communion presupposes the life of grace and the practice of the theological virtues (faith, hope, and love) as morally necessary for fruitful reception of Christ’s Body and Blood. For this reason, anyone conscious of grave sin must receive the sacrament of Penance before coming to Communion. “I therefore desire to reaffirm that in the Church [this rule] remains in force, now and in the future.”

37. The Eucharist and Penance are very closely connected because the redeeming Sacrifice of the Cross and its sacramental perpetuation gives rise to a continuous need for conversion and reconciliation with God. The judgment of one’s state of grace entails personal examination of conscience. Because of her concern for “the good order of the community” and her “respect for the Sacrament,” however, the Church becomes directly involved in this judgment when outward conduct “seriously, clearly, and steadfastly” contradicts moral norms (Canon Law is cited).

38. The visible bonds of communion must likewise be intact, especially with respect to the Church’s sacramental economy. Hence it is impossible to give Communion to a person who is not baptized or rejects the full truth of the faith regarding the Eucharistic mystery.

39. While the Eucharist is always offered in a particular community, given the nature of ecclesial communion, it is never a celebration of that community alone. Thus a truly Eucharistic community cannot close in upon itself as though it were self-sufficient, but must preserve harmony with the Roman Pontiff, the Bishop, and all other Catholic communities. The Bishop, in particular, is the visible principle and foundation of unity within his jurisdiction. Communion with the Roman Pontiff, the source of unity of the Bishops and the faithful, is likewise intrinsic to the celebration of the Eucharist.

40. As the early Christian communities were reminded by St. Paul, divisions in Eucharistic gatherings contradict that communion which the Eucharist creates and fosters.

41. The Eucharist’s effectiveness in promoting communion is one of the reasons for the importance of Sunday Mass. The Pope reiterates his previous reminders that the faithful are obliged to attend Mass every Sunday unless seriously impeded, and that pastors have a duty to see that it is possible for all to fulfill this precept.
42. Both faithful and pastors have an important role in safeguarding and promoting ecclesial communion. This is why the Church has drawn up norms intended to foster frequent and fruitful access to the Eucharist and to determine the objective conditions when Communion may not be given. Faithful observation of these norms is another practical way to express love for the Eucharist and for the Church.

43. Another important subject that touches on the Eucharist as sacrament of ecclesial communion is its relationship to ecumenical activity. First of all, we thank God for the many who feel an ardent desire for unity among all Christians. An efficacious grace inspired us and our separated brethren to set forth on the path of ecumenism. The Eucharist, the supreme sacrament of the unity of God’s People, is obviously of central relevance here. At Mass the Church prays that the Father will grant His children the fullness of the Holy Spirit so that they may become one body and one spirit in Christ.

44. Because the Church’s unity absolutely requires full communion in the bonds of faith, the sacraments, and ecclesial governance, it is not possible to celebrate together the same Eucharistic liturgy until those bonds are fully restored. Any such event would be an invalid means and even an obstacle to the attainment of full communion because it would introduce ambiguities concerning the true faith. “The path toward full unity can only be undertaken in truth.” The prohibitions of Church law, faithful to the moral norm of Vatican II, leave no room for uncertainty in this regard.

45. There may be, however, special circumstances when it is permissible to administer Holy Communion to individuals who belong to ecclesial communities not in full communion with the Catholic Church. In such cases the intention is to meet a grave spiritual need for that individual’s salvation, not to bring about the intercommunion that remains impossible until the visible bonds of ecclesial communion are re-established. Vatican II gave specific guidelines for responding to such requests from Eastern Christians separated in good faith from the Catholic Church. These were subsequently ratified by Canon Law.

46. The same provision applies to the sacraments of Penance and the Anointing of the Sick when the individual manifests the faith professed by the Catholic Church, greatly desires them and freely requests them. Conversely, Catholics in similar circumstances may request the sacraments from ministers of Churches in which they are valid. These conditions must be carefully respected and not extended to cases where the truths of the faith regarding the sacraments and the ministerial priesthood are denied. Faithful observance of these norms manifests and guarantees our love for Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, for our separated brothers and sisters (who have a right to our witness to the truth), and for the cause of promoting unity.
Chapter Five: The Dignity of the Eucharistic Celebration

47. The simple solemnity surrounding the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper is striking. The anointing at Bethany served as a fitting prelude. The Evangelists record all the details in light of a praxis already well-established in the early Church; ever since, the Holy Thursday event has shown visible traces of a liturgical sensibility shaped by the Old Testament tradition and open to reshaping in Christian celebrations in a way that is consonant with the new content of Easter.

48. Like the woman who anointed Jesus, the Church has feared no “extravagance” in expressing wonder and adoration before the unsurpassable gift of the Eucharist. No less than the disciples who carefully prepared the upper room, she has felt obliged down the centuries to celebrate the Eucharist in a setting worthy of so great a mystery. Could there ever be a truly “adequate” way to celebrate this liturgy? The “intimate” character of a “banquet” has never tempted the Church to forget that her Spouse is also Lord of the sacrifice marked by the shedding of His Blood. In the sacred banquet of the Eucharist (sacrum convivium), the simple signs conceal God’s unfathomable holiness. The Bread broken on our altars is the Bread of Angels (panis angelorum) to be approached with the humility of the centurion who felt unworthy to receive Jesus under his roof.

49. The Church’s faith in the Eucharistic mystery has found expression in a devout interior disposition and in outward forms meant to evoke the grandeur of the event. On the foundation of a well-regulated liturgy in the various ecclesial traditions, a rich heritage has developed in all the fine arts, especially architecture. From the homes of Christian families where the Eucharist was first celebrated to the basilicas of the early centuries, medieval cathedrals, and churches large and small that gradually appeared everywhere, the design of altars and tabernacles and the fine craftsmanship of church furnishings and vestments have combined clear understanding of the mystery with artistic inspiration. The same is true of sacred music, from the simplicity of Gregorian chant to ornate Masses by famous composers. In this way the Eucharist has made a powerful impact on artistic culture as well as on the Church and her spirituality.

50. Sacred art reflects a particularly remarkable sense of mystery in the Greco-Byzantine and Slavic traditions of the East. Going well beyond talent and technical skill, those artists have shown docility to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. The architectural and mosaic splendors of the Christian East and West belong to all believers; they contain a hope, and even a pledge, of that fullness of communion in faith and celebration which is so much desired. This patrimony presupposes a profoundly Eucharistic Church wherein Christ’s presence is immersed in the Holy Trinity, of which the Church herself becomes an “icon.” Within this context the Pope calls attention to the norms regulating church construc-
tion, decoration, and music, so that art may faithfully express the mystery of the Church.

51. Development of sacred art and liturgical discipline in the old countries of Europe now extends to places where the Christian influence is relatively recent. On his pastoral visits throughout the world the Pope has seen the great vitality of Eucharistic celebrations informed by different cultures. Adaptation to the changing conditions of time and place enables the Eucharist to give cultures Christian inspiration and sustain entire peoples along with individuals. **But this treasure is too precious to risk impoverishment or compromise through experimental practices introduced without careful review by competent authority in close association with the Holy See.** The Sacred Liturgy expresses the one faith professed by all and cannot be determined by the local Churches in isolation from the universal Church.

52. The priest, who presides at the Eucharist *in persona Christi*, has a “great responsibility” to serve the universal Church, not only the local community taking part in the celebration. The Pope laments the “misguided sense of creativity and adaptation” that led to “a number of abuses” in the immediate aftermath of post-conciliar liturgical reform. A reaction against “formalism” still leads some to “introduce unauthorized innovations which are often completely inappropriate. **I consider it my duty, therefore, to appeal urgently that the liturgical norms for the celebration of the Eucharist be observed with great fidelity....** Liturgy is never anyone’s private property....” There needs to be a renewed appreciation of liturgical norms; celebration of Mass in accordance with them “quietly but eloquently” demonstrates love for the Church. **The mystery entrusted to our hands is too great for anyone to treat it without due regard for its sacredness and universality.** “A more specific document” on this subject will be forthcoming.

Chapter Six: At the School of Mary, ‘Woman of the Eucharist’

53. Mary, Mother and model of the Church, can guide us toward the Eucharist because of her profound relationship with it. While there is no mention of her presence at its institution, she “certainly” would have taken part in the first community’s Eucharistic celebrations. But her life-long interior disposition is above all what makes her a “woman of the Eucharist.” This is how she serves as a model for the Church.

54. Since the Eucharist is *mystereium fidei*, no one better than Mary can act as our support and guide in acquiring a disposition of abandonment to the word of God. Her “do whatever he tells you” applies in particular to His command, “Do this in memory of Me.” As He was able to change water into wine, so can we trust that He turns bread and wine into His Body and Blood.

55. As Mary began to live this Eucharistic faith from the moment she offered her virginal womb for the Incarnation of the Word of God, the
Eucharistic commemoration of the Passion and Resurrection is in continuity with the Incarnation. When she conceived Jesus in the physical reality of His Body and Blood, she anticipated within herself what happens sacramentally in every believer who receives the same Body and Blood under the signs of bread and wine. **There is a profound analogy between her fiat at the Annunciation and our amen at Holy Communion.** As she was asked to believe that her Child was the Son of God, so we are asked to believe that the same Son of God becomes present in His full humanity and divinity in the Eucharist. At the Visitation, she served as His first “tabernacle,” and at the Nativity her contemplation of the Face of the newborn Christ is a model of our reception of Holy Communion.

56. In the subsequent mysteries of her life, Mary made her own the sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist. In each of them the Crucifixion and her Stabat Mater is foreshadowed. Mary’s daily preparation for Calvary was an “anticipated Eucharist,” a “spiritual communion” of desire and oblation. In the events following Calvary it continued to find expression, especially when she attended Mass celebrated by the Apostles. The Body under sacramental signs was the same Body she had conceived in her womb. Receiving the Eucharist must have meant “welcoming once more into her womb that Heart which had beat in unison with hers and reliving what she had experienced at the foot of the Cross.”

57. All that Christ did for our sake with regard to His Mother is present in the “memorial” of Calvary, including her continuing reception of His final gift: “Behold your Son!” (not only St. John, but each of us). And for us it means continually receiving her as our Mother, with a corresponding commitment to conform ourselves to Christ in her company. Thus is Mary present, as Mother of the Church, at each celebration of the Eucharist. **She and the Eucharist are just as inseparable as the Eucharist and the Church;** this is one reason why her name has been included in the liturgy East and West since ancient times.

58. The Pope suggests a Eucharistic reading of Mary’s Magnificat, her canticle of praise and thanksgiving at the Visitation with Jesus present in her womb. Praising God as she does, “through,” “in,” and “with” Jesus, is the true “Eucharistic attitude.” She goes on to proclaim the wonders in salvation history, especially the redemptive Incarnation, and concludes with the “eschatological tension” of the Eucharist: the seeds of that new history when the mighty are put down and the humble exalted. The “new heavens” and the “new earth” find in the Eucharist their anticipation and program. **May our lives, too, “become completely a Magnificat,” for there is no better way than Mary’s spirituality to help us experience the mystery of the Eucharist.**

Conclusion: Personal Reflections

59. In the context of the Eucharistic hymns, Ave Verum Corpus and
Adoro Te Devote, the Pope recalls his contemplation of the Eucharist at the time of his first Mass as a newly ordained priest in 1946, so that his “testimony of faith” might accompany and strengthen everyone’s faith in this “great and transcendent mystery,” the often unconscious object of everyone’s yearning. That faith, rooted in Christ’s words as handed down by the Apostles, “is sufficient for us.”

60. Implementation of the Church’s program for a “renewed impetus in Christian living” in the third millennium “passes through the Eucharist.” Every aspect of the Church’s mission “must draw the strength it needs from the Eucharistic mystery” and culminate in it. Only in this way can “we overcome our own deficiency.”

61. The Eucharistic mystery must be experienced in its integrity during the Mass, after Communion, and when praying before the Tabernacle. This is when the Church is firmly built and it becomes clear what she is: “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic”—the universal sacrament of salvation and a hierarchically structured communion. The Church’s renewed ecumenical commitment also takes place in the presence of the Eucharist, which impels us towards the goal of full sharing with all to whom we are joined by our common Baptism. Since the first centuries, the Christian community has vigilantly guarded her Eucharistic treasure, anxious to hand on without loss her faith and teaching. “There can be no danger of excess in our care for this mystery.”

62. In “the school of the saints,” the true “interpreters” of Eucharistic piety, the theology of the Eucharist “takes on all the splendor of a lived reality.” We listen above all to Mary, walking in her company with Christ, our strength and food for the journey, in order to become for everyone “witnesses of hope.” The Pope concludes these reflections with the final verses of the Corpus Christi sequence, Lauda Sion, by St. Thomas Aquinas, “impassioned poet” of the Eucharist, inviting us to join him in contemplating the heavenly goal “to which our hearts aspire in their thirst for joy and peace.”

JOHN PAUL II
Holy Thursday, April 17, 2003

[paraphrase by John Gueguen]