

# Sacramentum Caritatis

The Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, is the result of the Synod on the Eucharist in 2005, and therefore the primary intention of the document is for the most part to represent the fruit of the papers, discussions and interventions at that synod. The document should also be seen as emerging out of the context of other papal teaching on the Eucharist, particularly John Paul II's final encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003) and the more disciplinary document, the Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (2004) from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. Perhaps of greatest significance, however, is that this document is companion to the first encyclical of Benedict's pontificate, *Deus Caritas Est*. In conjunction with that document, we see two emerging emphases in Benedict's understanding of his own mission as Pope: to impress on the Church and the world the possibility and reality of true joy in the love of Christ, present among us, and to foster and, if possible, achieve greater unity, both within the Catholic Church and with other churches.

The exhortation is divided into three main sections. Part one, *The Eucharist, a Mystery to be Believed* deals with central theological matters concerning the Eucharist as sacrament, including the role of the Trinity, the ecclesiological dimensions of the sacra-

Analysing the recent document on the Eucharist, Andrew Cameron-Mowat SJ comments on the threefold theological, liturgical and evangelical organization of the document and its affirmation of the reforms of Vatican II. The author also situates vexed questions such as 'active participation' and liturgical music within the wider discussions of *Sacramentum Caritatis*. The author teaches at Heythrop College, University of London.

ment, the relationship between the Eucharist and the other sacraments, and with Eucharist in relation to eschatology and to Mary. Part two, *The Eucharist, a Mystery to be Celebrated*, deals with more specifically liturgical matters, including the place of Christ in the liturgy, liturgical aesthetics, including art, language and song, the structure of the Mass, what true active participation might be, and with Eucharistic devotion. Part three, *The Eucharist, a Mystery to be Lived* places the Eucharist at the heart of the life of the Church, with significant teachings on Sunday and on Eucharistic identity, and on the relationship between the Eucharistic community and the world.

Intended as it is as a consolidating and enriching document which provides the considered fruit of an important synod on a crucial subject for the Church, it is perhaps to be expected that the document for the most part offers up solid and elegantly-argued representations of much of both traditional and more recent theology of the sacrament of the Eucharist and its liturgy. Much that is here comes out of the central documents of the Second Vatican Council, to which is added the writings of Benedict XVI's predecessor John Paul II, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, the present Pope's first Encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est* and other sources.

As a liturgical scholar I was particularly interested to see, in #3, that the development of the liturgy after Vatican II receives full endorsement (although 'occasional

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abuses ... were noted’), and that stress is placed on the ‘overall unity’ of the development of the rites. This endorsement may not suit advocates of the 1962 rites. The introduction of several other Eucharistic Prayers to complement the Roman Canon is also given full endorsement and these prayers are regarded as particularly successful and important in the stress each one gives to the importance of the *epiclesis*, the prayer for the blessing and power of the Spirit. These prayers are ‘noteworthy for their inexhaustible theological and spiritual richness.’ (#48)

Part One, with the focus mainly on theological aspects of the sacrament of the Eucharist and its celebration, draws our attention in the way in which emphasis is placed, not so much on the Eucharist as *species*, but more on the *person* with whom we enter into a relationship by means of the Eucharist. Benedict teaches that ‘in the Eucharist Jesus does not give us a ‘thing’, but himself’ (#7), and this gift is part of the divine plan of God who is Trinity, so that we might experience the love of God through our sharing in Christ’s body and blood. Here, and in many other places, the Pope turns to Augustine for reflection, theological language, and prayer: ‘If you see love, you see the Trinity.’ (#8) The love of God for us is most radically made manifest on the cross which, to emphasise the level of relationship that is being developed by Benedict, becomes ‘a supreme act of love and mankind’s definitive deliverance from evil.’ (#10) Eucharist both makes this act of love present and also rejoices in that love. Here, Benedict incorporates the language of ‘nuclear fission’ which he first used in his homily at Marienfeld in August of 2005. So the celebration of the Eucharist is far more than a ritualised drama, far more than something done out of remembrance; it is the encounter of good conquering evil through Christ’s definitive act of self-emptying love.

Since the focus of this section of the exhortation is on how Eucharist draws us into a relationship with the person of the risen Christ, Benedict avoids any need to reconsider doctrines about the *change* of bread

and wine into Christ’s body and blood. Thus he can situate the large part of his writing in a theological and sacramental locus which both western and eastern Christians can find fruitful and thought-provoking.

There was an important development in western theology about the Eucharist with the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, in which significant emphasis was given to the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the sacrament, particularly to the role of the Spirit in the transformation of the bread and wine. The exhortation is lyrical in this regard. For Benedict, the development of the liturgy has been thanks to the Spirit who played ‘the decisive role’ (#12), and whose presence is to be found in all aspects of the sacramental life of the Church, particularly in its liturgical celebrations. For Benedict, the Spirit also has the ‘decisive role... particularly with regard to transubstantiation.’ (#13) Anyone who wishes to reflect on the meaning of Eucharist could benefit from starting with a consideration of this insight.

The relationship of love with Christ that is found in Eucharist is also to be seen in the Church that the Eucharist fosters. Because the celebration of Eucharist is so important to the very nature and activity of the Church, this means for Benedict that the centre of the Church is the presence of this love. Without this relationship, the Church suffers; with it, there is the possibility of true unity and ecclesial communion. Thus, whatever the particular differences that exist between ecclesial groups, for Benedict the presence of the love of Christ at the very heart of the Church makes our dialogue with other groups essential. Our celebration of Eucharist cannot be truly an act of love if we use it to emphasise our separatedness or distinctiveness. If it is not fundamentally an act of love then it has no place within the activities of the Body of Christ.

An exploration of the relationship between the Eucharist and the other sacraments gives Benedict the opportunity to draw out

and to emphasise some important material from the discussions at the synod. He begins by visiting the question of the order of the sacraments of initiation, and notes that the different orders between East and West are pastoral and not dogmatic; thus he leaves open the possibility of change to the order of reception for those baptised as infants in the West. The impetus for this is, quite understandably, that Eucharist is the 'goal of the whole experience of initiation'. (#18) There can be no doubt that the reform of the Rites of Christian Initiation for Adults has brought about a development in official thinking; the order of Baptism, Confirmation and finally Eucharist is theologically sound and we have been given effective pastoral resources to explain and celebrate the process.

The relationship of the Eucharist to the Sacrament of Reconciliation is not merely one of maintaining a personal or individual state of grace in order to receive sacramental communion. Our sin causes a break with our community, and this breach in the relationship of love is one which reconciliation can heal as we seek the 'restoration of full ecclesial communion'. (#20) The Eucharist is related to the Sacrament of the Sick in that it shows forth the power of love over suffering and death, and the sick are united with the whole body of the faithful in their suffering, through which they 'can participate in the redemption of the world.' (#22)

Regarding the relationship between the Eucharist and the priesthood, the exhortation reminds priests of the importance of not imposing their own personality on their ministry: they show forth Jesus Christ, not them-

selves. They are called to a ministry characterised by its humility and its quality of service, rather than by some form of imposed leadership. Priests are also obliged to the celibate life, though no mention is made of the many married clergy within the tradition.

The section on the relationship between Eucharist and Marriage adopts much of the theology of Bridegroom and Bride that characterised the writing of John Paul II. This section inevitably then leads to repetition of the teachings concerning the indissolubility of marriage, and the prohibition of the divorced and re-married from receiving Eucharist.

Part One concludes with a beautiful section on the eschatological dimension of the Eucharist and relates the close association of the Virgin Mary with this mystery.

Part Two gives Benedict the opportunity to reflect on some important aesthetic and theological aspects of the celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy. In this section it is possible to detect the influence of his own previous writings, such as *The Spirit of the Liturgy* and *Feast of Faith*. There is at the heart of liturgy a true beauty which is the experience of the love of God in Christ, who is 'the full manifestation of the glory of God.' (#35). Thus liturgical celebrations need to enhance, not diminish, the experience of this kind of beauty, particularly through paying closer attention to the *ars celebrandi*. The US bishops expressed this eloquently as long ago as 1972 in *Music in Catholic Worship* when they stated that 'good celebrations foster and nourish faith. Poor celebrations may weaken and destroy it' (#6). It would be encouraging if liturgy committees in dioceses and parishes could spend some time discussing their own liturgies in the light of this second part of the exhortation. The bishops of England and Wales have provided us with very helpful materials to foster a deeper understanding of the celebration of the Eucharist, with publication of the recent *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (2002) and particularly of *Celebrating the Mass* (2005) and *Consecrated for Worship* (2006). Special

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attention is drawn to liturgical music, though not to insist that Gregorian chant, while ‘proper to the Roman liturgy’ (#42), should be the exclusive form. The exhortation affirms that the Church is still bringing forth liturgical music of good quality, though it does not mention the achievements of musicians who have succeeded in incorporating music and instruments from their local culture into the celebrations of liturgy in various parts of the world.

The celebration of the liturgy of the word has been significantly improved with the renewal of the liturgy since Vatican II, and the exhortation draws attention to the experience of the proclamation of the Word of God, using quasi-sacramental terms to emphasise the importance of this part of the liturgy: ‘Christ does not speak in the past, but in the present, even as he is present in the liturgical action.’ (#45) So readers must be properly disposed and prepared and homilies must be improved if this experience of the living Christ is to become a reality. Homilies should not be abstract discourses on unrelated topics, but relevant to the community being addressed, for the homily brings the word of faith alive in its immediate and relevant context.

Having written previously on the development of *actuosa participatio* (*The Pastoral Review*, Vol 2 Issue 4, July/August, 2006) I was particularly interested to see how the topic is treated, and am not disappointed. The exhortation cleverly relates the matter to the dismissal *Ite, missa est* and notes that this dismissal is truly a kind of missioning for the assembly: it speaks of their role, taking Christ to the world. Benedict suggests that other texts could be developed to enhance the nature of this proclaimed missioning. While previous Popes had promoted active participation as being expressed by reception of Holy Communion, Benedict shows how true participation is especially to be seen in the engagement of people in the life of the church, not merely within the context of the liturgy, but particularly in proclaiming its message to the world and in showing the love of God to others. No one is to be left out of this fostering of true participation, and the

exhortation reminds us of the special situation of the sick, of prisoners, of migrants, and of non-Catholic Christians. Adoration is seen as a valuable part of the life of the eucharistic community, and is a proven method of enhancing true participation.

Part three draws the exhortation to a close with a profound meditation on the power of the Eucharist to transform us to and draw us to Christ as living sacrament of love. We ‘become sharers in the divine life’ (#70). There can be no distinction between our activities in the world and within the liturgy, for our whole being has been transformed by a ‘profoundly renewed existence’. (#72). Benedict’s attention to the unity that Eucharist not only fosters but also proclaims is of particular interest. Just as his pontificate has up to now been characterised by a particularly effective form of consultation and of pastoral and doctrinal concern, so his desire for unity within the various parts of the Church comes through in this section. Communion is ‘communion with God and communion with our brothers and sisters...And wherever we do not live communion among ourselves, communion with the Triune God is not alive and true either.’ (#76). He is clearly concerned about the polarising nature of several groups with the Church, particularly those who reject the current Roman Missal and also those who oppose the ordinary Magisterium, and is seeking ways to find pastoral solutions to the problems that exist, but which will not draw such groups further away from communion with their local bishops and with the universal Church.

This section also develops the language from the second part regarding the moral transformation that the Eucharist brings about. Quoting his own encyclical, Benedict reminds us that ‘a Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented’. (#82). In the same vein, our relationship to the Eucharist brings certain expectations to the quality of



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Benedict XVI our life in general, particularly with regard to our promotion of the common good and 'a service of charity towards neighbour' (#88). In addition, it makes claims on us to be members of the missionary Church, proclaiming the truth of God's love to all, even to the point of martyrdom.

Concrete examples of the need of witness are seen in many parts of the world; we must be more aware of the human need

that cries out for justice. Those who participate in the celebration of the sacrament of love are duty bound to accept the Church's social teaching. We continue to be faced by war, injustice, hunger and oppression and the call for action is urgent. The solution however is not to separate ourselves from the world, or to see the world as inherently evil, but to acknowledge the world as part of God's good creation – we are missioned to take an active role in its redemption. ■