



The Holy See

CLOSING OF THE XLVII INTERNATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 25 June 2000

1. *"Take; this is my body.... This is my blood"* (Mk 14: 22-23). These words spoken by Jesus at the Last Supper ring out today in our assembly, as we prepare to close the International Eucharistic Congress. They resound with unusual intensity, *as a renewed command*: "Take!". Christ entrusts to us his Body given and his Blood poured out. He entrusts them to us as he did to the Apostles in the Upper Room before the supreme sacrifice on Golgotha. Peter and the others at the table were astonished and deeply moved at these words. But could they understand at the time how far these words would take them? At that moment the promise Jesus had made at the synagogue in Capernaum was fulfilled: *"I am the bread of life.... the bread I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world"* (Jn 6: 48, 51). The promise was fulfilled *on the very eve of the Passion* in which Jesus would offer himself for humanity's salvation.

2. *"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many"* (Mk 14: 24). In the Upper Room Jesus speaks of *covenant*. It is a term which the Apostles have no difficulty in understanding, since they belong to the people with whom Yahweh, as the first reading tells us, had made the old covenant during the exodus from Egypt (cf. Ex 19-24). They vividly remember Mount Sinai and Moses, who had come down from that mountain carrying the divine Law engraved on two stone tablets.

They did not forget that Moses had taken the "book of the covenant" and read it aloud; and the people had agreed, saying: "All the Lord has said, we will heed and do" (ibid., 24: 7). Thus a covenant was made between God and his people, sealed with the blood of animals offered in sacrifice. For this reason Moses had sprinkled the people, saying: "This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words of his" (ibid., 24: 8). The Apostles, then, understood the reference to the old covenant. But *what did they understand of the new?* Certainly very little. The Holy Spirit will have to descend to open their minds: then they will understand the full sense of Jesus' words. They will understand and rejoice. We heard a clear echo of this joy in the words proclaimed a few moments ago from the Letter to the Hebrews: "If the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ!" (9: 13-14). And the author of the Letter concludes: "Therefore Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance" (9: 15).

3. *"This is the cup of my blood"*. On Holy Thursday evening the

Apostles reached *the threshold of the great mystery*. When, at the end of the supper, they went out with him to the Garden of Olives, they could not know yet that the words he had pronounced over the bread and the cup would be dramatically fulfilled the following day, in the hour of the Cross. Perhaps not even on the tremendous and glorious day that the Church calls *feria sexta in parasceve* - Good Friday - did they realize that what Jesus had handed on to them under the appearances of bread and wine *contained the paschal reality*. There is an illuminating passage in the Gospel of Luke. Speaking of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, the Evangelist notes their disappointment: "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (*Lk 24: 21*). The other disciples must have also shared this sentiment before meeting the risen Christ. Only after the resurrection did they begin to understand that human redemption had been achieved in Christ's Passover. The Holy Spirit will later guide them into the full truth by revealing to them that the Crucified One had given his body and poured out his blood as a sacrifice of expiation for the sins of human beings, for the sins of the whole world (cf. *1 Jn 2: 2*). The author of the Letter to the Hebrews again offers us a *clear synthesis of the mystery*: "Christ ... entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (*Heb 9: 11-12*).⁴ Today we affirm this truth at the *Statio Orbis* of this International Eucharistic Congress, as, in obedience to Christ's command, we do again "in his memory" what he did in the Upper Room on the eve of his Passion. "Take; this is my body.... This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (*Mk 12: 22, 24*). From this square we want to repeat to the men and women of the third millennium the extraordinary message: the Son of God became man for us and offered himself in sacrifice for our salvation. He gives us his body and blood as the food of a new life, of a divine life that is no longer subject to death. With deep feeling we once again receive from Christ's hands this gift, so that through us it may reach every family and every city, places of suffering and the workshops of hope in our time. The Eucharist is the infinite gift of love: under the signs of bread and wine we acknowledge and adore the one perfect sacrifice of Christ offered for our salvation and that of all humanity. The Eucharist is really "the mystery that sums up all the marvels wrought by God for our salvation" (cf. St Thomas Aquinas, *De sacr. Euch.*, chap. I).

In the Upper Room *the Church's Eucharistic faith was born and is continually reborn*. As the Eucharistic Congress now draws to a close, we want *to return spiritually to these origins, to the moment of the Upper Room and of Golgotha*, to give thanks for the gift of the Eucharist, the priceless gift that Christ left us, the gift by which the Church lives.⁵ Our liturgical assembly will soon disperse, enriched by the presence of faithful from every part of the world and made even more attractive by this extraordinary floral display. I greet you all with affection and cordially thank everyone! Let us leave this gathering reinvigorated in our apostolic and missionary commitment. May participation in the Eucharist make you, the *sick*, more patient in your trials; you, *married couples*, more faithful in your love; you, *consecrated persons*, more persevering in your holy intentions; you, *First Communion children*, and especially you, dear *young people*, who are preparing to take personal responsibility for the future, stronger and more generous. From this *Statio Orbis* my thoughts are already looking ahead to the solemn Eucharistic celebration that will close the *World Youth Day*. I say to you, young people of Rome, Italy and the world: carefully prepare yourselves for this international youth gathering, in which you will be called to take up the challenges of the new millennium.⁶ And you, Christ our Lord, who "in this great sacrament feed your people and strengthen them in holiness, so that the family of mankind may come to walk in the light of one faith, in one communion of love" (*Preface of the Holy Eucharist II*), always make your Church more steadfast and united, as she celebrates the mystery of your saving presence. Pour out your Spirit upon all who approach your sacred Table and make them bolder in bearing witness to the commandment of your love, so that the world may believe in you, who one day said: "I myself am the living bread come down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he shall live" (*Jn 6: 51*). You, Lord

Jesus Christ, Son of the Virgin Mary, are man's only Saviour, "yesterday, today and for ever"!

At the end of Mass the Holy Father greeted the pilgrims in various languages. To the English-speaking faithful he said: I greet the English-speaking pilgrims who have joined in our prayer of thanksgiving at this closing Mass of the International Eucharistic Congress. May the continuing celebration of the Great Jubilee ever increase the awareness and appreciation of the Lord's saving presence in your midst. Upon all of you I invoke the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. After greeting the other groups, the Holy Father added extemporaneously: Lastly, I would especially like to thank the many Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops from around the world. This week we have felt united with the Person of Christ as the Apostles were in the Upper Room. Bring my heartfelt greeting and my Blessing to your faithful. A thousand thanks again to everyone!

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