

THE EUCHARIST (Primordial Sacrament)

Vatican II fittingly describes the Eucharist as “the source and summit of the Church” (fons et culmen). The Eucharist has also been described as the primordial Sacrament from which all the other Sacraments flow (Rahner). In his outstanding teaching on the Eucharist, *Ecclesia de Eucharista*, Pope John Paul II declared:

“The Eucharist, as Christ’s saving presence in the community of the faithful and its spiritual food is the most precious possession which the Church can have” (n.9)

How are we to preserve this precious possession in our hearts and souls in a world of all too much counterwitness? That is a key question for every genuine believer....we must never cease to ask it.

The celebration of the Eucharist, the Mass, is multilayered....it calls us to repentance, it nourishes us with the Word through scripture, it invites us to offer up of our best, it sustains us with the Body and Blood, the Word made flesh, and it sends us out to promote peace and serve God and each other.

Aside from Mass it invites us to private devotion, to prayerful adoration of the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle or at Exposition.

No one can put a limit on the power of the Eucharist in our daily lives, no-one except myself if, at my peril, I shut myself off from its healing powers, its infinite strength.

In recent years there has been two noteworthy developments in the Church concerning the Eucharist. The first of these was a 65 page document by the Congregation for Divine Worship re-stating Church norms (rules) about the celebration of the Mass. These norms are designed to promote reverence and devotion to the Eucharist and they highlight (and condemn) some modern trends which occasionally “slip-in” to celebrating the Mass.

The second and a most welcome development was what has become known as Pope John Paul II’s year of the Eucharist (October 2004 to October 2005). Our late Holy Father wanted us to remember in particular that the Mass is again and again Christ’s sacrifice. In *Ecclesia de Eucharista* he has already warned against what he calls a “reductive understanding of the Eucharistic mystery ...stripped of its sacrificial meaning (no 10). The Mass, he stated, must not be celebrated “as if it were simply a fraternal banquet”.

The catechism of the Catholic Church makes the same point when it teaches that “The Eucharist is a sacrifice which re-presents (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross” (CCC,1366). In the Mass the same Christ as at Calvary is again offered “in an unbloody manner” (CCC1367)