

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

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The Eucharist and the Hunger for Truth

PART IV

The longing for truth and the hunger for knowledge have always been natural to man whose intellect is an inborn appetite to reach out to take possession of things beyond him — to capture sunsets, or birds, or children, or loved ones. This innate appetite has been whetted today by advances in science which have brought us a revelation of so much hidden from previous generations. The sophisticated advances in communications have opened us to a new world flooding in upon us. We have walked on the moon, and navigated over its dark side. We have most recently attempted to expose the mystery of Mars. Human events once removed from us by distances considered too remote from our personal concern are now reported to us in our living rooms as they happen.

Yet the very advancements in science which have transformed our world into a small global community and have brought strangers into our homes have become the occasion for much disappointment. The advances in science which have offered such hopeful promises have contributed to so much destruction in two World Wars and a host of smaller ones. We have harnessed forces of the universe to make bombs to destroy a part of it. Our communications have brought us close to people meant to be our idols, but we have found so often that they walk this earth with feet of clay. The ugly contrast between those who live in wealth and those who live in poverty has only added to the loneliness of the depressed as they watch the imbalances of society pictured in living color on a TV screen.

Since knowledge and truth have not brought

happiness with them, people have sought ways to shut out the truth that reminds them how painful life can be. Some have sought solutions in drugs or alcohol. Some have abandoned the ordinary labors of daily living to start a new society free of the cares and concerns of this one. Some have become fascinated with the mystical experience promised by certain religious sects.

Truth is not desirable when it only serves to frighten people or to discourage them or to paralyze them. And yet, to live in a world that is unreal and false is worse — because sooner or later we have to wake up and come face-to-face with the very things that frightened us or left us without hope.

The Eucharist restores our hunger for truth by diminishing our fear of it. It invites us to look beyond the surface of the things we see to a truth and beauty that is present, but thinly veiled. It enables us to look at the suffering of a dying man and see in it the loving act of a God Who became one of us for our sake. It lets us see in a piece of bread the power that made the universe out of nothing and still holds the whole world in His hands. It challenges us to look at strangers and even at people who make us angry and see them as our brothers and sisters united in the one Body of Christ. It invites us to look at our own weakness and sinfulness and to see us as persons called to share in the one priesthood of Christ through our Baptism.

The Eucharist restores our hunger for truth and makes that hunger a source of joy and redemption — and never a source of despair. Truth never need frighten us when Jesus is with us, because He has changed truth from a message of death to a promise of life and a source of joy that liberates us.

The Eucharist assures us that God is with us — that He is our Emmanuel — and that His Kingdom to come is already in our midst. The presence of the Glorified Jesus, The Lord of all

history, is with us. His presence changes the meaning of all things in the world that seemingly have a power to suffocate our spirit. A little child becomes a temple of God — unique and eternal because He never made two in the same mold. The Cross has lost its power as a symbol of the most rigid judgment of human failure, and has become a sacred sign of God's love. A cup of water becomes a gift never to be forgotten in this world or in the one to come.

The Eucharist is constantly teaching us that to receive Jesus is to be open to becoming what we are not now. It invites and challenges us to become the truth we say we admire — to allow the force of His words to alter our ideals and our intentions — to let the power of His love awaken our own and empower us to reach out to those whom we have left behind in a land of strangers.

To receive Jesus in the Eucharist, I must commit myself to Him by an act of love that puts Him above everything that could separate me from Him. The act of receiving Him is a 'yes' to Him Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. It is a 'yes' to His truth as the guiding principle of my life — to the truth that alone can set me free.

This is a strange food to feed our hunger for truth. It is the Eucharist, however, that is given to us as a gift and as a challenge to discover the deeper truth about food and sharing a meal, about suffering and death and resurrection, about body and blood, about priesthood and sacrifices, about Jesus and the Church, about Father and brothers, about faith and hope, about the Spirit and life. It is an invitation to lift up our eyes and see, as the Apostles did on Mt. Tabor, to listen to the words of eternal life as they did at Capernaum when all the others walked away, to come to Him when we have labored and are burdened, for He will refresh us with the living waters of truth, as once He promised by a well in Samaria.

Building up the Church

Pope Paul's address at the general audience of July 7:

You come to visit and revere the See of the humble successor of the Apostle, Simon the son of John, called Peter by Jesus Christ himself.

What word, what prophecy, what historical destiny are you seeking, not only in the place of his tomb, but also in the mighty monument which glorifies his memory and symbolizes his spiritual mission here? Do you not hear echoing in your minds the promise that Jesus made to the Apostle, when he said to him: "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church?" (Mt. 16, 18). Prophetic words, which seem

to take on here a tangible expression! We will never stop meditating upon them, reflected as they seem to be not only in the edifice of the Basilica to which we have flocked, scrutinizing, admiring and praying, but also in the institution which has its foundation and its heart here, and which involves us all, and reveals to us our name, a very common one, more mysterious than ever. We, we are ecclesia, the Church, the historical, visible and at the same time spiritual body, transcending our historical scene, the Mystical Body of Christ! For this blessed place, for this privileged moment, the Messianic and divine announcement was made, proclaimed: "I, I Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God, will build my Church."

Everything should be listened to, thought over, and, as far as is possible for us, understood.

Let us now choose one word only: "I, the Lord, will build." What does it mean, to build? It means to construct, to take shapeless, scattered materials, and, keeping their essential structure, mould them, unite them, assemble them in an architectural plan, and confer on them the usefulness and the dignity of one design, which reflects a thought, a purpose, a beauty, which belongs to all the single materials that compose it and to the building as a whole. This is Christ's idea about mankind, about the kingdom of God, about construction. This is the kingdom of God, which the Gospel proclaims; this is the Church, which Christ calls "mine," this is humanity pervaded with the plan of salvation. This is the key to understand the Scriptures: read the story of Abraham; the story of Israel; the story of the newborn Church. This is the divine thought operating in the history of mankind, and in the depths of souls, listening to the interior Master.

The dizzy effect of divine revelation, which opens before us its boundless and yet immediate panoramas can give the visitor a sense of rapture and at the same time a sense of confusion, leaving him almost overwhelmed and bewildered. But let it not be so. Let us listen, on the contrary, to the double message, which becomes ours, belonging to each one of us, and full of comforting energy.

The first message is that of unity and universality, which springs from the Gospel which has dazzled us here. How many things would not this message oblige us to remember! It would be enough to listen, not only to its echo, but to its repetition, which has become as simple as a verbal formula, but an extremely realistic and binding one, ringing out in the last, moving words of Christ, in the imminence of his passion: "let us all be one". Here, these

testamentary words of the Lord resound always. Here they become blaring trumpets for all peoples. Here they become a vocation for anyone in whom the ear of the spirit is attentive to the divine call. Here there is offered, like a loving play of the Lord, a conversation with him. To listen here is the first form of prayer, of sincere spiritual expression, which can graft the one who listens into the plan of the divine interlocutor.

And then the second message, that concerning the construction; the construction of the Church, which Christ himself is operating in history; a construction which for us, sons of time, is, it can be said, always beginning! All of the work carried out in the centuries that have gone before us, does not exempt us from collaboration with the divine builder. On the contrary, it calls us, and not just to a faithful task of preservation, of passive traditionalism, or of hostile rejection of the perennial innovation of human life. It calls us to begin all over again, mindful indeed, and jealous guardians, of what the true history of the Church has accumulated for this and for future generations, but aware that the building, until the last day of time, demands new work, demands laborious, fresh, brilliant construction, as if the Church, the divine building, were to begin today its adventurous challenge to the heights of heaven. Here it is necessary to shake off the tiredness, the laziness, the lack of confidence, the self-inflicted wounding of systematic contestation, and to try to interpret in the needs of society, with youthful freshness, with brilliant audacity, with great, humble confidence, the plan that Christ, the builder, prepares for his followers.

Let us see that we are among them. With our Apostolic Blessing.

