



YEAR OF THE EUCHARIST

JUNE THEME - EUCHARIST AND MISSION

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At the conclusion of every Eucharistic Liturgy, the priest or deacon dismisses the people with these words or their equivalent: “Go in the peace of Christ to love and serve the Lord.” The core message of the dismissal rite is not that the Mass is over. The core message of the dismissal rite is that those who have celebrated are to go out into the world to share what they have celebrated. They are sent out for mission.

To be in mission is the nature of the Church and the Church draws her energy for mission from Christ in the Eucharist. As Pope John Paul II stated in his Encyclical Letter on the Eucharist, “She (the Church) is fed by Christ and is enlightened by him.”

A word on mission

The Latin word, *missio*, means “a sending forth”. As a concept it applies to the missions of the Trinity e.g. the sending of the Word and Holy Spirit into the world for the redemption of all creation. When Jesus completed his mission through his priestly ministry on the cross, the mission for which he had been sent, he not only glorified the Trinity, he also gave back to the Father all creation redeemed.

Mission includes the sending forth of the Apostles by Jesus to continue his saving mission. It applies to the Church which continues the mission of Christ through the Holy Spirit until the end of time.

Being in mission reflects the catholicity of the Church – a universal community that invites all people to join its living, worshiping and evangelising body. In the wide sense, mission is everything that the Church does in the service of the kingdom e.g. as an instrument of freedom and of progress. In the strict sense, it is the preaching of the gospel among people and cultures where it has not been preached or where it is not known and accepted.

Mission is closely related to evangelisation itself as was made clear in the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (On Evangelization in the Modern World) in 1975.

The relationship of Eucharist to mission

The Eucharist is not only the content of the Church's mission i.e. that God loves us and has given himself up for our salvation, it also provides the motivation for mission. The words in the celebration of the Eucharist, "Do this in memory of me" obviously mean to continue the celebration of the Eucharist.

However, the words also mean that the community must respond to the missionary mandate implied in the celebration. The Eucharist, as the source and summit of Christian Life, provides the vision for mission and sustains the community that is mandated for mission.

The components of mission

The mission of the Church has distinct but interrelated parts e.g. to proclaim the Gospel in word, in sacrament, in witness, in service and to build up a fellowship or association or community that is already a sharing in the life of God. Let us look briefly at each element of proclaiming the Gospel:

1) In Word

Ordinarily proclamation is understood liturgically i.e. reading the word in a worship context that usually includes a homily, time for reflection and some form of communal prayer. However, proclamation can also be understood in the sense of teaching the meaning of the word, explaining and applying the values being communicated. Allow me to give an example. The Creeds of the Church state the content of the faith precisely. However, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* contains three hundred pages of explanation on the meaning of the Creeds.

Teaching the biblical, doctrinal and ethical foundations of the faith beyond the Creeds through writing and, in our modern times, teaching through media is another major area of Catholic responsibility for mission.

2) In Sacrament

Other than the Eucharist itself, almost all the other sacraments are, or can be, celebrated in the context of Eucharist. All the other sacraments are directed to the Eucharist. A careful study of the theological introduction to each sacrament in *The Rites* shows how each sacrament proclaims a value of the Gospel.

3) In Witness

The witness of the martyrs, the canonized saints from the many vocations in the Church and those truly holy people who will never be canonized but were and are highly committed to the Lord have all fed themselves from the Eucharist. They have served the Church throughout the centuries and by being a living contradiction to the values of the world have touched the lives of many people.

4) In Service

The many forms of ministry in the Church including the contemporary emphasis on social justice ministry (cf the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*) challenge people to leave privatized forms of spirituality to involve themselves in the building of the kingdom.

5) In Community

The understanding of Eucharist as communion (*koinonia*) is fundamental to the Church. Authentic solidarity is the result of and a sign of Eucharistic communion. It challenges any tendency to understand spirituality exclusively in terms of a private relationship with Jesus.

Conclusion

Mission flows from Eucharist and is sustained by Eucharist. Eucharist is what keeps mission from ever being understood as a career or a job. Mission which can be both demanding and, in some cases, dangerous compels us to be a people deeply rooted in the love of God present in the Eucharist.