



## **YEAR OF THE EUCHARIST**

### **OCTOBER THEME – THE EUCHARIST AND ESCHATOLOGY**

**By Msgr Kenneth Spence**

It is when cautiously we pronounce words like eschatology that we recall what is now read in English, originally was thought and penned in Greek or found expression in theologians who wrote in Greek.

The word eschatology comes from two words – *eschatos*, meaning uttermost, and *logos*, meaning discourse. Translated, it means “teaching about the last things or end times”. Previous Lenten Missions frequently explored “the last things”: death, particular and general judgements, hell, heaven and purgatory.

These all present some difficulty, as we have yet no personal experience of these events, which are still to come. This has not prevented secular speculation, theology or sacred liturgy striving to express the inexpressible.

In that struggle, image and symbol have proven to be the best vehicle to illustrate these elusive truths. Hence, first the Church fathers, then St Augustine, St Thomas Aquinas and many others have been drawn into grasping the event of the eschaton and what it heralds, namely the *parousia*. *Parousia* means the second coming of Christ in glory and the coming of a new heaven and a new earth.

This complex, confusing and, at times, frightening future series of events is rooted in the gospels, found throughout the epistles and dramatically presented in the apocalypse of St John.

That eschatology interests not only religious scholars and specialists is evident in motion pictures which dramatically bring that brand of popular – if sometimes bizarre – view of the last things. Can the Eucharist present in our midst by constant celebration shed light on, and connect with the events of eschatology?

In Article 3 1323 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, it is stated: “At the Last Supper on the night he was betrayed, our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood.

This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he

should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet 'in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.'"

This teaching is brought to life and expressed during the course of the Eucharistic prayer, where in the present the past is not only called to mind but is re-presented. This allows for the Lord's veiled coming under the appearance of bread and wine to connect us with him. "Every Eucharist is Parousia, the Lord's coming, and yet the Eucharist is even more truly the tensed yearning that he would reveal his hidden glory." (Cardinal Ratzinger)

This finds expression in the third Eucharistic prayer:

"On that day we shall see you, our God as you are we shall become like you  
And praise you forever through Christ our Lord  
From whom all good things come."

The focus of the Eucharist and Eschaton is on the promise revealed, and fulfilled in the Son, who gives direction. I am the way, which cannot fail or deceive; I am the truth, which answers all human yearnings; I am the life.

St Paul's warning found in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 should be considered when private, unauthenticated revelations cause some Catholics to spend intellectual energy and time in speculation about days of darkness and the third secret of Fatima. St Paul writes in verse 16 and 17:

*"May our Lord Jesus Christ himself,  
May God our father who loved us and in his mercy gave us eternal consolation and hope,  
console your hearts and strengthen them for every good work and word."*

Each day should be an opportunity for works of charity and joining in prayer, especially in the Great Prayer of the Eucharist. If that is done constantly, as if each day is our last, we will have made excellent use of our time now and will have prepared for eternity with Him.