

# Holy Mass, Center and Root of Christian Life

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“I have always taught you, my beloved daughters and sons, that the root and center of your spiritual life is the holy sacrifice of the altar.”<sup>1</sup> Blessed Josemaría’s words and writings constantly pointed to the Eucharist as the center and root of Christian life.

He stressed this truth especially when explaining Catholic teaching on the Eucharist sacrifice, and when describing the Christian vocation as *living in Christ, with a priestly soul*. “If the Son of God,” he wrote in 1940, “became man and died on the Cross, he did so that all men might become one with him and with the Father (cf. *Jn* 17:22). All of us, therefore, are called to form part of this divine unity. With a priestly soul, making the holy Mass the center of our interior life, we seek to be with Jesus, between God and mankind.”<sup>2</sup> He urged everyone to live in accord with the centrality of the Eucharist in the life of the Church, channeling one’s whole existence through the Eucharistic sacrifice each day: “Keep struggling, so that the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar really becomes the center and the root of your interior life, and so your whole day will turn into an act of worship—an extension of the Mass you have attended and a preparation for the next. Your whole day will then be an act of worship that overflows in aspirations, visits to the Blessed Sacrament and the offering up of your professional work and your family life.”<sup>3</sup> And he backed up his preaching by the example of his own life. As Bishop Álvaro del Portillo testifies: “Day after day, for forty years, I witnessed his struggle to transform each day into a holocaust, into a prolongation of the Sacrifice of the Altar. The holy Mass was the center of his heroic dedication to work and the root that nourished his interior struggle, his life of prayer and penance. Thanks to his union with Christ’s sacrifice, his pastoral activity had a great sanctifying value. Truly everything in his daily life was *operatio Dei*, *Opus Dei*, a true journey of prayer, of intimacy with God, of identification with Christ in his complete self-giving for the salvation of the world.”<sup>4</sup>

1. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Letter of February 2, 1945*, no. 11. In the citations that follow, whenever the author is not named it is from Blessed Josemaría Escrivá.

2. *Letter of March 11, 1940*, no. 11.

3. *The Forge*, no. 69.

4. Álvaro del Portillo, “Sacerdotes para una nueva evangelización,” in *La formación de los sacerdotes en las circunstancias actuales* (11th International Theology Symposium of the University of Navarre), Pamplona 1990, p. 996.

In the pages below, I will first consider the dogmatic foundation and theological content of the expression so often used by Blessed Josemaría Escrivá: “the Mass is the center and root of a Christian’s life.” Then I will try to show, through his teachings, what this expression implies for a Christian’s daily life.

***1. The Eucharist, a perpetuation, in the time of the Church, of the Holy Trinity’s current of love for mankind***

Anyone opening the writings of Blessed Josemaría immediately notices the profound sense of divine filiation reflected in them, imbued with a deeply Trinitarian perspective.<sup>5</sup> In a homily entitled “The Eucharist: Mystery of Faith and Love” (April 14, 1960, Holy Thursday), he draws us to the consideration of the Eucharistic mystery in the following terms:

“The God of our faith is not a distant being who contemplates indifferently the fate of men—their desires, their struggles, their sufferings. He is a Father who loves his children so much that he sends the Word, the Second Person of the most Blessed Trinity, so that by taking on the nature of man he may die to redeem us. He is the loving Father who now leads us gently to himself, through the action of the Holy Spirit who dwells in our hearts.

“This is the source of the joy we feel on Holy Thursday—the realization that the creator has loved his creatures to such an extent. Our Lord Jesus Christ, as though all the other proofs of his mercy were insufficient, institutes the Eucharist so that he can always be close to us. We can only understand up to a point that he does so because Love moves him, who needs nothing, to want not to be separated from us. The Blessed Trinity has fallen in love with man, raised to the level of grace and made ‘to God’s image and likeness.’ God has redeemed him from sin—from the sin of Adam, inherited by all his descendants, as well as from his personal sins—and desires ardently to dwell in his soul. . . . The Blessed Trinity’s love for man is made permanent in a sublime way through the Eucharist.”<sup>6</sup>

The most Holy Trinity’s presence and action in the Eucharistic sacrifice forms the core of his reflections. “The holy Mass . . . is the gift of the Blessed Trinity to the Church. It is because of this that we can consider the Mass as the center and the source of a Christian’s spiritual life.”<sup>7</sup> The Eucharist manifests to us and makes us sharers in the love of the Father, who in his salvific plan sent his only-begotten Son into the world and handed him over to death on the Cross, in order

5. Cf. F. Ocariz, “La filiación divina, realidad central en la vida y en la enseñanza de Mons. Escrivá de Balaguer,” in *Mons. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y el Opus Dei*, 2nd ed., Pamplona 1985, pp. 175-214; C. Fabro, “La temprata di un Padre della Chiesa,” in C. Fabro-S. Garofalo-M.A. Raschini, *Santi nel mondo. Studi sugli scritti del beato Josemaría Escrivá*, Milan 1992, pp. 106-110.

6. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 84-85.

7. *Ibid.*, no. 87.

to free us from the power of sin (cf. *Jn* 3:16-17). It shows us and offers us the love of the Son, the Bread come down from heaven, who, obedient to the will of the Father, gave up his life for us (cf. *Jn* 6:32-38; *Mt* 26:28). It reveals to us and communicates to us the love of the Holy Spirit, through whose action the Word became flesh (cf. *Mt* 1:20; *Lk* 1:35), who continues to make himself present among us in each celebration of the Eucharist, offering us his flesh vivified by the Spirit (cf. *Jn* 6:51-57;63).

“The three divine Persons are present in the sacrifice of the altar. By the will of the Father, with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, the Son offers himself in a redemptive sacrifice.”<sup>8</sup> Each time that the Church celebrates the Eucharist, our Lord becomes present under the sacramental signs of the bread and wine, in the act of offering up his life to the Father in expiation for the sins of all mankind. In Christ and with Christ, God’s salvific work becomes present, the sacrifice of our redemption in the fullness of the paschal mystery, Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection. This is not a static or purely passive presence of our Lord, for he makes himself present with the saving dynamism of his death and glorious resurrection. He is present as a Person who seeks us out to redeem us, to show us his love, to give us his very life in the Bread of eternal life and the Chalice of eternal salvation. He unite us to himself so that in Him—in Christ and through the action of the Holy Spirit—we may give back to the Father, in an act of thanksgiving, all that comes forth from the Father.

“Because of the Blessed Trinity’s love for man, the presence of Christ in the Eucharist brings all graces to the Church and to mankind.”<sup>9</sup> From this Trinitarian current of love which the Blessed Sacrament offers us, comes the strength that enables Christians to live in Christ, animated by a single Spirit, as children of the one Father, loving to the point of complete self-giving, fully dedicated to the building up of the Church and the transformation of the world according to the divine plan. The Eucharist then is not just a mystery that we can admire in the light of faith; it is infinitely more, for in this sacrament Jesus invites us to accept the salvation that he offers us, to receive the sacrificial offering of his Body and Blood as the food of eternal life, permitting us to enter into communion with him, with his Person and his Sacrifice, and into communion with all the members of his Mystical Body, the Church.

In the following pages we will consider the presence of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice in the Eucharist, and what our own participation in it should be. First we will give a summary of the doctrine elaborated by dogmatic theology and by the recent magisterium of the Church. Then, within this historical and theological context, we will explain the teaching that Blessed Josemaría Escrivá offers us regarding a Christian’s participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice.

8. *Ibid.*, no. 86.

9. *L. cit.*

## 2. *The Eucharist, the sacrifice of Christ and the Church: the path to the Father, in the Son, through the Holy Spirit*

### 2.1 *The doctrine formulated by the theological tradition and the twentieth-century magisterium*

“At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior 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.”<sup>10</sup> This text of the Second Vatican Council offers us a synthesis of the various aspects of the Eucharistic Mystery: the Eucharist is at one and the same time a *sacrifice* (in sacramental identity with the sacrifice of the Cross), a *memorial* of our Lord’s death and resurrection, a *sacrament* of his personal presence, a paschal *banquet* (of the new Passover of the pilgrim Church), a *sign and cause of the unity* of the Church, and a *pledge* of eschatological plenitude. It clearly highlights the essential content of the Eucharist and the purpose for which our Lord instituted it: *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.*

#### 2.1.1. *The Eucharist, the sacramental presence of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice*

The Eucharist is a *sacrifice* in a “new” sense in respect to the sacrifices found in natural religions and in the ritual sacrifices of the Old Testament. It is a *sacrifice* because the sacrament-memorial instituted by Christ at the Last Supper makes present, at the moment of the Church’s liturgical celebration, the unique sacrifice of our redemption.<sup>11</sup> That is to say, it is directly tied, by sacramental identification, to the unique, perfect and definitive sacrifice of the Cross. This relationship was instituted by Jesus at the Last Supper, when he gave his apostles, under the species of bread and wine, *his body offered in sacrifice and his blood shed for the remission of sins*, thus anticipating, in the memorial rite, what happened a short time later on Golgotha. From that moment on, the Church, with the guidance and strength of the Holy Spirit, has not ceased to fulfill Jesus’ mandate to his disciples: “do this in remembrance of me” (*Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24-25*). In this way “the Lord’s death” [his sacrifice: cf. *Eph 5:2; Heb 9:26*] is proclaimed—made present by word and sacrament—“until he comes” (*1 Cor 11:26*).

This announcement, the sacramental proclamation of the Paschal mystery of the Lord, is of particular efficacy, for it not only represents the redemptive sacrifice of Christ *in signo* or *in figura*, but it also makes truly present his Person and the salvific event that is being commemorated. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “The Eucharist is the memorial of Christ’s Passover, the making present

10. Second Vatican Council, Const. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, December 4, 1963, no. 47.

11. Cf. Pope Paul VI, *Solemn Profession of Faith*, June 30, 1968, no. 24.

and the sacramental offering of his unique sacrifice, in the liturgy of the Church which is his Body.”<sup>12</sup>

It is the Person of Christ, the incarnate and glorified Son of the Father, who makes possible this perennial presence of his redemptive sacrifice, the efficacy of which he confided to his Church in the sacraments: “In the liturgy of the Church, it is principally his own Paschal mystery that Christ signifies and makes present. During his earthly life Jesus announced his Paschal mystery by his teaching and anticipated it by his actions. When his Hour comes (cf. *Jn* 13:1; 17:1) he lives out the one historical event which does not pass away: Jesus dies, is buried, rises from the dead, and is seated at the right hand of the Father ‘once for all’ (*Rom* 6:10; *Heb* 7:27; 9:12). His Paschal mystery is a real event that occurred in our history, but it is unique: all other historical events happen once, and then they pass away, swallowed up in the past. The Paschal mystery of Christ, by contrast, cannot remain only in the past, because by his death he destroyed death, and all that Christ is—all that he did and suffered for all men—participates in the divine eternity, and so transcends all times while being made present in them all. The event of the Cross and Resurrection *abides* and draws everything toward Life.”<sup>13</sup>

This can be explained by considering the mystery of Jesus, the God-Man, whose actions, carried out in history, are truly actions of the Son of God the Father. He, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, when he carried out the sacrifice of our redemption, carried it out in his human nature with the power of his divinity,<sup>14</sup> thereby giving that event an eternal root and dimension. Thus his sacrificial offering, though carried out at a specific moment in history, did not remain limited or circumscribed by that historical moment, but rather attained the eternity of God.<sup>15</sup> It is perpetually present in the “eternal now” of the divine nature’s eternal vision and love, without interruption or repetition, inseparably united to the Person of the Son of God made man. Therefore, when we speak of our Lord “offering himself” at Mass, we should not understand it as a *new* act of offering by Christ, but simply as the perpetuation of the sacrificial offering fulfilled “once for all” (cf. *Heb* 7:25-27).<sup>16</sup>

When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the redemptive sacrifice of the Cross is made sacramentally present in the fullness of Christ’s Paschal mystery, for it re-presents (makes present again), in a mysterious but real way, the Person of Christ, risen and glorious. Therefore, it makes present the same Victim of Golgotha, now glorious; the same Priest, Jesus Christ; the same act of sacrificial offering (the primordial offering on the Cross), inseparably united to the sacramental presence of Christ. This offering, always present in the risen and glorious Christ, is

12. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1362.

13. *Ibid.* no. 1085.

14. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *S. Th.*, III, q. 17, a. 2, c.

15. Thus it is a “meta-historical act,” which cannot be measured using just the spatial and temporal parameters of the present moment, like our human acts, but according to the eternity shared in by the God-Man; cf. T. Filthaut, *Kontroverse über die Mysterienlehre*, Warendorf 1947, p. 17.

16. Cf. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *An Christus non solum virtualiter sed etiam actualiter offerat Missas quae quotidie celebrantur*, in *Angelicum* 19 (1942) 105-118.

changed only in its external manifestation. On Calvary it took place through his passion and death on the Cross; in the Mass, through the memorial-sign: the double consecration of the bread and wine in the context of the Eucharistic Prayer (a sacramental image of his self-offering on the Cross).<sup>17</sup> What is made present now is Christ's self-offering, in conformity with his Father's will, giving his life to redeem us from sin perpetuated in the glorified Christ. By his will, this salvific, eternal act has remained linked to history and becomes present in time and space wherever the memorial that he instituted at the Last Supper is celebrated. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: "When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ's Passover, and it is made present: the sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the cross remains ever present" (cf. *Heb 7:25-27*).<sup>18</sup>

We have been considering the Eucharist as the presence of Christ's redeeming sacrifice in the fullness of his Paschal mystery. But can we say that the Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the Church?

### 2.1.2. *The Eucharist, sacrifice of Christ and of the Church*

The Eucharist is the sacrifice of the Church, not only because the sacramental memorial of Christ's redemptive sacrifice was entrusted to her, but also because every time that she celebrates the Eucharistic mystery, she participates in the sacrifice of her Lord, entering into communion with him, with his sacrificial offering to the Father, and with the marvels of the redemption that he has obtained for us. The whole Church offers and is offered in Christ to the Father through the Holy Spirit. This is confirmed by the Church's living tradition, both in the texts of the liturgy and in the teachings of the Fathers and the magisterium. The basis of this teaching is found in the union and cooperation between Christ and the members of his Body, clearly expressed by the Second Vatican Council: "Christ, indeed, always associates the Church with himself in this great work in which God is perfectly glorified and men are sanctified."<sup>19</sup>

#### *The Church offers with Christ*

The participation of the Church, the priestly people, hierarchically structured, in the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice is based on Jesus' command: "do this in memory of me." It is reflected in the liturgical formula "*memores... offerimus... gratias agentes...*" frequently used in the Eucharistic prayers of the early Church,<sup>20</sup> and also present in today's Eucharistic prayers.<sup>21</sup>

17. The Eucharist makes present a pre-existing reality: the Person of Christ, and in Him, the sacrificial act of our redemption. The sign only brings about a new, sacramental mode of presence, permitting, as we shall see below, the Church's participation in our Lord's sacrifice.

18. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1364.

19. Second Vatican Council, Const. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 7.

20. Cf. Eucharistic prayer of the *Apostolic Tradition* of St. Hippolytus; *Anafora de Addai y Mari*; *Anafora de S. Marcos*, in A. Hänggi-I. Pahl, *Præx Eucharistica. Textus a Variis Liturgiis Antiquioribus Selecti*, Fribourg, 1968, pp. 80-81; pp. 375-380, pp. 101-115, especially pp. 112-114.

21. Cf. *Roman Missal*, Eucharistic Prayer I (*Unde et memores y Supra quæ*); Eucharistic Prayer III (*Memore igitur, Respice, quaesumus and Ipse nos tibi*). Similar expressions are found in the second and fourth Eucharistic Prayers.

As the texts of the Eucharistic liturgy show, the faithful are not merely spectators at an act of worship carried out by the priest celebrant. All those present can and should participate in the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice, since they have been incorporated into Christ by virtue of baptism and form part of “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 *Pet* 2:9). They are part of the new people of God in Christ, which he himself constantly gathers around him, so that from one end of the world to the other, a perfect sacrifice may be offered in his name (cf. *Mal* 1:10-11). They offer not only the spiritual worship of the sacrifice of their own work and their entire existence, but also, in Christ and with Christ, they offer the pure, holy and immaculate Victim. All of this is part of the exercise of the common priesthood of the faithful in the Eucharist.

In regard to this last point, it would be good to recall that this offering is carried out by the priest celebrant at the very moment of the consecration, when in the Person of Christ he makes present his Body and Blood, and his sacrificial offering which, in Him and with Him, is united to that of the whole Church, represented visibly in the assembly of the faithful.<sup>22</sup> Finally, in regard to the meaning of the prayers of the *anamnesis* [which ends with the words “do this in remembrance of me”], where the “priestly service” of the Church (its act of offering) is emphasized, this should not be understood as if the Church were offering, either alone or with the glorified Christ, a *new sacrifice*, different from or juxtaposed to the Cross of our Lord. The formula *memores... offerimus... gratias agentes*, simply makes explicit, by means of the liturgical text, the will of the Church, Christ’s Mystical Body, to offer itself in union with its Head. It makes no attempt to substitute for the Lord in offering the sacrifice, or to act as a mediator between Christ and the Father. The subject of the mystery is Christ alone. But together with Christ the Church is always taking part, as the Body and Spouse of her Lord.<sup>23</sup>

The Church’s action, on the one hand, is receptive (she receives salvation and life itself from her Lord, when in the sacramental representation of his salvific acts she is given access to his mystery). But to this passivity of reception there is joined an active collaboration, since the faithful, thanks to baptism, have been incorporated into Christ and can share in his work. The Church’s collaboration reaches its summit in her participation in the sacrifice of her Lord. When the Church (hierarchically ordered, the priest celebrant and the rest of the faithful) offers the Eucharistic sacrifice externally and unites herself interiorly with the sacrificial act of the Cross, the sacrifice of Christ is converted into the sacrifice of the Church as well. “It is the same sacrifice of the Cross; only the manner of offering it is different, as the Council of Trent says: *sola offerendi ratione diversa*. This sacrifice [Holy

22. On the participation of the faithful in the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice, cf. Pope Pius XII, Encyclical *Mediator Dei*: AAS 39 (1947) 555-556; 559-560; Second Vatican Council, Const. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 48; Dogmatic Const. *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, nos. 10-11; Pope Paul VI, Encyclical *Mysterium Fidei*: AAS 57 (1965) 761; *Ibid.*, *Solemnis Professio Fidei*, no. 24; Pope John Paul II, Letter *Dominicae Cena*, February 24, 1980, no. 9.

23. O. Casel, “Die Kirche als Braut Christi nach Schrift, Vaterlehre und Liturgie,” in *Mysterium der Eklesia. Von der Gemeinschaft aller Erlösten in Christus Jesus (Aus Schriften und Vorträgen)*, Mainz 1961, pp. 59-87.

Mass], therefore, is the true sacrifice of the Church, because the Church now fulfills on her own initiative the sacrifice that our Lord transmitted to her. In her character as Body and Spouse, that is, thanks to her free and spontaneous act of offering, although of course this is carried out by the command and power of her Head and Spouse, she makes her own the sacrificial act of her Head. In this way the sacrifice of Christ, without having anything added to it, is completely changed into the sacrifice of the Church. And thus it is changed into something new and different, without anything special being added to it, or any need to be perfected.”<sup>24</sup>

The Church, in her *act of thanksgiving*, presents to the Father what she has received from Him, asking for the application of the salvific benefits of the Cross and the grace to form in Christ one body and one spirit. As we have already stressed, the offering of the Church is not added to that of Christ but identified with it. The faithful are not offering a sacrifice different from our Lord's, for in uniting themselves with Him, the Church's offering is united to his own, “in such a way that the offering of the Church becomes the offering of Christ himself.”<sup>25</sup> It is Jesus Christ who offers the spiritual sacrifice of the faithful incorporated to his own sacrifice.<sup>26</sup> The relation between the two offerings “cannot be seen as a juxtaposition or succession, but rather as the presence of the one in the other.”<sup>27</sup>

#### *The Church is offered with Christ*

The Church, in union with Christ, not only offers the Eucharistic Sacrifice, but is also offered in it, for as Body and Spouse, she is inseparably united to her Head and Spouse.

The teaching of the Fathers is very clear in this respect. For St. Cyprian the “Church offered” (the invisible offering of the faithful) is symbolized in the liturgical offering of the gifts of bread and wine mixed with drops of water, as the material for the sacrifice of the altar.<sup>28</sup> For St. Augustine, in the sacrifice of the altar the whole Church is offered with her Lord, as the sacramental celebration itself makes clear: “The whole of that redeemed city, that is the congregation or communion of saints, is offered as a universal sacrifice to God through the High Priest who, ‘taking the form of a servant, offered himself in his passion for us that we might be the body of so glorious a Head. . . . Such is the sacrifice of Christians: ‘We, though many, are one body in Christ’ (Rom 12:5). This is the Sacrifice, as the faithful understand, which the Church continues to celebrate in the sacrament of the altar, in which it is clear to the Church that she herself is offered in the very offering she makes to God.”<sup>29</sup> For St. Gregory the Great, the celebration of the Eucharist is a

24. *ID.*, “Glauben, Gnosis und Mysterium,” in *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft*, 15 (1941) 299.

25. M. Lepin, *L'Idée du Sacrifice de la Messe d'après les théologiens depuis l'origine jusqu'à nos jours*, 2nd ed., Paris 1926, p. 755.

26. Cf. J.A. Jungmann, “*Oblatio und Sacrificium in der Geschichte der Eucharistieverständnisses*,” in *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie*, 92 (1970) 343.

27. J. Betz, *L'Eucaristia come mistero centrale*, in *Mysterium Salutis*, VIII, Brescia 1982, p. 341.

28. Cf. St. Cyprian, *Ep.* 63, 13: CSEL 3, 71.

29. St. Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, 10, 6: in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol 14, CUA Press, p. 127.



stimulus for us to imitate Christ's example, offering our life to the Father as Jesus did. Thus the salvation that stems from our Lord's Cross will reach us.<sup>30</sup>

The Eucharistic liturgy itself does not fail to express the Church's participation, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, in Christ's sacrifice: "Look with favor on your Church's offering, and see the Victim whose death has reconciled us to yourself. Grant that we, who are nourished by his body and blood, may be filled with his Holy Spirit, and become one body, one spirit in Christ. May he make us an everlasting gift to you...."<sup>31</sup> Similarly, in the fourth Eucharistic Prayer we ask: "Look upon this sacrifice which you have given to your Church; and by your Holy Spirit, gather all who share this one bread and one cup into the one body of Christ, a living sacrifice of praise."

As far as the recent magisterium is concerned, we can cite this text from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "The Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the Church. The Church which is the Body of Christ participates in the offering of her Head. With him, she herself is offered whole and entire. She unites herself to his intercession with the Father for all men. In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value. Christ's sacrifice present on the altar makes it possible for all generations of Christians to be united with his offering."<sup>32</sup>

This doctrine has great importance for Christian life. All the faithful are called to participate in the holy Mass with the intention of offering their own life without stain of sin to the Father, in union with Christ the immaculate Victim. They offer a spiritual sacrifice, returning with gratitude and filial love all that they have received from him. In this way divine charity — "the current of Trinitarian love" — will transform their entire existence.

## *2.2 Participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice in the teachings of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá*

Blessed Josemaría's writings present us with a deeply unified vision of the different aspects of the Eucharistic mystery. Particularly emphasized is its sacrificial dimension, viewed in the perspective of the sacramental order entrusted by Christ to his Church. The holy Mass is "the sacramental sacrifice of the Body and Blood of our Lord."<sup>33</sup> Following the Church's tradition, he identified this sacramental sacrifice with the unique sacrifice of our Redeemer. "It is the sacrifice of Christ, offered to the Father with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit—an offering of infinite value, which perpetuates the work of the redemption in us."<sup>34</sup> And on contem-

30. Cf. St. Gregory the Great, *Dialog.*, 4, 61,1: SChr 265, 202

31. *Roman Missal*, Eucharistic Prayer III: *Respice, quaesumus* and *Ipse nos tibi*.

32. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1368.

33. *Conversation*, no. 113.

34. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 86.

plating this reality with eyes of faith and love, we discover that this “sacrifice [Holy Mass] . . . summarizes all that Christ asks of us.”<sup>35</sup> We learn what he wants from us when we take part in the Eucharistic liturgy and in every moment of our life.

Our Father God wants us to live in accordance with what we are, as sons and daughters in the Son, identified with Christ in filial love and obedience. And this identification is realized in a special way thanks to the Eucharist. In Christ Jesus, in communion with his divine Person, we can live in a constant relationship of filial love with the Father (cf. *Jn* 6:57); and the Father pours out upon us his paternity overflowing with love. In addition, through communion with the body of Christ, with his life-giving Humanity vivified by the Spirit, we also enter into communion with the Third Person of the Trinity, receiving the Holy Spirit’s power to love, which creates, renews, inflames and sanctifies everything. He “makes us entirely Christ-like” and enables us to sense deeply our divine filiation in Christ. Blessed Josemaría wrote: “The life of grace, into which we are brought by baptism, and which is increased and strengthened by confirmation, grows to its fullness in the Mass. ‘When we participate in the Eucharist,’ writes St. Cyril of Jerusalem, ‘we are made spiritual by the divinizing action of the Holy Spirit, who not only makes us share in Christ’s life, as in baptism, but makes us entirely Christ-like, incorporating us into the fullness of Christ Jesus’ (St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses*, 22, 3). This outpouring of the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ and makes us acknowledge that we are children of God. The Paraclete, who is Love, teaches us to saturate our life with the virtue of charity. Thus *consummati in unum*, ‘made one with Christ,’ we can be among men what the Eucharist is for us, in the words of St. Augustine: ‘a sign of unity, a bond of love’ (St. Augustine, *In Ioannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 26, 13: PL 35, 1613).”<sup>36</sup>

The contemplation of Christ’s love for us revealed in the Eucharist and, above all, the identification with Him that is effected by faith, by the Eucharist’s “christifying” grace, and by the action of the Paraclete in our soul, should move any Christian who participates in the Eucharistic sacrifice “to correspond to such great love.” Therefore, says Blessed Josemaría, “we must give ourselves completely, in body and in soul.”<sup>37</sup> We are moved to surrender ourselves as Jesus did: with a loving, complete, unconditional, humble, hidden, persevering self-giving.

What God expects of us in every Eucharistic celebration is that we adhere fully to Jesus’ words: “take and eat . . . this is my body, which will be given up for you; take and drink . . . this is the chalice of my blood, which will be shed for you and for all men for the pardon of sins.” Our Lord’s command to “do this” (what I have done) “in commemoration of me,” demands not only that the priest repeat his words and gestures. He wants all those present to receive with faith and love the gift that he offers us and, united to him, to give ourselves to the Father, in the Spirit, for the salvation of the world.

35. *Ibid.*, no. 88.

36. *Ibid.*, no. 87.

37. *Loc. cit.*

All the faithful, the entire priestly People of God and not just the priest-celebrant, are called to share in the Eucharist in this way, that is, to make present their self-giving to God at the moment of the consecration of the gifts, and at the moment of communion when we become one and the same with the divine Victim.<sup>38</sup> Although only the sacramentally ordained minister, the priest or bishop, has the power to carry out the Eucharistic sacrifice *in persona Christi*, the Eucharistic celebration affects and involves each of the faithful present, who are called upon, in virtue of their common priesthood (that is, their participation in the priesthood of Christ received in Baptism), to offer to the Father a *spiritual worship* (Rom 12:1), the sacrifice of their lives, united to Christ's sacrifice. Therefore all the faithful, who are much more than mere spectators at an act of worship carried out by the priest celebrant, can and should participate in the offering of the sacrifice.

Blessed Josemaría insisted strongly on this doctrine of the Church, urging us to renew at holy Mass the offering of our life and everyday work, all that we are and have: our intelligence, will and memory; work, joys and sorrows. He wanted everything placed on the altar so that our Lord could take it up and give it a salvific value "in the supreme moment of the holy sacrifice of the Mass, where time blends with eternity."<sup>39</sup> He wanted our whole existence to be directed, day after day, to the Eucharistic sacrifice, teaching everyone to live with a priestly soul. Thus he anticipated what the Second Vatican Council said about the Christian faithful: "For all their works, prayers and apostolic undertakings, family and married life, daily work, relaxation of mind and body, if they are accomplished in the Spirit—indeed even the hardships of life if patiently borne—all these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Pet 2:5). In the celebration of the Eucharist these may most fittingly be offered to the Father along with the body of the Lord. And so, worshipping everywhere by their holy actions, the laity consecrate the world itself to God."<sup>40</sup>

What we have said up till now about the faithful applies in a special way to the priest-celebrant. Insofar as he acts *in persona Christi* in the Eucharistic celebration, he is called to identify himself in a special way with Christ, Victim and Priest. The offering of his own life to the Father, through Christ and in Christ, should be a reality for him in every celebration of the Eucharist. The Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis* states that "when priests unite themselves with the [sacrificial] act of Christ the Priest they daily offer themselves completely to God."<sup>41</sup> What they carry out sacramentally on the altar commits their entire life: they are called to give themselves fully, in Christ and with Christ, to the Father, thus allowing our Lord to take over their entire existence and to fill it with redemptive meaning and value.

38. In regard to the Church's desire that all the faithful participate conscientiously, devoutly and actively in the Eucharistic sacrifice, offering themselves together with Christ and offering the immaculate Host, not only through the hands of the priest but together with him, cf. Second Vatican Council, Const. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 48; Dogmatic Const. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11; Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, December 7, 1965, nos. 2 and 5; Pope Pius XII, Encyclical *Mediator Dei*; AAS 39 (1947) 555-556; Pope Paul VI, Encyclical *Mysterium Fidei*; AAS 57 (1965) 761; SCR, Instr. *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, May 25, 1967, nos. 3b and 3e, Pope John Paul II, Letter *Dominicae Cenaе*, no. 9.

39. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 94.

40. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Const. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 34.

41. Second Vatican Council, Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 13.

Blessed Josemaría Escrivá was fully conscious of this truth. He frequently recalled it to priests, and lived it himself every day in the Sacrifice of the Altar:

“The sacrament of orders in effect enables the priest to lend our Lord his voice, his hands, his whole being. It is Jesus Christ who, in the holy Mass, through the words of the consecration, changes the substance of the bread and wine into his body, his soul, his blood and divinity.

“This is the source of the priest’s dignity. It is a greatness which is on loan: it is completely compatible with my littleness. I pray God our Lord to give all of us priests the grace to perform holy things in a holy way, to reflect in every aspect of our lives the wonders of the greatness of God. ‘Those of us who celebrate the mysteries of the passion of our Lord must imitate what we perform. And then the host will take our place before God, if we render ourselves hosts (St. Gregory the Great, *Dialogue* 4:59).’<sup>42</sup>

Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, a privileged witness of the faith and love with which Blessed Josemaría celebrated Mass each day, tells us:

“At the elevation of the Eucharistic Bread, and again at the elevation of the Blood of our Lord, he would repeat certain prayers—not aloud, because the rubrics do not permit it, but in his mind and heart—and he did this with a heroic perseverance which lasted for decades.

“Specifically, while he had the consecrated host in his hands, he would say, ‘My Lord and my God,’ the act of faith of St. Thomas the Apostle [*Jn* 20:28]. Next, again taking his inspiration from the Gospel [*Lk* 17:5], he would slowly repeat, ‘*Adauge nobis fidem, spem, et caritatem*’ [‘Increase our faith, hope, and charity’], asking the Lord to give to the whole Work the grace of growing in these virtues. Immediately after that, he would repeat a prayer addressed to the Merciful Love, a prayer which he had known and meditated upon since his youth, but which he never used in his preaching—for many years he only rarely confided to us that he recited it—‘Holy Father, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary I offer to you Jesus, your beloved Son, and in him, through him, and with him I offer myself for all his intentions and in the name of all creatures.’ Afterwards he added the invocation ‘Lord, grant purity and *gaudium cum pace* [joy with peace] to me and to all,’ thinking especially, of course, of his sons and daughters in Opus Dei. And finally, while he was genuflecting after having elevated the Host or the chalice, he recited the first stanza of the Eucharistic hymn *Adoro Te Devote*, and he said to the Lord, ‘Welcome to the altar!’

“All of this, I repeat, was said by him not just on this or that occasion, but every day, and never mechanically, but with all his heart and love.”<sup>43</sup>

42. Homily, *A Priest Forever*, Scepter Booklet no. 16, p. 9.

43. Cavalleri, Cesare, *Immersed in God: Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, founder of Opus Dei as seen by his successor, Bishop Álvaro del Portillo*, Princeton, 1996, pp. 110-111.

We can easily understand the joy that Blessed Josemaría felt when he read in the Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis* something that he had been preaching for many years: the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice is “the center and root of the whole life of the priest, so that the priestly soul strives to make its own what is enacted on the altar of sacrifice.”<sup>44</sup>

Blessed Josemaría taught, and he himself lived, a radical dedication of one’s life to God in the holy Mass: “our Mass, Jesus,” he wrote in *The Way*.<sup>45</sup> “We should love the Mass and make it the center of our day. If we attend Mass well, surely we are likely to think about our Lord during the rest of the day, wanting to be always in his presence, ready to work as he worked and love as he loved.”<sup>46</sup> He strove to make his whole day a continual Mass, making each day “totally eucharistic.”<sup>47</sup> He wrote in 1945: “In this way, closely united to Jesus in the Eucharist, we will attain a continual presence of God, in the midst of the ordinary occupations proper to each one’s situation on this earthly pilgrimage of ours, seeking our Lord at all times and in all things. Making our own Christ’s sentiments on the Cross, we will find our entire life becoming an unceasing act of reparation, an untiring petition and a permanent sacrifice for all mankind. For our Lord will give us a supernatural instinct to purify all of our actions, elevating them to the order of grace and turning them into an instrument of apostolate. Only thus will we be contemplative souls in the midst of the world, as our vocation demands, and we will become truly priestly souls, converting every aspect of our being into a continual praise of God.”<sup>48</sup>

He taught us in a practical way how to make the Mass the center of our daily life. He divided the 24 hours of the day into two parts: “Until noon he lived the presence of God by concentrating on thanksgiving for the Mass that he had celebrated that morning, and, after the Angelus he began to prepare himself for the next day’s Mass.”<sup>49</sup> When preparing for Mass, he made many acts of faith, hope and love; he asked God’s pardon for his own sins and those of all mankind; he pleaded tirelessly for “apostolic souls” and renewed his intention of placing all his prayers, works, thoughts, and affections, joys and sufferings, on the paten, so that our Lord would make all of it his own and give it a redemptive value.

44. Second Vatican Council, Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 14. On the relation between this text and the preaching of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, see Álvaro del Portillo, *Sacerdotes para una nueva evangelización*, *op. cit.*, p. 995.

45. *The Way*, no. 533.

46. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 154.

47. *The Forge*, no. 826. The teaching that the Mass can be prolonged throughout the whole day has been formulated in various ways throughout history. On this point one can see a clear harmony between the teachings of Blessed Josemaría and the doctrine of the French school of spirituality. For example, F. Mugnier, following such authors as J. Bossuet, P. de Bérulle and Ch. de Condren, expresses himself as follows: “Faire ainsi de ma journée comme une messe en action, continuant, s’il se peut, la sainte messe quotidiennement entendue et pratiquée, ce devrait être la vie normale de tout chrétien” (F. Mugnier, *Roi, Prophète, Prêtre avec le Christ*, Paris 1937, p. 215).

48. *Letter of February 2, 1945*, no. 11.

49. *Cavalleri*, *op. cit.* p. 109.

For Blessed Josemaría, teaching the faithful to take part in the Eucharistic sacrifice was an essential part of every priest's ministry. "In Holy Mass all the affections and needs of a Christian's heart find their best channel: through Christ the Mass leads, in the Holy Spirit, to the Father. The priest should make a special effort to ensure that the people know this and practice it. No other activity should normally take precedence over this task of teaching people to love and venerate the Holy Eucharist."<sup>50</sup> And he continued: "A priest who lives the Mass in this way—adoring, atoning, pleading, giving thanks, identifying himself with Christ—and who teaches others to make the sacrifice of the altar the center and root of their Christian life, will truly show the incomparable value of his vocation."<sup>51</sup>

The central role of the Eucharist in the daily life of each Christian should show itself, particularly, in care for the Eucharistic liturgy, in the faith and the love with which we treat God and the things of God.

"I ask all Christians to pray earnestly for us priests that we learn to perform the holy sacrifice in a holy way. I ask you to show a deep love for the Holy Mass. In this way you will encourage us priests to celebrate it respectfully, with divine and human dignity: to keep clean the vestments and other things used for worship, to act devoutly, to avoid rushing.

"Why the hurry? Do people in love hurry when saying good-by? They seem to be going, yet they stay. They turn back once and again. They repeat quite ordinary words as if they had just discovered their meaning... Don't take exception to my applying to the things of God the example of noble and fine human love. If we love God with our heart of flesh—we have no other—we will not be in a hurry to finish this meeting, this loving rendezvous with him."<sup>52</sup>

His example was well engraved in the life of his daughters and sons in Opus Dei. "From the beginning of his priestly ministry, he struggled not to give in to either routine or precipitation when he celebrated the Holy Sacrifice, in spite of the scant time that he had to carry out his many pastoral activities. On the contrary, his spontaneous tendency was to say Mass with great tranquillity, going into each text and into the meaning of each liturgical gesture so carefully that for many years he had to make a real effort—in accord with what he was told in spiritual direction—to go faster, so as not to attract attention and because he realized that he was at the service of the faithful who were often pressed for time when attending Mass. In this context, we can understand what he wrote in 1932, like a sigh escaping from his soul: 'When one says Mass, the clocks should stop.'<sup>53</sup>

Those who witnessed how Blessed Josemaría Escrivá celebrated holy Mass are unanimous in affirming that externally there was never anything extraordinary

50. *A Priest Forever*, p. 16.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

53. Álvaro del Portillo, *Sacerdotes para una nueva evangelización*, *op. cit.*, p. 996.

or singular about his Mass, although it was impossible not to notice his profound reverence.<sup>54</sup> His piety was nourished by the liturgical texts and manifested itself in a multitude of gestures—indicated in the Eucharistic liturgy itself—such as the kissing of the altar table (a symbol of Christ), the bowing of the head, the unhurried genuflections with which he adored the Holy of Holies.<sup>55</sup> He lived the Holy Mass and taught everyone to live it as a very personal encounter with Christ, our Love, and with his whole Mystical Body, the Church: “To *live* the Holy Mass means to pray continually and to be convinced that, for each one of us, this is a personal meeting with God. We adore him, we praise him, we give him thanks, we atone for our sins, we are purified, we feel ourselves united in Christ with all Christians.”<sup>56</sup>

“The intensity,” wrote Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, “with which he personally united himself to the sacrifice of our Lord in the Eucharist, culminated in something that I have no doubt was a special mystical gift, and that the Father himself told us about, with great simplicity, on October 24, 1966: ‘At my age of sixty-five, I have made a marvelous discovery. I am always very happy to celebrate Holy Mass, but yesterday it cost me a tremendous amount of work. What an effort! I saw that the Mass is truly *Opus Dei*, real work, as the first Mass was real work for Jesus. I saw that the role of the priest in celebrating Mass involves working to produce the Eucharist; that one undergoes pain, and joy and tiredness. I felt in my flesh the exhaustion of a divine work.’”<sup>57</sup>

### 3. *The Eucharist and life in Christ*

In the Eucharist Jesus has not just left us a sign or reminder of his historical presence among men and of the sacrifice with which he carried out our redemption. His all-powerful love enabled him, after his glorious ascension to the right hand of the Father, to remain permanently in the Church in the most holy sacrament of the altar.

“Think of the human experience of two people who love each other, and yet are forced to part. They would like to stay together forever, but duty—in one form or another—forces them to separate. They are unable to fulfill their desire of remaining close to each other, so man’s love—which, great as it may be, is limited—seeks a symbolic gesture. People who make their farewells exchange gifts or perhaps a photograph with a dedication so ardent that it seems almost enough to burn that piece of paper. They can do no more, because a creature’s power is not so great as its desire.

54. Cf. J.M. Casciaro, *Vale la pena. Tres años cerca del Fundador del Opus Dei: 1932-1942*, 2nd ed., Madrid 1998, pp 113-114. See also the testimonies that appear in the *Artículos del Postulador*, nos. 379-384.

55. Cf. *Christ Is Passing By*, nos. 85-91.

56. *Ibid.*, no. 88. Years earlier Blessed Josemaría had written: “Never get used to celebrating or assisting at the Holy Sacrifice: do so, on the contrary, with as much devotion as if it were a matter of the only Mass in your life; knowing that present there is Christ, God and Man, Head and Body, and therefore, together with Him, the whole of his Church” (*Letter of March 28, 1955*, no. 5).

57. Álvaro del Portillo, *Sacerdotes para una nueva evangelización*, op. cit., pp. 996-997.

“What we cannot do, our Lord is able to do. Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect man, leaves us, not a symbol, but a reality. He himself stays with us. He will go to the Father, but he will also remain among men. He will leave us, not simply a gift that will make us remember him, not an image that becomes blurred with time, like a photograph that soon fades and yellows, and has no meaning except for those who were contemporaries. Under the appearances of bread and wine, he is really present, with his body and blood, with his soul and divinity.”<sup>58</sup>

The personal presence of Jesus—of the incarnate and glorified Son of the Father—true, real, and substantial, has immense consequences for the life of the Church and the Christian. Since Christ is the Word of the Father (cf. *Jn* 1:1; 1:14; 14:9-10), the One in whom “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (*Col* 2:9), our Redeemer and Savior (cf. *Mt* 26:28; *Acts* 4:10-12; *Rom* 3:23-24; *1 Tim* 2:5-6; *1 Jn* 2:2), the Eucharist possesses extraordinary sanctifying power. Entering into communion with Christ, *perfect God and perfect man*, we receive divine Life itself (cf. *Jn* 4:16), the Light that illumines all mankind (cf. *Jn* 1:9), the Truth that makes us free (cf. *Jn* 8:31-32), the Love that transforms us (*1 Jn* 4:16), and all the salvific goods that he, through his death and resurrection, has merited for us.

Through the Eucharist the new life in Christ, begun in the believer at baptism (cf. *Rom* 6:3-4; *Gal* 3:27-28), is strengthened and grows until it reaches its plenitude (cf. *Eph* 4:13), permitting the Christian to attain the ideal proclaimed by St. Paul: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (*Gal* 2:20). As Jesus’ very words tell us: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh. . . . He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me” (*Jn* 6:51-57). The eucharistic Bread offers the faithful our Lord’s very life, giving them a singular participation, in Christ and with Christ, in the communion of life and love of the One and Triune God.

The consideration of these truths was for Blessed Josemaría Escrivá a powerful stimulus to live in accord with what we are: children of God in Christ. “The holy Eucharist gives the sons of God a divine newness and we must respond ‘in the newness of your mind,’ renewing all our feelings and actions. We have been given a new principle of energy, strong new roots grafted onto our Lord. We must not return to the old leaven, for now we have the bread which lasts forever.”<sup>59</sup>

58. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 83.

59. *Ibid.*, no. 155. It is clear that if the salvific effects of the Eucharist are not gained in all their plenitude at one time ‘this is not owing to a lack of power in Christ, but to a lack of devotion in man’ (St. Thomas Aquinas, *S.Th.*, III, q. 79, a. 5, ad 3). In regard to the application of the saving power of the Eucharistic sacrifice and communion we have to remember that such application is not effected in a mechanical way (infallibly and extrinsically), but according to one’s moral dispositions, that is, according to one’s free correspondence to the grace offered by God, according to the faith, hope, charity, contrition, humility, etc. with which one approaches this personal encounter with Christ. Union with God in Christ is carried out in freedom and love. It is made possible by the love that he has for us, but it requires of us that we freely correspond to his love (cf. *1 Jn* 4:16, 19-21).



The Eucharist configures us with Christ. It lets us participate in the Son's being and the mission, identifying us with his intentions and sentiments. It gives us the strength to love as Christ asks us (cf. *Jn* 13:34-35), to enkindle all the men and women of our time with the fire of divine love that he came to bring to the world (cf. *Lk* 12:49), to have compassion for the masses who now, just as twenty centuries ago, wander like "sheep without a shepherd," without direction or meaning (cf. *Mt* 9:36). All of this should be manifested in our lives: "If we have been renewed by receiving our Lord's body, we should *show* it. Let us pray that our thoughts be sincere, full of peace, self-giving and service. Let us pray that we be true and clear in what we say—the right thing at the right time—so as to console and help and especially bring God's light to others. Let us pray that our actions be consistent and effective and right, so that they give off 'the good fragrance of Christ' (*2 Cor* 2:15), evoking his way of doing things."<sup>60</sup>

Thanks to the Eucharist a Christian can truly be a Christ-bearer, bringing Christ who is passing by to those around us. This is how Blessed Josemaría saw it in a homily given on April 28, 1964, the Feast of Corpus Christi:

"The Corpus Christi procession makes Christ present in towns and cities throughout the world. But his presence cannot be limited to just one day, a noise you hear and then forget. It should remind us that we have to discover our Lord in our ordinary everyday activity. Side by side with this solemn procession, there is the simple, silent procession of the ordinary life of each Christian. He is a man among men, who by good fortune has received the faith and the divine commission to act so that he renews the message of our Lord on earth. We are not without defects; we make mistakes and commit sins. But God is with us and we must make ourselves ready to be used by him, so that he can continue to walk among men.

"Let us ask our Lord then to make us souls devoted to the blessed Eucharist, so that our relationship with him brings forth joy and serenity and a desire for justice. In this way we will make it easier for others to recognize Christ; we will put Christ at the center of all human activities. And Jesus' promise will be fulfilled: 'I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.'"<sup>61</sup>

In the Eucharist we encounter the impetus for the evangelization of the world, the basis of the efficacy of the apostolate that Christ's disciples carry out.<sup>62</sup> Inserted into the current of life and love of the One and Triune God, they strive to fulfill, in the Son and through the Holy Spirit, the will of the Father, who wants all men to be saved (cf. *1 Tim* 2:4).

The Eucharist, in uniting us to Christ, the one Bread of which all Christians partake (cf. *1 Cor* 10:17), unites us to one another, thus building the Church up as

60. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 156.

61. *Loc. cit.*

62. The Second Vatican Council affirms explicitly that the Eucharist is "the source and the summit of all preaching of the Gospel" Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 5; cf. Decree *Ad Gentes*, December 7, 1965, no. 36.

a single Body (cf. *1 Cor* 12:27). In this way, when participating in the Eucharistic celebration “we feel ourselves united in Christ with all Christians.”<sup>63</sup> The Eucharist makes us more united with the entire family of God, which is the Church (cf. *Eph* 2:19).

The Eucharist, since it contains the incarnate Word, the crucified One who has risen and is now glorious at the right hand of the Father, possesses a salvific efficacy that transcends time. “Eternal happiness begins now for the Christian who is comforted with the definitive manna of the Eucharist. Let us leave everything behind us so that everything will be new, ‘our hearts, our words and our actions’ (Hymn *Sacris Solemnis*).”<sup>64</sup>

“In the Eucharist Jesus gives us a sure pledge of his presence in our souls; of his power, which supports the whole world; of his promises of salvation, which will help the human family to dwell forever in the house in heaven when time comes to an end. There we shall find God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit: the Blessed Trinity, the one and only God.”<sup>65</sup> The Eucharist contains as a seed, in an incipient manner, God’s universal salvific plan: with the resurrected Christ there is also present the new creation, “a new heaven and a new earth,” the new humanity (cf. *Rev* 21:1-7; *2 Pet* 3:13; *Rom* 8:19-22). For in Jesus’ glorious transfiguration the eschatological renewal of the world has already begun. In the risen Lord—who is the *eschaton*, the One who represents the final realities—the eighth day is already present, the eternity that breaks through into the present, giving us a foretaste of what eternal life will be.<sup>66</sup>

Thus we can say that every Eucharistic celebration is a Passover, the passage of the Church and of all creation towards its final goal. In every Eucharist “Jesus with the gesture of a high priest, attracts all things to himself and places them, *divino afflante Spiritu*, with the breath of the Holy Spirit, in the presence of God the Father.”<sup>67</sup>

63. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 88.

64. *Ibid.*, no. 152.

65. *Ibid.*, no. 153.

66. Cf. St. Basil the Great, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 27 66: SChr 17bis, 237.

67. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 94.