

Father John Paul II has called all Christians.

Finally let me refer once again to Saint Josemaría. We learned from him to have a special love for last stones. Be-

ginning is certainly important, but what is essential is to finish. I ask our Lord that we might find ourselves here once more within some months, the number of months scheduled for concluding the construction work.

Pastoral Letter

Rome

October 6, 2004

A pastoral letter to the faithful of the Prelature and its cooperators on the occasion of the Eucharistic Year, published on the Internet at www.opusdei.org.

"In the most blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself our Pasch and the living Bread which gives life to men through his flesh—that flesh which is given life and gives life through the Holy Spirit."¹ This mysterious and inexpressible manifestation of God's love for mankind occupies a privileged place in the hearts of all Catholics and, expressly, of God's children in Opus Dei. This is what our beloved Father taught us by his example, his preaching and his writings. He always told us that the Eucharist constitutes "the center and the source of a Christian's spiritual life."²

Therefore we were filled with joy by the Holy Father's decision, an-

nounced on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, to celebrate a Year of the Eucharist for the universal Church. As you will recall, this period begins during this month of October, with the International Eucharistic Congress being held in Guadalajara, Mexico, and will end in October 2005, with the Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which will be dedicated to this great Sacrament.

In perfect continuity with the Jubilee of the Year 2000 and in the spirit of the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, I would like the faithful of the Prelature, its Cooperators, and all those receiving the warmth of the spirit of the Work, to back up the Holy Father's initiatives every day, and to strive with all our strength to place the Holy Eucharist ever more at the center of our whole life. I also suggest that, during this Year of the Eucharist, staying close to our Lady by praying the Rosary, and moved by St. Josemaría's example, we make a point of going to the tabernacle to tell Jesus, who has become the Sacred Host, with deep sincerity: "*Adoro te devote! I adore you devoutly!*"

1. Vatican II, Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5.

2. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, 87. Cf. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 11; Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 14.

Let us be demanding on ourselves in striving for this goal, since the intensity of our Eucharistic piety determines the value of our life.

*Adoro te devote, latens Deitas, quae
sub his figuris vere latitas*

God so loved the world

We begin with a personal act of heartfelt adoration of the Eucharist, of Christ himself, for in this most holy Sacrament “there is contained, really, truly, and substantially the Body and Blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and, consequently, the whole Christ.”³ Jesus is present, but he is not seen. He is hidden under the species of bread and wine.⁴ “There he is, hidden in the Bread... for love of you.”⁵

Jesus’ love for mankind is the reason he remains among us, in this world, beneath the Eucharistic veil. “Ever since I was a small child, I have perfectly understood the reason for the Eucharist. It is a feeling that we all share: we always want to remain with those we love.”⁶ Our Father, considering the mystery of the love of Christ, whose delight is to be with the children of men (cf. *Prov* 8:31), who is not willing to leave us orphans (cf. *Jn* 14:18), who has chosen to remain with us until the end of the world (cf. *Mt* 28:20), used the example of people who have to part from one another to illustrate

the motive for the institution of this Sacrament. “They would like to stay together forever, but duty—in one form or another—forces them to separate.” And not being able to stay together, “they exchange gifts or perhaps a photograph,” but “they can do no more, because a creature’s power is not so great as its desire.” Jesus, God and Man, overcomes these limits through his love for us. “What we cannot do, our Lord is able to do. He leaves us, not a symbol, but a reality. He himself stays with us.”⁷ He who was born of Mary in Bethlehem; who worked in Nazareth and journeyed throughout Galilee and Judaea, and died on the Cross on Golgotha; who rose gloriously on the third day and appeared a number of times to his disciples, stays with us now.⁸

The Catholic faith has always professed this identical presence, in part to reject the idle daydreaming of those who excused their lack of Christian spirit by alleging they couldn’t see our Lord as the first disciples did, or who claimed they would behave differently if they were able to meet him physically. “How many now say, I would wish to see his form, his face, his clothes, his shoes. Lo! You see him, you touch him, you eat him. And you indeed desire to see his clothes, but he gives himself to you not to see only, but also to touch and eat and receive within you. Let no one then approach with indifference, let no one faint-hearted come, but all with burning hearts, all fervent, all vigilant.”⁹

3. COUNCIL OF TRENT, Session 13, Decree on the Holy Eucharist, Can. 1 (Denz. 1651).

4. Cf. *ibid.*, Can. 2 (Denz. 1652).

5. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, 538.

6. St. Josemaría, notes taken from a meditation, 14 April 1960.

7. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, 83.

8. Cf. *ibid.*, 84.

9. ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on the Gospel of St Matthew*, 82, 4 (PG 58, 743).

A God who is nearby

St. Josemaría taught us to put our whole heart into our faith in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, so that our Lord will truly enter into our life and we into his. Thus we will look at him and contemplate him, with eyes of faith, as a person who is really present. He sees us, he hears us, he awaits us, he speaks to us, he draws close to us and seeks us out, he immolates himself for us in the Holy Mass.¹⁰

Our Father said that people tend to imagine our Lord as “somewhere far off—where the stars shine,” as though he were unconcerned about those he has created. And thus they don’t completely believe that “he is also by our side—always.”¹¹ Perhaps you have met people who think the Creator is so different from us that he takes no interest in the small or great events that make up a human life. We, however, know that this is not the case, that “though the Lord is high, he looks upon little things” (*Ps* 137:6 *Vulgate*). He looks with love upon each of us; everything that is ours is of interest to him.

“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.”¹² His infinite love and concern for each and every one of us led the Son to remain in the Sacred Host, after becoming man and working and suffering like all mankind, his brothers and sisters. He is truly Emmanuel, God with us. “The Creator has loved his creatures to such an extent that 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, not to want to be separated from us.”¹³

Acts of adoration

Before this mystery of faith and love, we fall down in adoration. Only thus can we adequately show that we believe that the Eucharist is truly Christ, really and substantially present: his Body, his Blood, his Soul and his Divinity. Only thus can our love, heartfelt and total, produce an adequate response to the immense love that Jesus has for each of us (cf. *Jn* 13:1; *Lk* 22:15). Our adoration of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, since he is God, includes both external gestures and internal devotion, love. It is not a conventional ritual, but a very personal self-offering, which is shown forth externally. “In the Holy Mass we adore our God. We fulfill lovingly the first duty of a creature to his Creator: ‘You

10. Cf. *The Way*, 269, 537, 554; *The Forge*, 831, 991; *Christ Is Passing By*, 151.

11. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, 267.

12. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, 84.

13. *Ibid.*

shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve' (*Deut* 6:13; *Mt* 4:10). Not the cold, external adoration of a servant, but an intimate esteem and attachment that befits the tender love of a son."¹⁴

External signs of adoration—bowing our head or body, genuflecting, prostrating ourselves—are always intended to express reverence and affection, submission, total self-abandonment, a desire for union and service, and, of course, nothing at all of servility. True adoration does not mean separation, distancing, but loving identification. "A child of God treats the Lord as his Father. He is not obsequious and servile, he is not merely formal and well-mannered: he is completely sincere and trusting."¹⁵

What great importance St. Josemaría gave to these good manners of piety, no matter how small they might seem! These small details are full of meaning; they reveal people's inner perceptiveness, and the quality of their faith and love. "How hurried everyone is nowadays in their dealings with God! . . . Don't you rush. Don't make a contortion of your body that is a mere mockery, instead of a pious genuflection... Make a genuflection like this, slowly, reverently, well made. And as you adore Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, say to him in your heart: *Adoro te devote, latens Deitas*. I adore you, my hidden God."¹⁶

And our Father gave even more importance to the interior attitude of love which should imbue all our external manifestations of Eucharistic devotion. Adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament moves from the contemplation of Christ's love for us to the heartfelt declaration of our love for him as his creatures. But this is not just a matter of words, which are, of course, necessary; it is expressed above all in external and internal deeds of dedication: "Let us tell our Lord, without any need for words, that nothing will be able to separate us from him; that, as he puts himself into our hands, defenseless, under the fragile appearances of bread and wine, he has made us his willing slaves."¹⁷ Echoing St. John Damascene, St. Thomas Aquinas explains that, in true adoration, the outward humiliation of our body manifests and stirs up interior devotion in our soul, and eagerness to subject ourselves to God and serve him.¹⁸

We should have no qualms about telling our Lord over and over again that we love and adore him. On the contrary! But we have to make these words meaningful by our deeds of submission and obedience to his will. "God our Lord needs you to tell him, as you receive him each morning: 'Lord, I believe that it is you. I believe that you are really hidden in the sacramental species! I adore you, I love you!' And when you visit him in the oratory, repeat it to him again: 'Lord, I believe

14. St. Josemaría, *Homily A Priest Forever*, 13 April 1973.

15. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, 64.

16. St. Josemaría, notes taken from a get-together, October 1972, published in *Dos meses de catequesis*, II, p. 683.

17. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, 90.

18. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 84, a. 2; St. John Damascene, *On the Orthodox Faith*, 4, 12 (PG 94, 1133).

that you are really present! I adore you, I love you!" This is what it means to feel affection for our Lord. Like that we will come to love him more every day. And then continue loving him throughout the day, thinking about and acting on this idea: 'I am going to finish things well out of love for Jesus Christ, who is presiding over us from the tabernacle'.¹⁹

*Tibi se cor meum totum subiicit, quia,
te contemplans, totum deficit*

Marveling at the mystery of love

On considering Christ's self-giving in the Eucharist, how often our Father exclaimed: "He has stayed here for you. He has lowered himself to that extreme for love of you."²⁰ On contemplating so much love, the hearts of believers are awestruck, filled with wonder, and we want to respond by giving ourselves completely in return. "I am awed by this mystery of Love."²¹ Let us foster this sentiment, this disposition of our intellect and will, so that we don't start to take it for granted, but always maintain the simple spirit of a child who marvels at his father's presents. Let us also say with deep gratitude: "Thank you, Jesus, thank you for having lowered yourself to this extent, in order to satisfy all the needs of our poor hearts."²² Then, as a natural consequence, let us break into song, prais-

ing our Father God, who has chosen to nourish his children with the Body and Blood of his Son. And let us persevere in our praise, because it will always fall short.²³

Jesus has remained in the Eucharist to remedy our weaknesses, our doubts, our fears, our anxieties; to cure our loneliness, our perplexity, our discouragement; to accompany us on our way; to uphold us in our struggle. Above all, he is there to teach us to love, to draw us to his Love. "When you contemplate the Sacred Host exposed on the altar in the monstrance, think how great is the love, the tenderness of Christ. My way to understand it is by thinking of the love I have for you. If I could be far away, working, and at the same time at the side of each one of you, how gladly I would do it!

"But Christ really can do it! He loves us with a love that is infinitely greater than the love that all the hearts of the world could hold. And he has stayed with us so that we can join ourselves at any time to his most Sacred Humanity, and so that he can help us, console us, strengthen us, so that we may be faithful."²⁴

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my

19. St. Josemaría, notes taken from a get-together, 4 April 1970.

20. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, 538, 539. Cf. *Furrow*, 685, 686; *The Forge*, 887.

21. St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 161.

22. St. Josemaría, notes taken from a meditation, 14 April 1960.

23. *Lauda, Sion, Salvatorem, / lauda ducem et pastorem / in hymnis et canticis. / Quantum potes, tantum aude: / quia maior omni laude, / nec laudare sufficit* (Roman Missal, Solemnity of Corpus Christi, Sequence *Lauda Sion*.) "Sion, lift thy voice and sing: / Praise thy Savior and thy King; / Praise with hymns thy Shepherd true! / Dare thy most to praise Him well; / For He doth all praise excel; / None can ever reach His due."

24. St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, 838. Cf. 832, 837.

ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (*Is* 55:8-9). The "logic" of the Eucharist surpasses all human logic. This is so not only because Christ's presence under the sacramental species is a mystery that we will never fully be able to grasp with our intellect, but also because Christ's self-giving in the Eucharist completely overflows the littleness of our human heart, and that of all human hearts put together. Such great generosity can seem inexplicable to us, because it is so far removed from the great or small acts of selfishness that so often try to ensnare us.

"He was the greatest madman of all times. What greater madness could there be than to give oneself as he did, and for such people?"

"It would have been mad enough to have chosen to become a helpless Child. But even then, many wicked men might have been softened, and would not have dared to harm him. So this was not enough for him. He wanted to make himself even less, to give himself more lavishly. He made himself food, he became Bread.

"Divine Madman! How do men treat you? How do I treat you?"²⁵

We have to expand our heart if we are to approach Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Of course, it requires faith; but to be a Eucharistic soul also requires "knowing how to love," "know-

ing how to give oneself to others," imitating, within our smallness, Christ's self-giving to each and every person. St. Josemaría passed on to us his own personal experience: "The frequency of our visits to our Lord is in proportion to two factors: faith and the involvement of our heart; seeing the truth and loving it."²⁶

In the "school" of St. Josemaría

From an early age our Father had a deep-rooted appreciation for the love Christ shows by remaining with us in this Sacrament. For he had great faith, "faith you could cut with a knife," and he knew how to love: for us he was "an example of a man who knows how to love." Therefore, our Lord's "madness of love" in giving himself to us in this Sacrament "stole his heart," and he understood the excess of self-abandonment and humiliation that our Lord was led to through his tender and strong affection for each of us. For this reason too, our Father was able to respond to that love without going in for anonymous generalities. He saw himself as personally addressed by Christ, who offered himself up for his life and everyone's in the Eucharist. And therefore he was in a position to write, referring to the Holy Sacrifice: "Our Mass, Jesus..."²⁷

Let us follow the path mapped out by our beloved Founder, every day. With the apostles, let us ask our Lord frequently, as St. Josemaría did: *adauge*

25. St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, 824.

26. St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, 818.

27. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, 533.

nobis fide! Increase our faith! (Lk 17:5). Thus we will learn, in the "school of Mariano", to give ourselves constantly to others, beginning by serving those we find around us, with vibrant, self-sacrificing love. And we too will learn how to enter into the mystery of Eucharistic love and unite ourselves intimately to Christ's sacrifice. At the same time, our love for our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament will lead us to give ourselves to others especially in ways that won't be noticed, without drawing attention to ourselves, but going unnoticed, as he did. "Motivated by his own love and by his desire to teach us to love, Jesus came on earth and has stayed with us in the Eucharist."²⁸

We have to imitate Jesus in our own conduct: *oblatus est quia ipse voluit* (Is 53:7 *Vulgate*); "he was offered up because he willed it." We need the same strong inner determination as Christ's, to give ourselves and surrender ourselves to those we love, to fulfill what they expect and ask for. We need a clean heart, filled with unselfish affection, empty of the disorders introduced by an inflated ego. "The external signs of love should come from the heart and find expression in the witness of a Christian life. . . . Let our thoughts be sincere, full of peace, self-giving, and service. Let's 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."²⁹

Being truly Eucharistic souls cannot be reduced to the faithful observance of a few ceremonies, which are, certainly, indispensable. It entails the full dedication of one's heart and life, out of love for the One who gave and continues giving his own life to us with absolute generosity. Let us learn from our Lady the humility and unconditional availability needed to love, welcome and serve Jesus Christ. Let us often meditate, as our beloved Father invited us to, on the fact that she "was conceived without sin to prepare her to receive Christ in her womb." And let us take on board the question with which that invitation concluded: "If our thanksgiving were in proportion to the difference between the gift and our deserts, should we not turn the whole day into a continuous Eucharist, a continuous thanksgiving?"³⁰

Visus, tactus, gustus in te fallitur, sed auditu solo tuto creditur

With the light of faith

How evident is the failure of our senses when faced with the Blessed Sacrament! Sense experience, the natural path for our intellect to grasp what created realities are, does not suffice here. Only our hearing saves us from the shipwreck of the senses before the Eucharist. Only by listening to the Word of God that reveals what the mind cannot perceive through the senses, and accepting it with faith, can we realize that the substance, despite

28. St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 151.

29. St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 156.

30. St. Josemaría, Homily *A Priest Forever*, 13 April 1973.

appearances, is not bread but the Body of Christ, not wine but the Blood of the Redeemer.

Our intellect comes close to shipwreck too, because it cannot grasp, and never will, how, while the perceptible appearances—the “species”—of bread and wine remain, the substantial reality is the Body and Blood of Christ. “Does it pass thy comprehending? Faith, the law of light transcending, leaps to things not understood.”³¹

Through the theological virtue of faith we attain, when looking at the Eucharistic mystery, the certainty of what seems impossible to unaided human reason. “Lord, I firmly believe. Thank you for having granted us faith! I believe in you, in this marvel of love that is your Real Presence under the Eucharistic species, after the Consecration, on the altar and in the tabernacles where you are reserved. I believe more firmly than if I could hear you with my ears, see you with my eyes, touch you with my hands.”³²

“Our whole faith is brought into play when we believe in Jesus, really present under the appearances of bread and wine.”³³ We activate our faith in the power of the Creator; our faith in Jesus, who says: “This is my Body”, and “This is the cup of my Blood”; faith in the inexpressible action of the Holy Spirit, who intervened in the incarnation of the Word in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and intervenes in the

marvelous Eucharistic conversion, the transubstantiation.

We activate our faith in the Church, who teaches us: “Christ, our Redeemer, declared that which he offered under the species of bread to be truly his own Body (*Mt* 26:26ff; *Mk* 14:22ff; *Lk* 22:19ff; *1 Cor* 11:24ff); therefore it has ever been a firm belief in the Church of God, and this holy Synod now declares it anew, that, by the consecration of the bread and of the wine, a conversion is made of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood; which conversion is, by the holy Catholic Church, suitably and properly called Transubstantiation.”³⁴

In continuity with the Council of Trent and with the whole tradition of the Church, the magisterium since then has stressed that “every theological explanation which seeks some understanding of this mystery must, in order to be in accord with Catholic faith, maintain that in the reality itself, independently of our mind, the bread and wine have ceased to exist after the Consecration, so that it is the adorable body and blood of the Lord Jesus that from then on are really before us.”³⁵

I advise you, especially during this Year of the Eucharist, to reread and meditate on some of the more important documents that the Church’s mag-

31. Roman Missal, Solemnity of Corpus Christi, Sequence *Lauda Sion*.

32. St. Josemaría, Letter, 28 March 1973, 7.

33. St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 153.

34. Council of Trent, Session 13: *Decree on the Holy Eucharist*, Ch. 4 (Denz. 1642).

35. Pope Paul VI, *The Credo of the People of God*, 30 June 1968. Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 17 April 2003, 15.

isterium has dedicated to the Blessed Sacrament.³⁶ Let us take up these venerable texts with deep gratitude, reinforcing our obœdientia fidei to God's word that is transmitted to us in these teachings with the authority given by Jesus Christ.³⁷

Credo quidquid dixit Dei Filius; nil hoc verbo Veritatis verius

Words of life

Our faith is founded on the words of our Lord himself. The Church has always understood these words exactly as they are, that is, in a fully real sense. After multiplying the loaves and fishes, Christ declared: "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" (*Jn* 6:51). He was not speaking figuratively. If that had been the case, when he saw that many people, including some of the disciples, took scandal at these words, he would have explained them in another way. But he did not; on the contrary, he reaffirmed them more forcefully: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed and my blood is drink indeed" (*Jn* 6:54-55). To prevent them from thinking he was going to offer himself as food in a material, physical way, he added: "It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail;

the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (*Jn* 6:63).

These are words of the "*Verbum spirans amorem*, the Word breathing love": words of love, which lead to love, because they reveal God's love for mankind, announcing the Good News: "The Blessed Trinity has fallen in love with man."³⁸ How could our concerns not be of interest to him? How could he fail to intervene in our favor when necessary? "Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me.' 'Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?' Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you" (*Is* 49:14-15). God's concern, his care for each of us, now reaches us through the human Heart of the Incarnate Word. "For Jesus is moved by hunger and sorrow, but what moves him most is ignorance. 'As he landed he saw a great throng, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things' (*Mk* 6:34)."³⁹

An attitude of trust

On the natural plane, it's right to emphasize the importance of sense experience as the basis for science and knowledge. But if we keep our eyes "glued to the things of earth," what our Father described can easily result: "the eyes of our soul grow dull. Reason pro-

36. Cf. for example, Pius XII, Encyclical *Mediator Dei*, 20 November 1947; Paul VI, Encyclical *Mysterium Fidei*, 3 September 1965; John Paul II, Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 17 April 2003; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1322-1419.

37. Cf. VATICAN II, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, 10.

38. St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 84.

39. St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 109.

claims itself sufficient to understand everything, without the aid of God. . . . The human mind appoints itself the center of the universe, being thrilled with the prospect that 'you shall be like gods' (*Gen* 3:5). So filled with love for itself, it turns its back on the love of God."⁴⁰ In an age that "fosters a worldly climate centering everything on man, an atmosphere of materialism, blind to man's transcendent vocation,"⁴¹ we have to cultivate in ourselves and spread around us an attitude of openness towards others, of reasonable trust in their word.

Earlier I pointed out that in order to understand the "divine extravagance"⁴² of the Eucharist we need to "know how to love." Reflect now on the fact that it is equally necessary to "know how to listen to" and to trust, above all, in God and his Church. Faith in Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament—a submission and at the same time an elevation of our intellect—frees us from the disastrous downward spiral that takes us away from God and also from others. It will defend us against the "conceit" that masks "the worst of all evils."⁴³ The act of total submission of our intellect before the uncreated Word, hidden under the species of bread, also helps to prevent our trusting only in our own senses and our own judgment, and reinforces in us the authority of God who can neither deceive nor be deceived.

Hidden in the tabernacle is the strength we need, our securest refuge against all doubts, fears and worries.⁴⁴ This is the Sacrament of the New Covenant, of the eternal Covenant, the ultimate and definitive newness, because no greater self-giving is possible. Without Christ, mankind and the world would remain in darkness. And the lives of Christians also become progressively darker if they separate themselves from him. This Sacrament, with its definitive newness, banishes forever what is old; it dispels unbelief and sin. "Everything harmful, worn out or useless has to be thrown away—discouragement, suspicion, sadness, cowardice. The Holy Eucharist gives the children of God a divine newness, and we must respond in novitate sensus, 'in the newness of your mind' (*Rom* 12:2), renewing all our feelings and actions. We have been given a new principle of energy, strong new roots grafted onto our Lord."⁴⁵

In Cruce latebat sola Deitas, at hic latet simul et Humanitas

With Christ on Calvary

The celebration of the Eucharist places us on Calvary. For "in the divine sacrifice celebrated in the Mass, that same Christ is contained and immolated in an unbloody manner, who once offered Himself in a bloody manner on the altar of the Cross (*Heb* 9:27). . . . For the victim is one and the same, the same now being offered by the ministry

40. St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 6.

41. St. Josemaría, Letter, 28 March 1973, 10.

42. St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 80.

43. St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 6.

44. Cf. St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, 817.

45. St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 155.

of priests, who then offered himself on the Cross, the manner alone of offering being different."⁴⁶ And we have access to Calvary "not only through faith-filled remembrance, but also through a real contact, since this sacrifice is made present ever anew, sacramentally perpetuated, in every community which offers it at the hands of the consecrated minister."⁴⁷

Close by Jesus on Golgotha, on another cross, is Dismas, the good thief. We are like him in that we too find ourselves really in the presence of the same Person, taking part in the same dramatic event. We are also like him, or wish to be, in his deep faith in that Person. He believed that Jesus brought with him the Kingdom of God and, repenting, he wanted to be with Christ in that Kingdom. We too believe that Christ is God, the Son of God, who became man to save us. But we differ from that contrite sinner, for he saw Christ's humanity but not his divinity. We, looking at Jesus in the Eucharist, can see neither his divinity nor his humanity.

The repentant thief

Unlike the other evildoer, Dismas recognizes his guilt, accepts the punishment his offenses deserve and confesses the holiness of Jesus: "This man has done no wrong" (*Lk* 23:41). We too beseech the Lord to welcome us into his Kingdom. In order to receive him with greater purity in our heart, we confess

our faults and ask him for pardon. Also, as the Church teaches us, whenever necessary we go to the sacrament of Reconciliation beforehand, with constructive sorrow.

"If it is not fitting for anyone to approach a sacred ceremony unless he does so in a holy fashion, . . . all the more diligently should (the Christian) avoid approaching to receive it (the Eucharist) without great reverence and holiness, especially having read those awesome words of the Apostle: 'For any one who eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks judgment upon himself, not discerning the body of the Lord' (*1 Cor* 11:29). Therefore, any one who wishes to go to Communion, needs to be reminded of his command: 'Let a man examine himself' (*1 Cor* 11:28).

"Church custom declares that such examination is necessary and that nobody should approach the Holy Eucharist conscious of mortal sin, without having gone first to sacramental Confession."⁴⁸

Christ's humility on the Cross moved Dismas not to be proud, but to accept suffering meekly and reject the temptation to rebel against it. "The humility of Jesus: in Bethlehem, in Nazareth, on Calvary... But more humiliation and more self-abasement in the Sacred Host: more than in the stable, more than in Nazareth, more than on the Cross."⁴⁹ Let us imitate the *latro pœnitens*, the repentant thief, in his

46. Council of Trent, Session 22: *Doctrine on the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*, Ch. 2 (Denz. 1743).

47. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 12.

48. Council of Trent, Session 13, *Decree on the Holy Eucharist*, Ch. 7 (Denz. 1647).

49. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, 533.

humble attitude. In fact we should be even humbler, because the example of self-abasement in the Eucharist which we contemplate through our faith is even greater than the self-abasement Dismas saw with his eyes on Calvary. When our ego rises up in pride, claiming a right to comfort, sensuality, recognition or gratitude, the remedy is to look at Christ Crucified, to go to the tabernacle, to participate sacramentally in his sacrifice. This was the conclusion our Father came to, when he ended that point of The Way with the words: "That is why I must love the Mass so much!"⁵⁰

Teacher of all the virtues

St. Thomas Aquinas writes that Christ on the Cross exemplifies every virtue: "*Passio Christi sufficit ad informandum totaliter vitam nostram.*"⁵¹ All we have to do is to turn our eyes to the Crucified and we will learn whatever we need in this life. He goes on: "*Nulum enim exemplum virtutis abest a Cruce.*"⁵² There is no virtue which is not shown there, and there are plenty of examples of each of them: fortitude, patience, humility, detachment, charity, obedience, contempt for honors, poverty, self-abandonment...

We can say the same about the Eucharist: in it, Christ teaches all-surpassing love and humility. In this divine Gift, we can also strengthen our practice of the other Christian virtues. "In the Holy Eucharist and in prayer we have a school

where we learn how to live, serving all souls with cheerful service; how to govern, serving too; how to obey freely, wanting to do so; how to seek unity, while respecting variety and diversity, through a close, personal identification."⁵³

In a special way the Holy Eucharist teaches us the virtues we need to cultivate every day at work and in our family, in the everyday situations facing ordinary people: being able to wait patiently, welcoming everyone, always being available... The silence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is particularly eloquent for those who, like us, are called to sanctify ourselves *nel bel mezzo della strada*, in the middle of the street, busy with countless apparently unimportant occupations. From his silence there, he points out to us that ordinary life offers us, through the humility in which it is lived, a constant possibility of sanctification and apostolate. It holds all the treasure and strength of God, who intervenes and converses with us at every moment, and is interested even in the falling of one hair of our head (cf. *Mt* 10:29).

When we contemplate Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, we become aware of the need to act with purity of intention, and to have no other will than that of fulfilling what God wants, which is to serve souls so that they may get to Heaven. We discover how important it is to give ourselves to others, spending our lives accompanying all mankind, our brothers and sisters, without fuss,

50. *Ibid.*

51. St. Thomas Aquinas, *On the Apostles' Creed*, 4: "The Passion of Christ is sufficient to inform our entire life".

52. *Ibid.*: "No example of any virtue is missing from the Cross".

53. St. Josemaría, Letter, 24 March 1931, 61.

patiently and discreetly; with friendship and affection shown in deeds that may be small, but are definite and useful; making our time available and having an openness of heart which leads us to address to all, to each individual, the appropriate words, the advice and consolation they need, a point of doctrine, fraternal correction.

"He has so abased Himself that He accepts everything; He exposes Himself to everything—to sacrilege, to blasphemy and to the cold indifference of so many people—in order to offer even one man the chance of hearing the beating of his Heart in his wounded side."⁵⁴

Dedication to the service of others

Looking at Jesus' Real Presence in the tabernacle, we understand the inexpressible effectiveness of "going unnoticed and disappearing", which does not involve falling into a *dolce far niente*, "sweetly doing nothing", isolating ourselves from others, ceasing to influence our environment and events in our own family, professional or social spheres. It leads us, instead, to give all the glory to God and to respect other people's freedom; and also to impel them towards our Lord, not in a noisy way, but with the "coercion" of our own self-giving and of virtue that is cheerful and generous.

Looking at our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, we realize how good it is for us to "become bread"; so

that others can feed on what we have—our prayer, our spirit of service, our joy—so as to go forward along the path to holiness. We become convinced of the need for "hidden and silent sacrifice,"⁵⁵ a sacrifice without spectacle or grandiose gestures. "Jesus has remained within the Eucharist for love... of you. He has remained, knowing how men would treat him..., and how you would treat him. He has remained so that you could eat him, so that you could visit him and tell him what's happening to you; and so that you could talk to him as you pray before the tabernacle, and as you receive him sacramentally; and so that you could fall in love more and more each day, and make other souls—many souls!—follow the same path."⁵⁶

In the Eucharist, Jesus shows with divine eloquence that, in order to be like him, we have to give ourselves completely and unhesitatingly to others, until we turn our life's journey into one of constant service. "You will become a saint if you have charity, if you manage to do the things which please others and do not offend God, though you find them hard to do."⁵⁷

*Ambo tamen credens atque confitens,
peto quod petivit latro pœnitens*

Following the rhythm of contrition

Let us go back to the scene on Calvary, to listen to the good thief's petition, which moved St. Josemaría so profoundly when he meditated on the

54. St. Josemaría, Homily *A Priest Forever*, 13 April 1973.

55. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, 509.

56. St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, 887.

57. St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, 556.

Adoro te devote. “Many times have I repeated that verse of the Eucharistic hymn: *Peto quod petivit latro pœnitens*, and it always fills me with emotion: to ask like the penitent thief did!

He recognized that he himself deserved that awful punishment... And with a word he stole Christ’s heart and opened up for himself the gates of heaven.”⁵⁸

Especially in his last years, seeing the difficulties of the Church, our Father turned with all his soul to God’s mercy, begging for the understanding, the love of God for himself and for everyone. He did not base his claim on any merits, which he thought he didn’t have. “It has all been the Lord’s doing,” he would say with conviction. He didn’t appeal to motives of justice in order to obtain the Lord’s help in trials and tribulations. He sought refuge in God’s compassion. Thus, from his faith in Christ, he passed to contrition: to constant and cheerful conversion. That was our Father’s approach: being quite sure that *cor contritum et humiliatum, Deus, non despicies* (Ps 50[51]:19), God does not despise a contrite and humbled heart.

Now, through his intercession in heaven, we must make our own this rhythm of faith and sorrow which is an unmistakable sign of genuine interior life. Prayer before the Eucharist will strengthen our hope, our trust in the Lord’s mercy. It will do so in many ways; among others, by helping us dis-

cover our wretchedness, so that we can take it to the foot of the Cross and so, with our struggle against our defects, we will be able to raise our Lord’s victorious Cross over our lives, our weaknesses.

Trusting in God’s mercy

Dismas found God’s mercy and grace by transforming the activity which until then had been his “profession”: assaulting people and stealing what they had. On the cross, through sincere faith and sorrow, he “assaulted” Christ, “stole” his heart and entered with him into glory. Our Father passed on to us his “loving habit of ‘storming’ tabernacles.”⁵⁹ He taught us, above all, to unite our sanctified work to the offering which Jesus makes of himself in the Mass and thus work with the strength which flows from his sacrifice.

We too should share in the experience of the *latro pœnitens*: we look to the Lord’s mercy for our sanctification. When we receive his forgiveness and grace, we reflect these gifts in the fraternity we show towards everyone, for holiness, perfection, is directly related to mercy. Our Lord himself tells us so: “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect (*Mt* 5:48); and Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (*Lk* 6:36).

But we must always remember that “Mercy is more than simply being compassionate. Mercy is the overflow of charity, which brings with it also an overflow of justice.”⁶⁰ It translates

58. St. Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, 12th Station, 4.

59. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, 876.

60. St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, 232.

simply into giving and devoting ourselves to other people, as the Good Samaritan did: without neglecting our own duties and, at the same time, making up our mind to sacrifice our love of comfort and to leave aside little—or not so little—personal plans and interests. “Mercy means keeping one’s heart totally alive, throbbing in a way that is both human and divine, with a love that is strong, self-sacrificing and generous.”⁶¹

Seen this way, this active mental disposition can be applied analogously to Christ, who is both God and Man. It would be absurd to say that we could be merciful to God in himself, but it isn’t so with regard to the Humanity of Jesus, for our Lord himself has told us that he sees the mercy we show to his human brothers and sisters, even the least of them, as shown to himself (cf. *Mt* 25:40). Moreover, we can in some way practice mercy—by way of atonement—towards the Humanity of our Lord hidden in the tabernacle, where he is “the Great Solitary one.” It is a deep act of love and piety to visit him in the “prison of love,” where he has remained “willingly locked up”⁶² because he has wanted to be with us always, until the end.

How many opportunities open up for us to “treat him well,” to keep him company, to show him our love and affection! St. Josemaría encouraged us to do so: “Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, you lovingly await us in so many lonely

tabernacles. I ask that in our Centers we may always treat you ‘well’, surrounding you with our affection, our prayer, our reparation, the incense of little victories, and sorrow for our defeats.”⁶³

*Plagas, sicut Thomas, non intueor,
Deum tamen meum te confiteor*

Thomas’ initial attitude

A week after Jesus’ resurrection, in the Cenacle, Thomas looks at our Lord, who shows him his wounds and tells him: “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing” (*Jn* 20:27). In the Eucharist, we also find ourselves really before his glorious Body, which is at the same time in the state of a victim—*Christus passus*—through the sacramental separation of the Body and the Blood. “The Eucharistic Sacrifice makes present not only the mystery of the Savior’s passion and death, but also the mystery of the resurrection which crowned his sacrifice. It is as the living and risen One that Christ can become in the Eucharist the ‘bread of life’ (*Jn* 6:35, 48), the ‘living bread’ (*Jn* 6:51).”⁶⁴

We can imagine that, when Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane and afterwards, faced with the “human failure” of Christ, the Apostle Thomas must have felt disconcerted, let down, hopeless. Perhaps his interior collapse was particularly acute, and that was why he

61. *Ibid.*

62. St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, 827.

63. St. Josemaría, Letter, 28 March 1973, 7.

64. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 14.

found it harder than the other ten Apostles to accept the fact of the Lord's resurrection. He found it particularly difficult to believe once again in Jesus, to hope in him once more, to be filled anew with real enthusiasm; in short, to love him and feel loved by him. And he laid down conditions.

God has revealed himself progressively, and in some ways the history of Revelation is echoed on the personal level in each individual's journey of faith. Each new step along that journey also means a "new" abandonment, which is harder, and requires a greater identification with Christ, dying more and more to one's own self. And it is good that we should be forewarned, because we too may find ourselves tempted to react as St. Thomas did: an attitude of disbelief, unwillingness to believe unhesitatingly, to believe even more. Let's not be surprised at this, nor afraid. To get over this difficulty, let us repeat with greater faith before the tabernacle and on other occasions: *Dominus meus et Deus meus!* My Lord, and my God! (*Jn* 20:28).

The Apostles believed in Jesus as a prophet and emissary of God; as the Messiah and Savior of Israel; as the Son of God. But they had formed an inaccurate idea of how his salvation would be enacted, and what form their Master's Kingdom would take. They did not entirely understand the announcements Christ made to them, at least three times, of his passion and death. Then, partly through their indolence and

partly due to the whole tragedy of the passion, events brought them violently face to face with God's plan, and they all fell away, save St. John. And they found it hard, St. Thomas especially so, to accept the glorious reality that Christ had risen. But our Lord's different apparitions overcame their reservations, and Thomas himself got over his spiritual feebleness, as I have said, with a marvelous act of faith and love: *Dominus meus et Deus meus!*

In times of trial

We too may find in ourselves, for different reasons, an initial resistance to believe, through an accumulation of negative experiences; through the antagonism of an anti-Christian environment; or through some "unexpected Cross,"⁶⁵ which comes to us more crudely and concretely: "because God asks all of us for total self-renunciation, and sometimes the poor man of clay from which we are made, rebels—especially if we have allowed our ego to get into our work, which should be for God."⁶⁶

We can always overcome situations of this kind, with God's grace, if we see them as what they are: invitations to draw closer to God, to get to know him better and love him more, to serve him more effectively. The surest means to overcome them is to meet the crucified and glorified Christ: Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. In a very special way, therefore, the moment will have come for us to go to the tabernacle to

65. St. Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, 5th Station.

66. St. Josemaría, notes taken from a get-together, 25 June 1972.

speak to our Lord, who shows us his wounds as proof of his love; and, with faith in those wounds which we do not contemplate physically, we will discover, with the Apostles, the mystery of how it was "necessary that Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory" (*Lk* 24:26). We will accept the Cross more clearly as a divine gift, and so understand our Father's exhortation: "Let us be determined to see the glory and good fortune that are hidden in suffering."⁶⁷

To the wounds of Christ

My daughters and sons, once again I tell you we must not be surprised or frightened if we come across especially hard situations, in which the chiaroscuro, the light and darkness of the faith, comes to us more explicitly in its dimension of darkness; occasions when perhaps it is more difficult to recognize Christ, so that we cannot even get a glimmer of where the path willed by God is leading. This kind of interior trials can at times be due to our human wretchedness, to our unresponsiveness. Often, though, it is not so; instead, they are part of a plan willed by God to identify us with Jesus Christ, to sanctify us.

The time has come to "go", as the Apostle Thomas did, to the wounds of Christ. This is how St. Josemaría explains it: "but don't forget that being with Jesus means we shall most certainly come across his Cross. When we abandon ourselves into God's hands, he frequently permits us to taste sorrow,

loneliness, opposition, slander, defamation, ridicule, coming both from within and from outside. This is because he wants to mould us into his own image and likeness. He even tolerates that we be called lunatics and be taken for fools.

"This is the time to love passive mortification which comes, hidden perhaps or barefaced and insolent, when we least expect it. . . .

"When we really come to admire and love the most sacred Humanity of Jesus, we will discover each of his Wounds, one by one. When we undergo periods of passive purgation, that we find painful and hard to bear, periods when we shed sweet and bitter tears, which we do our best to hide, we will feel the need to enter into each one of his most Holy Wounds: to be purified and strengthened, rejoicing in his redeeming Blood. . . .

"Go as the spirit moves you: unburden in his Wounds all your love, both human and... divine. This is what it means to seek union, to feel that you are a brother of Christ, sharing his blood, a child of the same Mother, for it is She who has brought us to Jesus."⁶⁸

Not only in times of trial, but always, let us perseveringly seek to meet the risen Christ, who awaits us on the altar and in the tabernacle. With what confidence and security we should go to pray before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, to beg, with the daring of children, for so many needs and intentions! The Apostle St. Thomas made

67. St. Josemaría, notes taken from a meditation, 9 April 1937.

68. St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, 301-303.

that meeting a condition for his belief; we, now, by the grace of God, have the certainty that when we place ourselves before Jesus all our spiritual difficulties are solved. We see neither our Lord's Humanity nor his Divinity, but we believe firmly, and we go to him. He "sees us and hears us, he is waiting for us and presides over us from the tabernacle where he is truly present, hidden under the sacramental species. . . . 'What is the matter?' he asks, and we reply, 'It's my...' At once there is light, or at least the acceptance of his will, and inner peace."⁶⁹ That way we will be faithful and we will feel the desire and the strength to tell the whole world, with no human respect, naturally and urgently, that we have found Christ, that we have touched him, that he is alive! We taste, as did St. Josemaría, the truth and the joy of those words, *Iesus Christus heri et hodie, ipse et in saecula!* (Heb 13:8), Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today and for ever.

Fac me tibi semper magis credere, in te spem habere, te diligere

Eucharistic souls: faith, love, hope

Growth in the spiritual life is directly related to growth in Eucharistic devotion. How forcefully our Father preached this truth! As the fruit of his own spiritual experience, he encourages each of us: "Be a Eucharistic soul! If the center around which your thoughts and hopes turn is the tabernacle, then, my child, how abundant the fruits of your sanctity and apostolate will be!"⁷⁰

The desire for holiness and apostolic zeal find their surest source and foundation in Eucharistic contemplation. "I cannot see how anyone could live as a Christian and not feel the need for constant friendship with Jesus in the word and in the bread, in prayer and in the Eucharist. And I easily understand the ways in which successive generations have expressed their love for the Eucharist."⁷¹

When God approaches someone to attract them to himself, they should prepare themselves with more acts of faith, hope and love. They should direct their life more decisively towards God, turning it into one of greater prayer, more penance, more frequent reception of the sacraments, more Eucharistic devotion. That was what our Father always did, especially from the time when our Lord began to manifest himself to his soul, with those inklings of love. Early on, when he was at St. Charles' Seminary, he spent whole nights in prayer, accompanying our Lord in the tabernacle; as the days went by, he felt a growing urge to spend more time with our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

The Christian path is essentially the path of the theological virtues: the fruit of supernatural knowledge (faith), of a loving tension towards the infinite Good that is the Blessed Trinity (hope), and of communion in charity. And its most sublime expression is Eucharistic adoration, because in it we are adoring God just where he has chosen to come

69. St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, 249.

70. St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, 835.

71. St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 154.

closest to us. At the same time, and for the same reason, it proves to be the best means of growing in those three virtues. Our Father prayed for those virtues every day, precisely in the Holy Mass, when he raised up Jesus, sacramentally present in the consecrated Host and in the chalice with his Blood: *adauge nobis fidem, spem, caritatem!* Increase our faith, our hope, and our love!

Faith, hope and charity are supernatural virtues, which God alone can infuse into souls, which he alone can intensify. But this does not mean that our reception of these divine gifts exempts us from personal collaboration, because the Almighty never imposes his love in any of his plans: "God does not want slaves, but children. He respects our freedom."⁷² And so, as a rule, he thinks it fitting that his inexpressible action should be welcomed and accompanied by an effort on the part of his creatures. We should be filled with wonder at the importance he attributes to us.

God's tenderness

We can discover that Christ's hiddenness in the sacramental species, which responds to the requirements of the sacramental economy, also fits in with God's express desire not to force human freedom. By hiding himself, our Lord invites us to seek him, while he puts himself in our way, he "comes out to meet us."⁷³ How often this happened to St. Josemaría, who, without realizing

it, without specifically seeking it, found himself "mulling over" words of Scripture that shed light on aspects of his work, showed him the will of God, answered problems and doubts which he had put to his Lord! "The Gospel tells us that Jesus hid himself when they wanted to make him king after he had worked the miracle.

"Lord, you make us share in the miracle of the Eucharist. We beg you not to hide away. Live with us. May we see you, may we touch you, may we feel you. May we want to be beside you all the time, and have you as the King of our lives and of our work."⁷⁴

When Christian life is centered on faith, hope and charity, it tends by its very nature always to make us grow, to increase our response: we are not satisfied with what we are already doing. And so, one sign that we truly love God is to judge that we love him little, that we need to spend more time with him each day. Only people who have little love, think that they already love a lot. Our Father appeals to us in strong words: "What was that?... You can't do more!? Couldn't it be that... you can't do less?"⁷⁵ Let us respond, going once again to Christ our Lord, hidden in the tabernacle: *Fac me tibi semper magis credere, in te spem habere, te diligere!* Make me always believe in you more, hope in you more, love you more!

This tension to reach "more" finds its center and root—as does the whole

72. St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 129.

73. St. Josemaría, Homily *A Priest For Ever*, 13 April 1973.

74. St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, 542.

75. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, 23.

of Christian living—in the Eucharist. Because Jesus in the Eucharist is the summit of the crescendo of God's self-giving to mankind, and when we become identified with him he communicates to us the same crescendo in self-giving, and does so suaviter et fortiter, gently and strongly, taking us, as it were, by the hand. This is how St. Josemaría put it: "You have started to visit the Blessed Sacrament every day, and I am not surprised to hear you say, 'I have come to love the sanctuary light madly'."⁷⁶ So, before the tabernacle, let us beg Jesus with fervent piety to grant us all, more and more, the "work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope" (1 Thess 1:3).

*O memoriale mortis Domini, panis
vivus, vitam præstans homini*

Memorial of the Sacrifice of the Cross

The Eucharist is the memorial of the death of the Lord and the banquet where Christ gives us his body and blood as food. Pope Pius XII teaches: "According to the plan of divine wisdom, the sacrifice of our Redeemer is shown forth in an admirable manner by external signs which are the symbols of His death. For by the "transubstantiation" of bread into the Body of Christ and of wine into His Blood, His Body and Blood are both really present: now the Eucharistic species under which He is present symbolize the actual separation of His Body and Blood. Thus the commemorative representation of His

death, which actually took place on Calvary, is repeated in every sacrifice of the altar, seeing that Jesus Christ is symbolically shown by separate symbols to be in a state of victimhood."⁷⁷

Concerning this doctrine, Pope John Paul II teaches: "The Mass makes present the sacrifice of the Cross; it does not add to that sacrifice nor does it multiply it. What is repeated is its memorial celebration, its "commemorative representation" (*memoralis demonstratio*), which makes Christ's one, definitive redemptive sacrifice always present in time. The sacrificial nature of the Eucharistic mystery cannot therefore be understood as something separate, independent of the Cross or only indirectly referring to the sacrifice of Calvary."⁷⁸

The Holy Mass, therefore, must never be seen as a mere remembrance of the saving event on Golgotha, for it makes it sacramentally present. Every sacrament effects what it signifies; thus, the Mass signifies and makes present the very sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary. It brings to us the living memorial of our Lord's passion and death. "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."⁷⁹ In the Sacrifice of the Mass, we unite all we have to the offering in which Christ, the Head of the Church, gave himself to God the Father, in adoration, thanksgiving, satisfaction for the

76. St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, 688.

77. Pius XII, Encyclical *Mediator Dei*, 20 November 1947, 20.

78. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 12. Cf. Council of Trent, Session 22, *Doctrine on the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*, Ch. 2 (Denz. 1743).

79. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1364.

sins of mankind, and petition for the needs of the world.

Center and root of the spiritual life

Our Founder, in his catechesis, always stressed the intimate relationship that exists between the Last Supper, the Cross and the Mass. At a time when, in not a few places, the sacrificial reality of the Eucharist was being obscured, he emphasized especially the infinite value of the Holy Sacrifice. In words that everyone could understand, he once said: "I can perfectly make out the institution of the Holy Eucharist, which is a moment when Christ showed divine and human love, and his Sacrifice on the wood of the Cross. At the Last Supper Christ was 'able to suffer,' he hadn't yet suffered; on Calvary he is 'suffering,' with the gesture of the Eternal Priest. Jesus hangs there, fixed with nails, after having sanctified the world with his footsteps, and he dies for love of each of us: all of his Blood is the price of our soul, of each and every soul."⁸⁰

Through this immolation, the Lord has obtained eternal redemption for us (cf. *Heb* 9:12). "This sacrifice is so decisive for the salvation of the human race that Jesus Christ offered it and returned to the Father only after he had left us a means of sharing in it as if we had been present there. Each member of the faithful can thus take part in it and inexhaustibly gain its fruits. This is the faith from which generations of Christians down the ages have lived."⁸¹

St. Josemaría welcomed this legacy of faith and made it, in all its implica-

tions, deeply part of his life. Following the counsel and example of the Holy Fathers, he sought to imitate always, throughout the whole of each day, what takes place in the Mass, and he encouraged others to do likewise: "Become identified with that Jesus, the Host, who offers himself on the altar!"⁸² He always practiced what he preached: the Holy Mass, as the center and root of the spiritual life of the Christian, was the foundation of each of his days. He meditated on this and passed it on to us in the light of his profound contemplation of the Eucharistic Mystery.

"The Mass is, I insist, an action of God, of the Trinity. It is not a merely human event. The priest who celebrates fulfills the desire of our Lord, lending his body and his voice to the divine action. He acts, not in his own name, but *in persona et in nomine Christi*: in the Person of Christ and in his name.

"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. This is the sacrifice announced by the prophet Malachy ... 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 and surpasses the sacrifices of the old law.

"The holy Mass brings us face to face with one of the central mysteries of our faith, because it is the gift of the Blessed Trinity to the Church. It is be-

80. St. Josemaría, notes taken from a get-together, May 22, 1970.

81. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 11.

82. St. Josemaría, notes taken from a meditation, 14 April 1960.

cause of this that we can consider the Mass as the center and the source of a Christian's spiritual life. It is the aim of all the sacraments. 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."⁸³

Making an effort to respond fully to the gift of the Holy Eucharist

I stress that the celebration of the Eucharist should become the center and root of the spiritual life of a son or daughter of God, since this Sacrament marks the culmination of the sacrifice which the Son of God made of his life. Besides setting this sacrifice before our eyes and enabling us to imitate it in our daily response, the celebration of Mass also offers us the grace of the Redemption and an opportunity to give our lives, like Christ, for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Receiving this inexpressible gift obliges us to make an effort to respond to it. We must do all we can to unite ourselves and everything that is ours with Jesus' offering to God the Father. "In the Holy Sacrifice of the altar, the priest takes up the Body of our God, and the Chalice containing his Blood, and raises them above all the things of the earth, saying: *Per Ipsum, et cum Ipso, et in Ipso*—through my Love! With my Love! In my Love!

"Join with the action of the priest. Or rather, make that act of the priest a part of your life."⁸⁴

I want to underline the fact that our Father did not simply teach that the Mass is the center and root of the interior life. He showed us how to respond personally to the gift the Trinity gives us in the Holy Sacrifice, so that our personal spiritual struggle really orbits around the Mass, feeds on that sacrifice and is rooted in that holocaust.

He advised us, among other things, that he found it very useful to divide the day into two—the first half to prepare for the Mass, and the second to give thanks for it. During the night, he used every waking moment to keep up his conversation with God, with an emphasis on the holy Eucharist. He tried especially to savor and find meaning in each gesture and word of the different parts that make up the Eucharistic celebration. He always found new facets in this exercise and united it to acts of faith, hope and love and to specific situations and intentions. His homily "The Eucharist, Mystery of Faith and Love" is a great help in this regard.⁸⁵

Everything that flows with Christ's grace, like divine sap from the Eucharistic root, also demands, as I have said, an effort on our part. St. Josemaría urges us on to undertake this wonderful daily combat: "Keep struggling, so that the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar really becomes the centre 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. This will then overflow in aspirations, visits to the Blessed Sacrament

83. St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 86-87.

84. St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, 541.

85. Cf. *Christ is Passing By*, 88-91.

and the offering up of your professional work and your family life."⁸⁶

Communion with Christ and unity of the Church

The Sacrifice of the Altar combines the aspects of a banquet and a sacrifice. Through the priest Christ offers himself as a victim to God the Father, and the Father himself gives Christ to us as our food. Christ in the Blessed Sacrament is panis filiorum,⁸⁷ "bread for the children". Communion with the Body and Blood of our Lord fills us with a specific grace that produces in our soul effects similar to those produced by food in the body "sustaining, building up, restoring and delighting."⁸⁸

However, whereas in physical nourishment the body assimilates what is eaten, here the opposite happens. We are assimilated by Christ into his Body; we are transformed into him. "Our participation in the Body and Blood of Christ transforms us into that which we receive."⁸⁹

The Eucharist operates in the Church as the sacrament of unity, since when we all eat the same Bread we become one Body. Mass and Holy Communion build up the Church. They construct its unity and make it firm and cohesive. "Those who receive the Eucharist are united more closely to Christ. Through it Christ unites all the faithful in one body—the Church. Communion renews, strengthens, and

deepens this incorporation into the Church, already achieved by Baptism. In Baptism we have been called to form but one body (cf. *1 Cor* 12:13). The Eucharist fulfills this call."⁹⁰

My daughters and sons: it is very important for us to be united with the visible Head when we celebrate or participate in this holy Sacrifice! We all want to be very close to the Pope, the Head of the universal Church; you should be very united to the Bishops, the Heads of each particular Church, and very especially to this Father of yours whom our Lord has chosen to place as the visible Head and principal of unity in this "little part of the Church" that is the Work.

Præsta meæ menti de te vivere, et te illi semper dulce sapere

Life in Christ

"By virtue of its union with the Word, Christ's flesh is life-giving."⁹¹ St. Luke writes: "All the crowd sought to touch him, for power came forth from him and healed them all" (*Lk* 6:19). Likewise the Eucharistic Bread is not only living but life-giving. It gives us divine life in Christ. In receiving it, we can each say with St. Paul: "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me" (*Gal* 2:20).

Præsta meæ menti de te vivere...
Grant that my soul may live by you...
The invitation contained in this verse is for everything in us to be nourished always by living in Christ, so that we

86. St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, 69.

87. Roman Missal, Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, Sequence, *Lauda Sion*.

88. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, q. 79, a.1.

89. St. Leo the Great, *Homily 12 on the Passion*, 7 (PL 54, 357).

90. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1396.

91. Council of Ephesus, 431 AD (Denz. 262).

behave in a way that is completely faithful to his love, and persevere in savoring his sweetness. May our joy and our "pleasure" be in Christ. May we go to him "like iron drawn by a magnet."⁹²

Our sincere desire, our petition to do so, is a powerful help towards wanting and fostering unity of life. What that means is not having more than one Lord in our soul (cf. *Mt* 6:24), seeking only one thing (cf. *Lk* 10:42), and submitting totally to one Love, who is our God. It means wanting only what God wants, and accepting everything else because God wants it and in the way and to the extent that pleases him. It means being so identified with Christ that the fulfillment of his will is expressed in us as an essential characteristic of our own personality. It means having the same sentiments as Christ (cf. *Phil* 2:5). To achieve that, let us ask him for it with St. Josemaría: "May I see with your eyes, my Christ, my dear Jesus."⁹³

We Christians should not forget that with our Lord, *omnia sancta*, all things are holy, but without him, *mundana omnia*, all things are worldly. Let us not be fooled by a lack of love that hides behind the appearance of naturalness to avoid facing up, decisively, out of love, to the consequences that fidelity to Christ involves. Our relationship with God can be built on only one model, Christ, and we should see clearly that Jesus' relationship with his Father shines out by its total unity: "I and the Father are one" (*Jn* 10:30).

Unity of life

Holy Mass, by its very nature, and still more when we struggle to make it the center of our interior life, possesses the power to unify human existence. In the unbloody renewal of his sacrifice on Calvary, Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament takes to himself all the labors and intentions of those who are united to his oblation. He summarizes them in the adoration he offers the Father, and in the thanksgiving, reparation and petition that he makes to him.

Just as Christ in his life on earth summarized in himself all human history since Adam, and in his sacrifice summarized his own life, so also in the Sacrifice of the Mass he brings together everything that God grants mankind and synthesizes all that mankind can raise to the Father in Christ under the impulse of the Paraclete. In short, "the Holy Eucharist ... sums up and effects the mercies of God toward men."⁹⁴

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass summarizes what our conduct should be—loving adoration, thanksgiving, reparation and petition, that is, dedication to God and through him to others. Whatever weighs on us and overwhelms us, all that fills us with joy and enthuses us, and every aspect of our daily activities, should flow into the Mass. We should go there with our personal concerns and those of others, indeed, of the whole world.

Last Christmas I told some brothers of yours that they should go to Bethlehem not only with their own in-

92. St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, 296.

93. St. Josemaría, notes taken from a meditation, 19 March 1975.

94. St. Josemaría, *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer*, 123.

tentions and needs, but should also bring Baby Jesus all the sufferings and urgent needs of everyone in the Work, the Church and the whole world. That is my advice to all of you now. When you go to Mass, bring before our Lord everyone's material and spiritual needs, just as Christ, lifted up the Cross, was weighed down by the sins of the men and women of all times. Let us be up there with him, like him, on the Cross, where he interceded before his Father, as he does now on the altars and from the tabernacles on earth, to obtain for each human being, with divine superabundance, the graces that each needs, without excluding anyone.

You will recall that in 1966 St. Josemaría had a powerful experience that he related as follows: "After so many years, that priest made a marvelous discovery: he came to understand that the Holy Mass is real work: *operatio Dei*, God's work. That day, when he celebrated Mass, he experienced pain, joy and tiredness. He felt in his flesh the exhaustion of a divine task.

"For Christ too it cost a great effort to carry out the first Mass: the Cross."⁹⁵

He took this as God's way of rewarding the efforts he had made over the years to center his whole life on the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and, at the same time, as confirmation of the supernatural validity of this way to unity of life, which is so characteristic of the

spirit of the Work. Let us struggle day after day so that, whatever we do, our mind is centered on Jesus Christ, to hold fast to his plans and also to enter into his sweetness.

Pie pellicane, Iesu Domine, me immundum munda tuo sanguine

Becoming more and more purified

The myth that the pelican used to pierce its breast with its beak in order to nourish its offspring on its own blood, has traditionally been used as a Eucharistic symbol that tries to represent the way the two aspects of the Eucharist, sacrifice and banquet, cannot be separated. Indeed, in holy Mass, "the work of our redemption is carried out,"⁹⁶ and we are given the Body of Christ to eat and his Blood to drink.

In this Sacrament it is clear that Christ's Blood redeems us, and also nourishes us and delights us. His Blood washes away all sins (cf. *Mt* 26:28) and restores the soul's purity (cf. *Rev* 7:14). His Blood begets women and men with chaste bodies and clean hearts (cf. *Zech* 9:17). It is Blood that inebriates and intoxicates us with the Holy Spirit, and loosens our tongues to sing and tell the *magnalia Dei* (*Acts* 2:11), the mighty works of God.

As it is the very same Sacrifice of Calvary, the Eucharist contains in itself the power to wash away all sin and to grant grace. From the Mass, as from Calvary, the other sacraments are born,

95. St. Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, 11th station, 4.

96. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 3.

and they in turn direct us to Christ's holocaust as their end. However, the ordinary sacrament (and you should repeat this in your apostolate) ordained by God to forgive mortal sins is not the Mass but Penance, the sacrament of reconciliation with God and with the Church through the absolution that follows a fully sincere and contrite confession to the priest of all the mortal sins that have not yet been forgiven directly in this sacrament.⁹⁷

Receiving holy Communion properly prepared

Moreover, precisely because the Eucharist is an expression and communication of love, it requires, in those who wish to receive our Lord's Body and Blood, a clear desire for union with Jesus through grace. "Have you ever thought how you would prepare yourself to receive Our Lord if you could go to Communion only once in your life?

"We must be thankful to God that he makes it so easy for us to come to him: but we should show our gratitude by preparing ourselves to receive him very well."⁹⁸

The quality and care of our preparation will depend, as I said earlier, on our own inner depth and sensitivity, and particularly on our faith in and love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. "We should receive Our Lord in the Eucharist as we would prepare to receive

the great ones of the earth, or even better: with decorations, with lights, with new clothes...

And if you ask me what sort of cleanliness I mean, what decorations and what lights you should bring, I will answer you: cleanliness in each one of your senses, decoration in each of your faculties, light in all your soul."⁹⁹

Naturally we shouldn't wait until we are perfect (otherwise we would wait for ever) to receive our Lord sacramentally. Nor should we stop going to Mass because we don't feel like it or because we are sometimes distracted. "Go to Communion. It doesn't show lack of respect. Go this very day when you have just got over that 'spot of trouble.'

"Have you forgotten that Jesus said: 'It is not by those who are well, but by those who are sick, that the physician is needed?'"¹⁰⁰

Nor should we stop receiving Holy Communion because it seems to us that the frequent reception of this Sacrament is failing to produce in us the effects we would expect from God's generosity. "Going to Communion every day for so many years! Anybody else would be a saint by now,' you told me, 'and I... I'm always the same!'

"Son,' I replied, 'keep up your daily Communion, and think: what would I be if I had not gone?'"¹⁰¹

97. Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Pœnitentia*, 2 December 1984, 31, I.

98. St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, 828.

99. St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, 834.

100. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, 536.

101. *Ibid.*, 534.

Rather, Christians should remember that frequent reception of Holy Communion, which was already a practice in the early Church, is an authentic sign of being in love, which our own failings cannot obliterate. "Apostolic soul: Jesus' intimacy with you—so close to him for so many years!—doesn't it mean anything to you?"¹⁰²

When these or similar false excuses arise, it is more than ever time to adopt, with gratitude and trust in Jesus, the same attitude as the centurion, as we do when we say at Mass "*Domine, non sum dignus*, Lord, I am not worthy". We should never forget that in the presence of the majesty and perfection of Christ, who is God and Man, we are poor beggars who have nothing. We are stained with the leprosy of pride. We do not always see God's hand in what happens to us, and sometimes we are paralyzed and fail to do his will. Yet all this is no justification for holding back. It should lead us to say very often, following our Father's example: "I wish, Lord, to receive you with the purity, humility and devotion..."

Cuius una stilla salvum facere totum mundum quit ab omni scelere

Telling others about the effects of the Eucharist

These words refer to the characteristic "superabundance" that the Eucharist provides, and the "excess" of divine love that has been granted and that is continually being offered to us. This verse of the Eucharistic hymn refers to the atoning aspect of the Sacrament.

One single drop of the God-Man's Blood would have sufficed to erase all the sins of mankind. He wanted, however, to shed it all. "One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water" (*Jn* 19:34). In ancient civilizations, and to some extent today too, blood symbolized life. Christ chose to hold back none of his blood, showing his deliberate desire to give us his whole life.

Contemplating Jesus' total self-giving for us, and considering once more that "there is no way to separate Christ, the God man, from his role as redeemer,"¹⁰³ helps us to realize that we cannot be satisfied with behaving personally as Eucharistic souls: we must spur others on to do likewise.

It is not enough for each of us to seek our Lord in the Eucharist and make friends with him. We need, through our apostolate, to "infect" many others, the more the better, so that they also seek and maintain that unparalleled friendship. "Love Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament very much. Try to get many others to love him. Only by having this concern in your souls will you be able to teach it to others, because you will give what you are living, what you have, what you are."¹⁰⁴

Seeing the sad state of ignorance that exists, even among many Catholics, let us think, my daughters and sons, about how important it is to explain to people what the Mass is and what it is worth, the dispositions we should have on receiving our Lord in

102. *Ibid.*, 321.

103. St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 122.

104. St. Josemaría, notes taken from a get-together, 4 April 1970.

holy Communion, the need we feel to go and visit him in the tabernacle, and the value and meaning of the “good manners of piety.”¹⁰⁵

Here we see an inexhaustible and fruitful field for our personal apostolate that will bring in its train, as a blessing from our Lord, a lot of vocations. That is what our beloved Father told us from the beginning, and showed us with his daily example. “In order to fulfill the will of Christ our King” (our Father was speaking here of the Work spreading throughout the world), “you need to have a lot of interior life and to be Eucharistic souls—lunettes!—souls of prayer. That is the only way you can have the dynamism the Work requires of you.”¹⁰⁶

Love for mortification and penance

If we are to really become Eucharistic souls and prayerful souls, we need to be united habitually to the Cross, seeking and accepting mortification. Don Alvaro wrote to us about a question our Father once put to a group of his sons: “What can we do to be apostles as our Lord wants in *Opus Dei*?” He immediately replied energetically and with absolute conviction: “Bear within ourselves Christ crucified! (...) Our Lord listens to the petitions of mortified and penitent souls.”¹⁰⁷ Don Alvaro concluded from this, for himself and for everyone: “If we are to be faithful to the great commitment of co-redeeming, we must personally identify

ourselves with our Lord Jesus Christ by crucifying our passions and concupiscence of soul and body (cf. *Gal* 5:24). This is the divine ‘paradox’ that has to be renewed in each one of us: ‘to live, we must die’ (*The Way*, 187).”¹⁰⁸

It is precisely in the Sacrament of the Sacrifice of the Son of God that we obtain the grace and strength to become identified with Christ on the Cross. We must never doubt it: the source and root of our life of mortification are to be found in Eucharistic devotion. We will be in a position to say that we are authentic Eucharistic souls only if we live *cum gaudio et pace*, with joy and peace, nailed with Christ to the Cross, and if we learn to “subject and humble ourselves out of love”, if “our thoughts, affections, senses and faculties, our words and our deeds”—everything—are “tied tightly, through love for our Lady, to her Son’s Cross.”¹⁰⁹ A Eucharistic soul is necessarily always a priestly soul, especially if the person is consumed with desires to expiate and to sacrifice. Such a soul is “essentially, totally Eucharistic.”¹¹⁰

When we are serious about the Mass becoming “our Mass, Jesus,” because Jesus celebrates it with each of us and because we each offer ourselves as an oblation united to Christ’s offering to God the Father, then it lasts for the twenty-four hours of the day. “Love our Lord a lot. Desire to make reparation with greater contrition. We have to

105. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, 541.

106. St. Josemaría, *Instruction*, 1 April 1934, 3. The Spanish word for “lunettes” is *viriles*, which means both the lunette (the part of the monstrance that holds the sacred Host), and “manly”.

107. Quoted by Don Alvaro, Letter, 16 June 1978.

108. *Ibid*

109. *Ibid*.

110. St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, 826.

make reparation first for ourselves, as the priest does before he goes up to the altar. With our priestly soul, we turn our day into a Mass, in union with Christ the priest, and present to the Father a holy oblation in expiation for our own faults and the faults of all men and women. . . . Treat our Lord well for me in the Mass and throughout the day."¹¹¹

Iesu, quem velatum nunc aspicio, oro, fiat illud quod tam sitio, ut te revelata cernens facie, visu sim beatus tuae gloriae

Hunger to see Christ's face

This concluding verse of the Adoro te devote could be summarized as: "Lord, I want to see you!" This is a very natural conclusion, since the Eucharist, a "pledge of future glory,"¹¹² gives us a foretaste of eternal life. "The Eucharist is truly a glimpse of heaven appearing on earth. It is a glorious ray of the heavenly Jerusalem which pierces the clouds of our history and lights up our journey."¹¹³

This central treasure of the Church is a foretaste of eternity because it makes us participants in "the Lamb's supper" where the blessed are filled with the sight of God and his Anointed (cf. *Rev* 19:6-10). By the grace of God we are granted access to the same reality here and now, but not fully, only imperfectly (cf. *1 Cor* 13:10-12). The new life conferred at Baptism and destined to achieve fulfillment in glory is increased and strengthened in us by the gift of the Sacrament.

Receiving Jesus in Holy Communion makes us serene in the face of death and the uncertainty of judgment, because he has assured us that "he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him upon the last day" (*Jn* 6:54). "Those who feed on Christ in the Eucharist need not wait until the hereafter to receive eternal life: they already possess it on earth, as the first-fruits of a future fullness which will embrace man in his totality. For in the Eucharist we also receive the pledge of our bodily resurrection at the end of the world."¹¹⁴ Eucharistic faith and hope rescue us from many fears.

The holy Eucharist is "the most sacred and transcendent act that man, with the grace of God, can carry out in this life. To communicate with the Body and Blood of our Lord is, in a certain sense, like loosening the bonds of earth and time, in order to be already with God in heaven, where Christ himself will wipe the tears from our eyes and where there will be no more death, nor mourning, nor cries of distress, because the old world will have passed away (cf. *Rev* 21:4)."¹¹⁵

This Sacrament stands, as it were, on the threshold between this life and the next, not only when it is administered to the dying as Viaticum, but more properly because it contains *Christus passus*, now in glory, such that it participates in the sacramental order of this life, yet belongs substantially to heaven.

111. St. Josemaría, notes taken from a get-together, 6 October 1968.

112. Vatican II, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 47.

113. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 19.

114. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 18.

115. St. Josemaría, *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer*, 113.

This is another reason why Eucharistic piety make us more and more *Opus Dei*, spurring us on to be contemplatives in the world, as we journey in love on earth and in heaven: "Not 'between' heaven and earth, because we are of the world. In the world and in Paradise at the same time! That could be the formula to express how we should go about our life for as long as we remain *in hoc saeculo*, in this world."¹¹⁶

Pledge of eternal life

God's plan for salvation begins in this earthly stage which is "penultimate" and finishes in that which is to come, eternity.¹¹⁷ Therefore faith involves a sort of initial face-to-face knowledge, a beginning of the glorious beatific vision. In the Eucharist, the tension towards glory is based above all on the love that arises from a constant relationship with Christ. A Eucharistic soul longs to adore openly the One it now adores hidden in the Bread. Loving Christ hidden in the Blessed Sacrament gives rise to an unstoppable desire to possess that love openly. "Get to know the Sacred Humanity of Jesus... And He will place in your soul an insatiable hunger, an 'uncontrollable' yearning to contemplate his Face."¹¹⁸

The saints have always felt this impatience, as St. Josemaría felt it in his heart. "People in love yearn to see each other. Lovers only have eyes for their beloved. Isn't it only natural? The human heart feels a sort of inner com-

pulsion. I would be lying if I said I wasn't deeply affected by the thought of contemplating Christ's face. *Vultum tuum, Domine, requiram*; Lord, I long to see your face. I love to close my eyes and think that, when God wills, the moment will come when I will be able to see him, not as in a mirror dimly, but ... face to face (1 Cor 13:12). Yes, my children, My heart yearns for God, the living God. When shall I go and behold the face of God? (*Ps* 41:3)."¹¹⁹

Eucharistic devotion will give us that yearning and increase it in us until being with Christ becomes the only thing that matters, without, however, separating us from this world. On the contrary, we will love it more passionately when our heart is closely united to the Heart of Christ. Intimate friendship with our Lord in the Eucharist will vigorously impress on us the conviction that happiness is not to be found in earthly things that will grow old and disappear. Happiness is to be found in remaining always with him, whom we already possess as our "infinite treasure, pearl of great price" in this Sacrament.¹²⁰ "As he was giving out Holy Communion that priest felt like shouting out: this is Happiness I am giving to you!"¹²¹

The Blessed Virgin Mary, Woman of the Eucharist

John Paul II has called Mary the "woman of the Eucharist" and has given her to us as an example, as

116. St. Josemaría, notes taken from a meditation, 27 March 1975.

117. Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, 25 March 95, 2.

118. St. Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, 6th station, 2.

119. St. Josemaría, notes taken from a meditation, 25 December 1973.

120. Cf. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, 432.

121. St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, 267.

“school” and “guide,” so that we will learn to be amazed, which means to accept, adore and be grateful for the mystery of the Eucharist.¹²²

We understand this very well in the light of faith. This was what happened to our Father, who explained to us how at holy Mass “in some way the Blessed Virgin is there, because of her intimate relationship with the most Blessed Trinity and because she is the Mother of Christ, of his flesh and blood—the Mother of Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect man. Jesus was conceived in the womb of Mary most holy, not through the intervention of man, but by the power of the Holy Spirit alone. In his veins runs the blood of his Mother, the blood that is offered in the sacrifice of the redemption, on Calvary and in the Mass.”¹²³

At the foot of the Cross, Mary united her own interior sacrifice—“See if there is any sorrow like my sorrow” (Lam 1:12)—to her Son’s, cooperating in the Redemption on Calvary. She “is present, with the Church and as the Mother of the Church, at each of our celebrations of the Eucharist”¹²⁴ and cooperates with the Son in spreading throughout the world—she is the Mediatrix of all graces!—the infinite saving power of the holy Sacrifice that Jesus alone accomplishes.

My daughters and sons, if in some way we have compared ourselves to Dismas, the good thief, and the Apos-

tle Thomas, how can we fail to look at Mary, to learn to know Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to love him more, to learn from him and to imitate him, to “treat him well”? In this very personal endeavor, that incessantly will renew us interiorly and fill us with desires for sanctity and apostolate, let us find help by contemplating the mysteries of the rosary, from the Annunciation, when we see our Lady welcoming the Word Incarnate unconditionally into her most pure womb, to her glorious coronation, when God receives her body and soul into glory and crowns her as our Queen, Mother and Lady.

“We go to Jesus—and we ‘return’ to him—through Mary.”¹²⁵ Let us ask our Mother to take us by the hand always, and especially in this Year of the Eucharist, so that we may always repeat to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, with words and deeds: “I adore you, I love you”! *Adoro te devote!* When we do so, may we hear our beloved Father saying to us: “Call upon Mary and Joseph, because in some way they will be present in the tabernacle as they were at Bethlehem and at Nazareth (...). Don’t forget!”¹²⁶

A very affectionate blessing from
your Father
✠ Javier

Rome, October 6, 2004, second anniversary of the canonization of St. Josemaría.

122. Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 53-58.

123. St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 89.

124. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 57.

125. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, 495.

126. St. Josemaría, notes taken from a conversation, 6 June 1974.