



VATICAN - THE WORDS OF DOCTRINE by Rev Nicola Bux and Rev Salvatore Vitiello - The Eucharist: the "heart" of the Church

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - In the last encyclical, almost a last will and testament, of the Holy Father John Paul II, of holy memory, entitled *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* we read at paragraph 11: "The Church has received the Eucharist from Christ her Lord not as one gift – however precious – among so many others, but as the gift par excellence, for it is the gift of himself, of his person in his sacred humanity, as well as the gift of his saving work. Nor does it remain confined to the past, since "all that Christ is – all that he did and suffered for all men – participates in the divine eternity, and so transcends all times".

Therefore the Eucharist is not just one of the Church's "sacramental gestures" instead it is the Sacrament par excellence, through, with and in which the Mystical Body of Christ is built up.

In fact: "A causal influence of the Eucharist is present at the Church's very origins. The Evangelists specify that it was the Twelve, the Apostles, who gathered with Jesus at the Last Supper (cf. Mt 26:20; Mk 14:17; Lk 22:14). This is a detail of notable importance, for the Apostles "were both the seeds of the new Israel and the beginning of the sacred hierarchy". By offering them his body and his blood as food, Christ mysteriously involved them in the sacrifice which would be completed later on Calvary. By analogy with the Covenant of Mount Sinai, sealed by sacrifice and the sprinkling of blood,³⁸ the actions and words of Jesus at the Last Supper laid the foundations of the new messianic community, the People of the New Covenant" (n. 21).

The attention given to the Eucharist by the Pontiff of venerable memory, was echoed by a document of great interest, which was however in spirit and letter hardly noticed, and deserves to be taken up again, and at last carefully studied and implemented.

I refer to the "Instruction *Redemptionis sacramentum* On certain matters to be observed or to be avoided regarding the Most Holy Eucharist" issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. In the second paragraph the instruction clearly reveals its continuity with the desires and the instructions of the Pope at the time: "The Church's doctrine regarding the Most Holy Eucharist, in which the whole spiritual wealth of the Church is contained - namely Christ, our Paschal Lamb - the Eucharist which is the source and summit of the whole of Christian life, and which lies as a causative force behind the very origins of the Church, has been expounded with thoughtful care and with great authority over the course of the centuries in the writings of the Councils and the Supreme Pontiffs. Most recently, in fact, the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II, in the Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, set forth afresh certain elements of great importance on this subject in view of the ecclesial circumstances of our times".

Those who with a heart rightly filled with deep gratitude continue to cite John Paul II, cannot ignore his last Encyclical, which outlines the content, which represents the Father's "last" word to his sons and daughters as he prepares to leave them.

The doctrinal and liturgical doctrine of Benedict XVI is in full continuity with that of John Paul II as always in the Church's authentic history, for every Supreme Pontiff a holy history of salvation. The testament and legacy of John Paul II were fully welcomed and valorised in the first Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Ratzinger, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, which followed the Synod of Bishops of the Eucharist, convoked at the request of his predecessor.

Almost an echo, if understood, of the remarkable Encyclical "Deus caritas est", the Exhortation shows all the Bishops of the Church in full agreement, in communion with the Vicar of Christ stating the Eucharist's centrality and essentiality in the Church with all the consequences theological, liturgical and disciplinary which stem from that eminent position.

It is of great intellectual and spiritual consolation, and a call to contemplate the Mystery deeply and prayerfully, lucid awareness of the great magisterial continuity which clearly the Holy Spirit, gives to His Church as she is

called continually to recognise the Eucharist as her “heart”. Word and actions in the divine liturgy, can only be consequential to the reality celebrated. (Agenzia Fides 3/7/2008)