



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO TOGO, IVORY COAST, CAMEROON,
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, ZAIRE, KENYA AND MOROCCO

«STATIO ORBIS» MASS
AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE FORTY-THIRD INTERNATIONAL
EUCCHARISTIC CONGRESS IN NAIROBI

HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

*Uhuru Park - Nairobi (Kenya)
Sunday, 18 August 1985*

“Unless a grain of wheat falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest” (Jo. 12, 24). Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ; beloved Pilgrims from all the continents of the world,

1. These words were spoken by the Lord Jesus as he thought of his own death. *He himself* first of all is that “grain of wheat” which “falls on the ground and dies”. The Son of God, of the same substance as the Father, God from God and Light from Light, was made man. He entered into the life of ordinary men and women as the son of the Virgin Mary of Nazareth. And finally *he accepted death* on the Cross *as the sacrifice* for the sins of the world. Precisely in this way the grain of wheat dies and yields a rich harvest. It is *the harvest of the Redemption of the world*, the harvest of the salvation of souls, the power of truth and love as the beginning of eternal life in God.

In this way the parable of the grain of wheat *helps us* to understand *the very mystery of Christ*.

2. At the same time, the grain of wheat that “falls on the ground and dies” becomes *the pledge of bread*. A man harvests from his fields the heads of grain which have grown from the single grain and, transforming the collected grains into flour, he makes bread from it as food for his own body. In this way Christ’s *parable* about the grain of wheat *helps us* to understand *the mystery of the*

Eucharist.

In fact, at the Last Supper, Christ took bread in his own hands, blessed it and said these words over it: "Take this, all of you, and eat it: this is my body which will be given up for you". And the broken Bread which had become in a sacramental way his own Body he distributed to the Apostles.

In a similar way he brought about the transubstantiation of the wine into his own Blood, and distributing it to the Apostles, said: "Take this, all of you, and drink from it: this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all men so that sins may be forgiven". And then he added: "Do this in memory of me".

3. This is how the mystery of Christ *remains among us* through *the Sacrament of the Eucharist*. The mystery of the Redeemer of the world who gave himself up for us all, offering his Body and Blood in the Sacrifice of the Cross. Thanks to the Eucharist the words of our Redeemer are fulfilled: "I will not leave you orphans; I will come back to you" (*Jo. 14, 18*).

In this Sacrament he is always coming to us. We are not orphans. He is with us!

In the Eucharist he also brings us *his peace*, and he helps us to overcome our weaknesses and fears. It is just as he had foretold: "Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace the world cannot give, this is my gift to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid" (*Jo. 14, 27*).

And hence, from the beginning, the *disciples and witnesses* of our Crucified and Risen Lord "remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers" (*Act. 2, 42*).

They remained faithful "to the breaking of bread". In other words, the Eucharist constituted the very centre of their life, the centre of the life of the Christian community, the centre of the life of the Church.

Thus it was at the beginning *in Jerusalem*. Thus it has been everywhere, wherever faith in the Gospel together with the teaching of the Apostles has been introduced. From generation to generation it has been so among different peoples and nations. Thus it has also been on *the African continent* since the Gospel first reached these lands through the missionaries, and since it produced its first fruits in a community assembled to celebrate the Eucharist.

4. Today this community united in Christ extends over almost the entire continent. This community of seventy million people is a great sign of fruitfulness of the Eucharist; the power of Christ's Gospel has been revealed in Africa. From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the Lord is praised on African soil. Sons and daughters of Africa faithfully transmit the teachings of the

Apostles, and the Eucharist is continuously offered for the glory of God and the well-being of every human being on this continent. The authentic living of Religious Life and the existence of millions of Christian families are proof that the grain of wheat has yielded a rich harvest to the glory of the Blood of Jesus and to the honour of all Africa.

5. *Another expression of the maturity of the Christian community* and of the growth of the Church is the fact that for the first time an International Eucharistic Congress is taking place in the heart of the African continent: the whole world praises God for the *Forty-third International Eucharistic Congress in Nairobi*.

Today this Congress reaches its climax. By this "Statio Orbis", Africa, united through its Bishops, gathered about the Successor of Peter, proclaims *before the whole world the saving truth of the Eucharist*.

This Congress is like a great reflection of that first Christian community in Jerusalem which was "faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers" (*Act. 2, 42*).

The mystery of the Eucharist is joyfully proclaimed by the Eucharistic Congress before the whole Church and the whole world.

In the message which this Congress announces to the world there is *a strong and clear echo of the words of Christ*. "I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever" (*Io. 6, 51*).

6. The *message of the Eucharistic Congress* contains within itself - just like the very mystery of the Eucharist - *an invitation to love*. At the first Eucharist, on the evening before he gave his life for us on the Cross, our Saviour said to his disciples: "I give you a *new commandment: love one another*, just as I have loved you, you also must love one another. By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples (*Ibid. 13, 34-35*).

The love of Christ that is received as a gift must in turn be given as a gift. Christ's love poured out upon us abundantly in the one bread and the one cup must be shared with our neighbour: with the neighbour who is poor or homeless, with the neighbour who is sick or in prison, with the neighbour who belongs to a different tribe or race or who does not believe in Christ.

7. *Christ's invitation to love*, addressed to us once more in this Eucharistic Congress, is *meant above all for the Christian family*.

It is as if *the Lord were speaking to each member of the family*. *Wives*, love your husbands just as Christ has loved you. *Husbands*, love your wives "just as Christ loved the Church and sacrificed

himself for her to make her holy” (*Eph. 5, 25*). “*Children*, be obedient to your parents in the Lord - that is your duty . . . And *parents*, never drive your children to resentment but in bringing them up correct them and guide them as the Lord does” (*Ibid. 6, 1. 4*). Take as your model the Holy Family at Nazareth: the purity and loving tenderness of Mary, the fidelity and honesty of Joseph and his generosity in daily work, the humility and obedience of Jesus.

And Christ’s invitation to love is especially relevant in the practice of *conjugal love*. The exclusive and unbreakable union of husband and wife expresses itself best in mutual self-giving. Couples who continually seek to love and support one another share in a special way in the life of the Most Holy Trinity. They reflect like a mirror the ever faithful love of God for his people. Married love is fruitful, with a fruitfulness that is shown especially in children. And every child brings a renewed invitation to love with still greater generosity.

8. To feed and clothe and care for each child requires much sacrifice and hard work. In addition, parents have *the duty of educating their children*. As the Second Vatican Council says: “Their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it. For it devolves on parents to create a family atmosphere so animated with love and reverence for God and others that a well-rounded personal and social development will be fostered among the children. Hence, the family is the first school of those social virtues which every society needs” (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 3).

While married love is exclusive in its most intimate expression of self-giving, it is also marked by the power of generously welcoming children and of *reaching out in care and service* to members of the extended family, to the local community and to society as a whole. The Christian family fulfils a key role in small Christian communities and in the life and mission of the Church. While no family is without sin and selfishness and the tensions which these provoke, yet by the power of the Holy Spirit these can all be forgiven and overcome, and *the family* can contribute to the Church’s task of *reconciliation, unity and peace*.

9. Christ’s invitation to love, addressed to the Christian family, is seen in a new perspective when considered in the light of the first reading of today’s liturgy. The Lord says to his people through the Prophet Hosea: “I will betroth you to myself for ever, betroth you with integrity and justice, with tenderness and love; I will betroth you to myself with faithfulness” (*Os. 2, 19-21*).

The *Christian family* is called to be a sign in the world of *God’s faithful love* for his people. But in order to be so, the Christian family is first of all invited to receive and be filled with God’s love. For *the family* is designed by providence to be *a community in dialogue with God*. That is why prayer and the sacraments should enjoy a place of prominence in family life.

Most important of all is *the Eucharist*, in which Christ’s covenant of love with the Church is commemorated and renewed, and in which a husband and wife find strength and nourishment for

their own marriage covenant.

The *Sacrament of Penance* offers members of the family the grace needed for conversion and for overcoming whatever divisions sin has brought about in the home. “While they discover in faith that sin contradicts not only the covenant with God, but also the covenant between husband and wife and the communion of the family, the married couple and the other members of the family are led to an encounter with God, who is ‘rich in mercy’, who bestows on them his love which is more powerful than sin, and who reconstructs and brings to perfection the marriage covenant and the family communion” (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Familiaris Consortio*, 58).

Prayer is essential to the life of every Christian, but *family prayer* has its own special character. Since it is a form of shared prayer, it has to be shaped and adapted according to the size and make-up of each family. Few activities influence a family more deeply than their prayer together. Prayer fosters reverence for God and respect for one another. It places joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments, every event and circumstance, within the perspective of God’s mercy and providence. Family prayer opens the heart of each member to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and helps the family to be more united in itself, yet more ready to serve the Church and society.

10. *The Eucharist is the Sacrament of Life*. It fills the human soul with divine life, and it is *the pledge of eternal life*. Through the Eucharist Christ always speaks to us those words which he said on the eve of his Passion and Death: “There are many rooms in my Father’s house; . . . I am going now to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone and prepared you a place, I shall return to take you with me; so that where I am you may be too” (Jo. 14, 2-3).

The *Eucharistic celebration lifts us* out of the routine of daily life. It directs our spiritual gaze *forwards and upwards*. The Eucharist helps us here and now “not to lose sight of Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection” (Hebr. 12, 2). It also helps us to keep in mind the finishing line of the race which we began in Baptism, the real purpose of our life, our ultimate destiny. Christ wants us to be with him for ever in eternity; he wants us to enter once and for all into his Father’s house where he has prepared a place for us. The Eucharist increases our desire for this fullness of life and unity in Christ which we shall find in heaven alone. And the Eucharist is a sure promise of our achieving it.

11. Dear Brothers and Sisters, dear Cardinal Otunga and all my brother Bishops and priests, beloved men and women religious, dear parents of families, children and young people, single people and the elderly, all of you who are taking part in this Eucharistic Congress by your presence here physically or spiritually: *the Church* of Jesus Christ which has taken root throughout the earth *offers to the world with joy and gratitude*, through my ministry as Bishop of Rome and Successor of Peter, the *Eucharistic message of this Congress*.

The Church sees in this Congress a particular result of all her missionary and pastoral labours

since the beginning of evangelisation on the African continent, and for this result she gives thanks and praise to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

At the same time, drawing from the young and lively faith of Africa, the whole Church *desires to renew her missionary zeal* just as the Second Vatican Council manifested it twenty years ago; for the Church is by her very nature missionary!

May Christ in the Eucharist, as “the grain of wheat” fallen on the soil of Africa, bring forth in his body the Church *a rich harvest for eternal life!*

Amen.

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