



APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION

*Veneremur Cernui –
Down in Adoration Falling*

of The Most Reverend Thomas J. Olmsted, Bishop of Phoenix,
to Priests, Deacons, Religious and the Lay Faithful
of the Diocese of Phoenix on the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist



“Veneremur Cernui – Down in Adoration Falling” - An Apostolic Exhortation to Priests, Deacons, Religious and the Lay Faithful of the Diocese of Phoenix on the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist

Cover photo by Billy Hardiman: Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted elevates the Eucharistic host during the Chrism Mass March 29, 2021, at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Avondale.

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INTRODUCTION

My beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. I wish to speak to you about the most important and central teaching of our faith. What I share is “not too high for you.” It is not theology that is only meant for theologians and priests. This concerns the most important reality of our lives – the saving presence of our Lord. This is not a teaching that can be dumbed down or over simplified. This is a truth that we need to be clear and certain about. Be bold, then! Take up and read, drink in the truth, discuss and share it with others and allow Jesus, truly present in the Eucharist, to conform you further to Himself and fulfill the deepest longings of your heart.

2. From the time I was a little child, I knew Jesus was present in every Catholic Church. I could not have explained it, but I was certain He was there. The way my father genuflected before the Tabernacle, the quiet reverence of my mother, the way our pastor Father Daly sang the *Tantum Ergo* with such gusto and a thick Irish brogue, it was these actions and God’s grace, more than words, that imbedded in my heart a solid conviction about the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. And because our farm family prayed together every evening, during thunderstorms or blizzards, whether we had a bumper crop or hardly anything at all from drought-stricken soil, no matter what, we knew that the Lord Jesus we received at Mass was with us, every day and night, and that whatever we faced, all would be well because of Him.

3. Of course, that faith in the Eucharist has been tested many times over the years. As a seminarian in Tours, France, for example, during two months of intensive French language study, some classmates learning of my practice of daily Mass accosted me, sneering with venom, “You really believe Jesus is present in that piece of bread?” Shocked by their hate-filled tone, I could say nothing for what seemed like eternity; but after probably less than a minute, I managed to stammer, “Yes... I do.” That shocking and embarrassing moment, to my surprise, led ever so gradually to new gratitude for the gift of the Eucharistic faith and a deeper conviction about daily Mass and Eucharistic adoration. It also taught me to expect my faith in our Eucharistic Savior to face scorn and contradiction.

4. I invite you in this Exhortation to “*put out into the deep*” (Lk 5:4). Whether your faith in the Eucharist is strong or weak, whether you consider the Church your Home or you have recently decided to disassociate, or even if you have no faith at all, my sincere hope is that a true “Eucharistic amazement” will be ignited within you.

5. The People of Israel faced many obstacles, challenges, and sufferings as they crossed the desert and entered the Promised Land. But God had assured them of His presence and guidance on their arduous sojourn. In the Ark of the Covenant, they recognized the presence of God. Into battles and in dangerous lands, wherever the Israelites went, the Ark went with them because it

assured them that God would be with them to fight their battles, to care for them and protect them. For this reason, the Ark became a powerful and enduring image of God's presence.

6. When the People of Israel were preparing to cross the Jordan river and enter the Promised Land, Joshua stressed the importance of following the Ark: *"When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord being carried, you are to set out from your positions and follow it... so that you can see the way to go, since we have never been this way before"* (Josh. 3:2-4). This instruction was addressed to a people who would face the dangers of the crossing and the challenges and threats that awaited them in an unknown land.

7. Like the People of Israel, we too are heading into difficult waters. Today we find ourselves in a crisis; many anxieties, uncertainties and doubts assail us from every side. As I said in my pastoral letter *"O Sacred Feast,"* the Church at large is experiencing a grave crisis of faith in the Eucharist. This crisis has inflicted additional significant implications for authentic Christian discipleship; namely, abysmal Mass attendance, declining vocations to marriage, priesthood, and religious life, waning Catholic influence in society. As a nation we are experiencing a torrent of assaults upon the truth. The Gospel message has been watered down or replaced with ambiguous worldly values. Many Christians have abandoned Christ and His Gospel and turned to a secular culture for meaning that it cannot provide and to satiate a hunger that it can never satisfy.

8. In such troubled waters, our greatest anchor in these storms is Christ Himself, found in the Holy Eucharist. Though the instruction of Joshua was intended for the People of Israel facing formidable enemies as they crossed into the Promised Land, his words remain crucial for us: *"Follow the Ark of the Lord, for we have never been this way before"*.

9. As God's People today, we are also on a journey to a promised inheritance, a journey also filled with dangers, challenges, and suffering. We do not have a column of cloud by day nor a pillar of fire by night reminding us of God's presence ever guiding and protecting us as He did for the People of Israel. We do not have the Ark of the Covenant in our midst. Instead, we have not something but Someone much greater! Someone greater than the Ark who goes before us and is always with us. We have Jesus Christ truly present in the Eucharist to guide, comfort, and strengthen us. In times like these, echoing the instruction of Joshua, we must fix our gaze on the Lord and draw near to Him more than ever in the Eucharist. The more the Lord in the Eucharist is our central focus, the more surely He will bring us through these dark and turbulent waters. On this day when we commemorate the Institution of the Eucharist, I as your shepherd implore each of you to seek out Jesus in the Eucharist to be strengthened and renewed in your faith.

PART I

EUCCHARIST – MYSTERY TO BE REVERED

10. We cannot speak of the Eucharist without being confronted by its awesome mystery. It is no wonder that it is the central point of division between Catholics and other Christians. As early as the second century, we have record of Christians being accused of cannibalism by the pagan Romans because they ate and drank the Body and Blood of Christ (cf. *First and Second Apologies of St. Justin Martyr*). Since the Protestant Reformation, many Christians stopped believing in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Instead, they hold a certain religious service on Sundays but not the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

11. The perennial biblical verse where the Christian conflict begins and ends is the Bread of Life discourse: *“Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink”* (Jn 6:53-55).

12. Jesus meant exactly what He said – He is truly present in the Eucharist. Some say that these words are figurative or that Jesus was only speaking symbolically when He said, *“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life”*. However, if Jesus had meant it as a symbol, He would not have repeated this message seven times in this dialogue: *“My flesh is true food, my blood is true drink”*. The Jews understood what He really meant, and they responded with incredulity, *“How can this man give us His flesh to eat?”*. Despite the uproar caused by His teaching, Jesus did not soften His claim. On the contrary, He strengthened it. Up to this point, the Gospel of Saint John uses the ordinary Greek word for “eat” (*phagein*). After the indignant question from the Jews, John shifts to a stronger word “to chew” or “to munch” (*trogein*). To capture the force of this word, we could translate, not as: *“Whoever eats my flesh”*; but *“Whoever feeds on my flesh”*.

13. The Eucharist is the supernatural food that keeps us going along the difficult journey towards the Promised Land of eternal salvation: *“Whoever eats my flesh has eternal life”*. To see the truth of these words, we must turn to the context for which they were spoken.

I. The Mass as the new Exodus from Slavery of Sin

14. The Eucharist comes to us through the Mass. Our normal experience of the Eucharist is at Mass, the central ritual – or liturgical – celebration which takes place every day and is a weekly obligation for the faithful. What we often call the Sacrifice of the Mass is the place where the Church has always believed we eat and drink the Body and Blood of Christ. The Mass must be understood within the context of the Last Supper where *“Jesus took bread [...] and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body’ [...] Then he took a cup, [...] he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant’”* (Mt 26:26-28).

15. At the Last Supper, which the Church commemorates today, Jesus took part in and forever transformed the Jewish Passover ritual meal. It is here we see the context in which Jesus desires His Body and Blood to be consumed as food. This is the context where we discover the beauty of the grand mystery of the Eucharist as the fulfillment of both the Jewish Passover and the Covenant of Israel.

16. Remember the First Passover was offered at the climax of the deliverance of Israel from slavery to the Egyptians (c.f. *Exodus* 12). Each household was to take a male lamb in the prime age of its life, free of defects, and sacrifice it to God. The blood of the lamb was to be spread on the entrances of their homes while its flesh was to be eaten. Every home that followed the rites commanded by God for this sacred meal were spared from the death of their firstborn sons. The first Passover saved the Israelites from death and led to their liberation from slavery. At the annual Passover, the head of the household was to recount the story of how the Lord delivered them from the oppression of Egypt and spared their lives. Then they were to eat the flesh of the lamb that they sacrificed.

17. Jesus brought this first Passover to its ultimate fulfillment at the Last Supper. At this Passover, Jesus took the position at the head of the household, the father of the family. Instead of recounting the story of the first exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, He spoke of His own suffering and death about to take place. Instead of explaining the significance of the Passover Lamb to be consumed, Jesus identified His body and blood with the bread and wine and commanded that it be consumed.

18. Just as the Hebrews had no alternative means of liberation other than the Passover lamb, there is no other means to salvation than through the grace of Jesus' own self-sacrifice. Because Jesus is God, the second Person of the Trinity, His offering of His Blood is in a real sense an act of God, transcending time and place. Thus, in every Mass, we feast on the flesh of the Lamb of God offered once for all in expiation for our sins.

II. The Mass as the eternal memorial of Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross

19. In the Bible and the Church liturgy, when the Sacrifice of the Mass is called a 'memorial,' it means much more than remembering the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary. It means that whenever the Mass is celebrated, the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary that happened in the past is really made present to us at Mass, here and now. This is only possible because being the eternal High Priest who has conquered death, His self-offering on the Cross is an everlasting act of love. The Letter to the Hebrews points clearly to the eternal nature of Christ's sacrifice: *"Because He remains forever, [He] has a priesthood that does not pass away... He is always able to save those who approach God through Him, since He lives forever to make intercession for them"* (Heb 7:24-25).

20. Therefore, in every Mass, Jesus is not being offered again; rather, we – the Mystical Body of Christ – are taken up into the one sacrifice at Calvary by means of the Priesthood of Christ. The

sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary is perpetuated and made present to us in such a way that we can participate in it, linking our imperfect and sinful lives to the perfect and pure sacrifice of God and receiving all the divine benefits that flow from His eternal sacrifice. Our Lord made this possible for us at the Last Supper by instituting the Sacrament of the Eucharist. He uses this Sacrament to make His self-offering at Calvary present to all believers in every place and in every time. Ever since that holy night, throughout the centuries, whenever and wherever the Mass is celebrated, the eternal sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross is really made present.

21. If we were at Calvary, what would stand out to us? We would see Jesus gasping for breath. His gaze would seem to alternate down and up, first towards us with mercy and longing and second upwards in surrender to His Father. Would we simply say “thank you” or would we be compelled to make a response of compassion? When we attend Mass, do we seek to join Jesus in His total surrender to the Father’s will? Do we bring our imperfections, our toil and sin, and lay them before Jesus to be consumed by His Death? We either say with Jesus, “Into Your hands, Father, I commend my spirit, too!” or we choose to remain enslaved to our sin.

22. For the title of this Exhortation, I have chosen the words “*Veneremur cernui*” which comes from the hymn *Tantum Ergo* that we sing at the end of solemn adoration and benediction. These words composed by Saint Thomas Aquinas can be translated as “*may we adore with body prostrated*” or “*down in adoration falling*”. My dear sons and daughters, Jesus our Lord and God is present to us in the Sacrament of the Eucharist in His self-offering to the Father and His merciful outpouring of love for us. Let us adore Him with ever increasing reverence!

23. Whether we may be weak or strong, I encourage you to pray for the grace of faith in God’s presence in the Eucharist as well as the grace to worship as the angels do. This is what the Church prays when she ends the preface and begins the Eucharistic prayer with the words, “*May our voices, we pray, join with theirs in humble praise, as we acclaim: Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts*” (*Roman Missal*, Preface of Eucharistic Prayer I).

24. It is in the Eucharist where Our Lord meets us and becomes our faithful companion along every instance of our life. After Mass, the remaining consecrated Hosts are reserved in the tabernacle so that Holy Communion can be brought to the sick and throughout the week we can come and pray in His presence. He wants to remain with us so that whenever we need Him, we will find Him there to be our light, strength, comfort, and guidance.

25. “*I will be with you always until the end of times*” (Mt 28:20). Since that Last Supper of Holy Thursday until now, Our Lord Jesus has faithfully kept His promise – wherever there is a tabernacle in the world that contains the Eucharist, there is Jesus truly present among us. His presence is not like a memory or a symbol that a person keeps in a photo album. He is truly, really, and substantially present in the Eucharist. The Catechism affirms: “*In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist, the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really and substantially contained*” (CCC 1374). The same Jesus that walked the countryside of Palestine, the same Jesus that preached,

cured the sick and raised the dead, the same Jesus who suffered, died, and rose is truly present in the Eucharist. Indeed, our Lord is ever near us, and we might recall with joy the exultant words of Deuteronomy 4:7: *“What great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us?”*.

26. Immeasurable is the value of every Mass! Unfathomable is the grace made so accessible to us in the Mass, where Jesus Christ is ever present! It is here that a quality and abundance of life beyond this world is given to us.

PART II

HOLD NOTHING BACK FROM CHRIST

27. On the sacred day of Holy Thursday, Jesus' last night with His disciples, He knew that soon He would return to His Father, but He also knew how much they will need His presence, one that *"The Imitation of Christ"* eloquently describes as consoling and strengthening: *"When Jesus is near, all is well and nothing seems difficult. When He is absent all is hard. When Jesus does not speak within, all other comfort is empty, but if He says only a word, it brings great consolation"* (Book II Chapter 8). In a certain sense, we can say that here Jesus faces a dilemma. On the one hand, He desires to return to His Father and on the other hand, He desires to remain with His disciples. God's love always finds an ingenious solution to such dilemma. Jesus returns to His Father, but by instituting the Sacrament of the Eucharist, at the same time He remains with His disciples, to accompany them in the challenges, difficulties, and suffering that they will face as they take on the mission of preaching the Good News. Through the Eucharist, Jesus gives the greatest gift of Himself to His disciples and to us. Indeed, the Eucharist is truly the sacrament of Christ's love!

28. God's love for us did not stop at the Incarnation. He did not just become one of us and share our life from conception to death and redeem us through His suffering, Death and Resurrection. His self-giving love went beyond by becoming our very nourishment. The Eucharist reveals how much Jesus loves us. Saint John Vianney, the patron saint of priests, expresses eloquently God's extreme love for us in the Eucharist: *"Never would we have thought of asking God to give us His own Son. But what man could not have even imagined, God has done. What man could not say or think, and what he could not have dared to desire, God, in His love has said it, planned it and carried His design into execution. We would never have dared to say to God to have His Son die for us, to give us His Body to eat, His Blood to drink... In other words, what man could not even conceive, God has executed. He went further in His designs of love than we could have dreamed"* (*The Eucharist Meditation of the Curé D'Ars*, Meditation I).

29. How do we, then, respond to the Lord's gift of Himself in the Holy Eucharist? Do we really desire Him? Are we anxious to meet Him? Do we desire to encounter Him, become one with Him and receive the gifts He offers us through the Eucharist?

30. In the Sequence *"Lauda Sion Salvatorem"* for the Solemnity of *Corpus Christi*, Saint Thomas Aquinas invites us **to hold back nothing** as the most appropriate response to the gift of Jesus Himself in the Eucharist: *"Quantum potes, tantum aude, quia maior omni laude nec laudare sufficis. Dare as much as you can: because He is greater than any praise, nor can you praise him enough."* *"Quantum potes"* means "however much you can" and *"tantum aude,"* which means 'as much as you dare'. This is the most appropriate response to such an awesome gift, to go all out in our response to Jesus' most extravagant gift of Himself.

31. In response to this great gift, many missionaries throughout history have given up everything, even having a family of their own and left their homeland to bring the message of God's love and the Eucharist to so many parts of the world. In response, many men and women religious have consecrated their lives to adoring Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament within the four walls of their convent and monastery. In response, countless martyrs throughout the centuries, like the ones of early third-century persecution at Abitina in Tunisia, were willing to submit to tortures and death rather than deny the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. And in response, many believers, even those of today, have made a commitment to come to daily Mass and even to adoration to be with Jesus in the Eucharist. The question we must ask ourselves is: What is our response?

32. *"Quantum potes, tantum aude, quia maior omni laude nec laudare sufficis"*. Indeed, we are to hold back nothing, but in turn, give ourselves completely to the Lord who has given Himself entirely to us in the Eucharist. The only appropriate response to this great gift is to order our whole life, first, on receiving the gift and then imitating it, offering our own body and blood, our sweat and tears, our whole heart, all we have and are to Jesus in the service and love for our brothers and sisters as Jesus has done for us.

I. The Graces of Holy Communion

i. Holy Communion changes and transforms us into "Alter Christus"

33. The Eucharistic presence of Jesus is not only to be with us, but also to be our strength and nourishment. Jesus does this by choosing the elements of nature – bread and wine – the food and drink that man must consume to maintain his life. The Eucharist is precisely this food and drink for they contain in themselves all the power of the Redemption wrought by Christ. The Eucharist is the only nourishment that brings us true, lasting happiness and leads us to eternal life. It is capable of transforming man's life and open before him the way to eternal life. How is this possible?

34. While going through a period of conversion, one day Saint Augustine was granted a vision in which a voice said to him: *"I am the food of the mature: grow, then, and you shall eat me. You will not change me into yourself like bodily food; but you will be changed into me"* (*Confessions*, VII, 10, 18). There is a popular saying that goes, *"You are what you eat."* How true this is when we apply this to the Eucharist. Ordinary food is absorbed by us and becomes a part of our bodies. But when we receive the Eucharist, it absorbs us; a Christian becomes truly what he eats; he is transformed into Christ. Centuries ago, Saint Leo the Great wrote: *"Our partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ tends only to make us become what we eat"*.

35. The Fathers of the Church took the example of physical food to explain this mystery. We know that the stronger form of life normally assimilates the weaker and not vice versa. The vegetative world assimilates the minerals, and the animals assimilate the vegetables, and the

spiritual assimilates the material. When we receive the Body of Christ, we do not change Christ into our own substance. Instead, we are changed into Christ Himself. The normal food that we eat is not a living thing and therefore cannot give us life. It is a source of life only because it sustains the life we have. Instead, the Bread of Life, that is Jesus, is the living Bread and those who receive it, live by it. So, while the normal food that nourishes the body is assimilated by the body and becomes a part of it, the complete opposite takes place with the Bread of Life.

36. This Eucharistic Christ gives life to those that receive Him, assimilates them and transforms them into Himself. Jesus called Himself the “Bread of Life” precisely to make us understand that He does not nourish us as ordinary food does; rather, as He possesses life, He gives it to us. Being assimilated by Jesus in Holy Communion makes us like Him in our sentiments, desires, and our way of thinking. In Holy Communion, His heart nourishes our hearts; His pure, wise and loving desires purify our selfish ones, so that we not only know what He wants, but also start wanting the same more and more. Saint Paul aptly wrote, *“I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me”* (Gal 2:20). Through the Eucharist, we really become not only an *Alter Christus* – Another Christ – but indeed *Ipse Christus*, Christ Himself. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI in a homily on *Corpus Domini* speaks of this divine assimilation: *“The purpose of this communion, of this partaking, is the assimilation of my life with His, my transformation and conformation into He who is living Love. Therefore, this communion implies adoration; it implies the will to follow Christ, to follow the One who goes ahead of us”* (Homily, *Corpus Domini*, 2005).

37. Have you ever wondered why Jesus chose to leave us His presence under the appearance of bread and wine? He reveals the reason in His discourse on the Bread of Life: *“Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me”* (Jn 6:57). He wants to be nourishment of higher order of life within us, a capacity to love and act like Him, even to *“be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”* (Mt 5:48).

38. Bread and wine are also powerful symbols that convey eloquently Jesus’ invitation to walk the same path of sacrificial love. The grains of wheat that are used for making bread had to go through a grueling process. They are plucked, thrashed, crushed, and ground up, kneaded and shaped, and finally, they are thrown to be baked in an oven. In a similar way, the grapes are plucked and smashed. Their juice is purified and bottled. Then they are left until maturity. If we look up at the Crucified Jesus on the Cross, we can see a similar grueling process He went through in His Passion and Death; this is what true love really means. Every time we come to the Eucharist, we are invited to imitate this sacrificial love of Christ.

39. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that reliving the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist compels us to become like Jesus, *“‘bread that is broken’ for others, and to work for the building of a more just and fraternal world. Keeping in mind the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, we need to realize that Christ continues today to exhort His disciples to become personally engaged: ‘You yourselves, give them something to eat’ (Mt 14:16). Each of us is truly called, together with Jesus, to be bread*

broken for the life of the world” (Sacramentum Caritatis 88). It is through the Eucharist that Christ multiplies Himself in each of us and sends us out into our world to collaborate with Him in the work of Redemption. What we receive, we cannot keep it to ourselves. We must bring Jesus to others in our lives.

40. At the end of Mass, the priest dismisses the faithful with the words, *“Go forth, the Mass is ended.”* However, the original Latin words of dismissal say: *“Ite, missa est”*, which literally means *“Go, you are sent.”* Every time we leave the threshold of the church after having received the Eucharist, we bring the love of Christ to our daily activities and to every person we meet.

ii. We become “One Body and One Spirit in Christ”

41. The ultimate effect of the Holy Eucharist is not only the transubstantiation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ for our spiritual nourishment, but the transformation of those who receive Holy Communion into *“one body, one spirit in Christ” (III Eucharistic Prayer and 1 Cor 12:12-13).* Through this personal relationship with the Risen Jesus in the Eucharist, we experience the self-sacrificing love of Jesus, who invites us to imitate His love and to bring that love to everyone and every situation of our daily life. We can see how the Eucharist changed the lives of the early Christians. Flowing from their Eucharistic experience with the Risen Lord, they lived, in loving communion with one another; they ate together and prayed together in the Temple. They placed their possessions at the feet of the Apostles for the needs of the poor. They were of *“one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common” (Acts 4:32).*

42. The Eucharist also played a central role in strengthening this communion in the life of the venerable servant of God, Cardinal Francis Nguyen Van Thuan. As coadjutor Archbishop of Saigon, Vietnam, he was arrested on August 15, 1975, soon after South Vietnam fell to the Communist regime. He spent the next 13 years in prison, moving between forced residences, re-education camps, and nine years of solitary confinement. In his book *“Testimony of Hope”*, he describes how the Eucharist became his hope and light in the darkness of prison camp. With three drops of wine and a drop of water in the palm of his hand, he would secretly celebrate Mass. And those Masses became for him a source of consolation and strength in such a difficult time in his life.

43. The “re-education camp” divided the prisoners into groups of fifty who slept on the floor as their bed. Each man had a foot and a half wide space. Of the fifty prisoners with Cardinal Van Thuan, only five others were Christians. With the cooperation of the non-Christian prisoners, they made arrangements so that at night they would be near each other. When lights went out at 9:30, then he quietly said Mass and distributed Communion to the Catholics. He kept one consecrated Host always in his shirt pocket. During the night, the prisoners took turns for adoration. During the day, even amid the cruelty of prison life, Cardinal Van Thuan and the few Christians focused their attention on Jesus. For them, Jesus in the Eucharist became a true

companion. As a result of the Eucharistic presence that was clandestinely introduced into the prison camp, the Christian prisoners regained the fervor of their faith during those difficult times and even other non-Christians converted to the faith. The strength of Jesus' love in the Eucharist is irresistible. The silent presence of Jesus in the Eucharist brought consolation to those who suffered, strength to a weakened faith and especially a fortified bond of unity among them.

44. How much we need the Eucharist in our world today! We are also struggling through a challenging time. We are emerging from a pandemic that has crippled many with fear and left much suffering in its wake. Throughout this time, we have also experienced great division within our country and even within our Church. A tangible and rapid decline of our culture produces empty noise and vain pleasures that drown out God's invitation to enter into a loving relationship with Him.

45. What can we do to bring peace, justice and love to a world that is starving for God and His love? By ourselves, we can do nothing. But, in the Eucharist, God Himself is our nourishment and strength. We cannot transform our lives nor change the world with our own strength alone. The Eucharist as a Sacrament of communion and love motivates us inwardly to work tirelessly towards reconciliation and the restoration of justice; to work together to restore respect for the dignity of all men and women made in the image and likeness of God.

46. In Holy Communion, Christ is present in us. Holy Communion allows Christ through us to go to every corner and alley of the world so that where there is division and hate, He will bring love; where there is suffering and pain, He will bring comfort and consolation; and where there is discouragement and sin, He will bring healing and forgiveness. Imagine if each of us Christians makes the Eucharist the source and summit of our life? We would set the world on fire with Christ's love!

II. Faith perceives what our senses fail to grasp

47. What must we do then, to assure that Holy Communion bestows these life-giving and transforming effects in our soul? If we receive Holy Communion out of routine only, without openness to the Lord, then we will not receive all the graces that God wants to give. But if we receive the Lord with the right dispositions, God's grace will strengthen our resolve to follow, love and imitate Him. Our Lord Jesus deeply desires our union with Him in Holy Communion and through it He wishes to bring about our transformation into Him and the transformation of our society in which we live. But we, on our part, must ardently desire this union with Jesus Christ as well.

48. In today's superficial and fast paced culture that is driven by instant results and gratification, it is easy for us to lose our sense of wonder when we come face to face with the miracle of the Eucharist. Living in a culture that seeks sensational headlines and attention-catching spectacles,

we can easily take for granted the Eucharist and receive Jesus in Holy Communion with little to no expectation. Contrary to what our culture offers and seeks, the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is so quiet, so gentle, and imperceivable.

49. Yet, faith can penetrate through the veil of our senses to help us see that every Holy Mass is truly an encounter with Jesus Christ. When Scripture is proclaimed and preached, it is Christ Himself who is speaking. To receive all these benefits and transforming effects of Holy Communion, faith is the first essential requirement.

50. In the Discourse on the Bread of Life in Chapter 6 of the Gospel of Saint John, many of the disciples reacted to Jesus' claim by saying, *"this teaching is difficult. Who can accept it?"* After Jesus watched most of His disciples abandon Him, He turned to the Twelve apostles and asked, *"Do you also want to leave?"* Peter responded with faith, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God"* (Jn 6:68). This teaching was not any easier for Peter. It would only become fathomable a year later for Peter and the other Apostles during the Last Supper when Jesus would take bread and wine into His hands, and totally change them into Himself as He said, *"This is my body: take and eat,"* and *"This is the chalice of my blood: take and drink."* Peter knew that Jesus had the words of eternal life. He put his whole faith in Jesus' words. He believed in Jesus' difficult teaching on the Eucharist precisely because he believed in his Lord and God, basing his entire existence in the words of Jesus.

51. Today, in our own particular situation and circumstance, Jesus also turns to us and asks the same question: *"Do you also want to leave?"* Like the disciples in Capernaum, many in our times have wandered spiritually away from Jesus in the Eucharist. Many Catholics have wandered away from the practice of Sunday Mass, focusing more on work, sports, sleep, or entertainment rather than the Lord. There are also those who are physically there but not with their faith. They may come to Mass but do not receive Jesus with faith, love, and reverence because they think that they are only receiving a symbol rather than God Himself who died for them. There are those who physically come to Mass, but their hearts cannot wait to leave Jesus' presence. Indeed, the Eucharist is hard to believe! Thus, it is important for us to have patience and compassion for those whose faith is weak. Nevertheless, the call to faith is urgent.

52. Our Catholic faith passed on to us from the Apostles affirms that after the words of consecration, what seems to our senses to remain just simple unleavened bread and wine really become the Son of God and Savior of the world. For this reason, Saint Thomas Aquinas through his beautiful Eucharistic hymn *"Adoro Te Devote"* invites us to have a greater trust in Jesus' words about His Body and Blood, even if the reality may seem too good to be true: *"Sight, touch, taste fail with regard to Thee, but only by hearing does one believe surely; I believe whatever God's Son said: nothing is truer than the word of Truth."* And in the hymn of *"Tantum Ergo,"* he invites us to beg the Lord for this needed faith: *"May faith supplement what our senses fail to grasp."*

53. Faith makes all the difference in how we experience God's saving and transforming grace in the Eucharist. Faith is the key we hold in our hands to open the treasures of God's love and grace entirely at our disposal for our sanctification. Beg the Lord to strengthen your faith: *"Make me always believe in you more and more"* (Hymn *Adoro Te Devote*).

54. The Lord Jesus invites us to respond with faith like Peter, *"To whom shall we go, you have the words of everlasting life"* and make a commitment not just to believe His words that He is the Bread from heaven, but to build our lives according to that belief. Jesus is asking us to make Him the "source and summit" of all Christian life (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 11). He is asking us to choose him who has chosen to dwell among us and has made the promise and commitment to always be with us.

III. Worthy Reception of Holy Communion – Conforming our life with Christ

55. The beautiful and rich Liturgy of the Church, which has been passed down to us from the first century, contains many expressions of devotion and faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. For example, we call to mind that the main reason our churches are decorated with beautiful and precious art is because here in the Church building, Jesus is present in the tabernacle, always accompanying us and interceding for us. We also celebrate our Masses with beautiful music and vestments, incense, candles, and many other details that allow us to express our faith and gratitude to Christ who has loved us so much that He has decided to stay with us, really present in the Eucharist, until the end of time. Many churches hold special hours of prayer and adoration of the Eucharist, to honor and thank our Lord, and to bring all our needs before Him. We dress respectfully for Mass knowing that we come to worship and receive our Lord who comes to us at the altar and especially in our hearts. All these expressions of devotion flow from a lively faith in Christ's real presence in the Eucharist.

56. As the Eucharistic faith of the Church expresses itself in so many beautiful ways, so also, our faith in the Real Presence should move us to desire and strive with all our efforts to prepare and receive Jesus worthily in Holy Communion.

57. At the moment of Holy Communion, the priest holds up the consecrated Host and says, *"the Body of Christ"*. When we reply "Amen" and then receive the Body of Christ, we are expressing not only our faith in Jesus Christ but also our desire and effort to live in friendship with Him. By receiving the Body of Christ in Holy Communion we manifest our union with the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church. Therefore, if with our "Amen," we refuse to accept and live by the whole teaching of Christ and His Church, we are not in communion with Him but living a 'fake' union, one that overlooks truth and justice. In the same way, when we commit a mortal sin and deliberately fail in a serious matter of *"rejection of communion with God... then we are seriously obliged to refrain from receiving Holy Communion until we are reconciled with God and the*

Church” through the Sacrament of Penance (USCCB *“Happy Are Those Who Are Called to His Supper”*: On Preparing to Receive Christ Worthily in the Eucharist).

58. John Paul II reminded us of this perennial teaching of the Church, that *“the celebration of the Eucharist, however, cannot be the starting-point for communion; it presupposes that communion already exists, a communion that it seeks to consolidate and bring to perfection”* (*Ecclesia et Eucharistia*, no. 35). To receive all the graces and benefits from Holy Communion that was mentioned above, the Eucharist requires that we live and persevere in sanctifying grace and love, remaining within the Church as one body and one spirit in Christ. Reaffirming the clear teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Saint John Paul II stated, *“Anyone conscious of a grave sin must receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to communion”* (CCC 1385).

59. It is important to underline this intrinsic connection between the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist because, as Pope Benedict wrote, we are *“surrounded by a culture that tends to eliminate the sense of sin and to promote a superficial approach that overlooks the need to be in a state of grace in order to approach sacramental communion worthily”* (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 20). A common and mistaken trend of our times is to presume that all have the right to approach and partake of the Body and Blood of the Lord and that limiting such a ‘right’ would go against the practice of Jesus Christ, who welcomed all sinners.

60. However, the teachings of the Church have always been clear and based on Scripture. Holy Communion is reserved for those, who with God’s grace make a sincere effort to live this union with Christ and His Church by adhering to all that the Catholic Church believes and proclaims to be revealed by God.

61. From the very beginning, the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, passed down to us in the *Didache* – one of the oldest writings outside the New Testament – describes this ancient practice in which the priest, just before distributing Holy Communion says: *“Whoever is holy, let him approach, whoever is not, let him do penance”* (*Didache* 10). The Church has always stressed this perennial doctrine and discipline: before one receives Jesus Christ in Holy Communion one must be in communion of life, restored often by God’s mercy in the Sacrament of Penance. Otherwise, instead of receiving all the graces from Holy Communion, we are partaking of our own condemnation. Saint Paul declared, *“Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord.”* In other words, whoever unworthily receives the Eucharist will have to answer for the Lord’s death. The Apostle further warned, *“A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself”* (1 Cor 11:27-29).

62. Thomas Aquinas painfully but clearly echoed Saint Paul’s warning in the hymn *Lauda Sion Salvatorem* reminding us that the “Bread of Life” becomes the bread of death for those who consume Jesus in the state of grave sin. *“The good partake, the bad partake: with, however, an*

unequal share of life and death. It is death to the bad, life to the good: behold how unlike is the result of like partaking." When one receives Holy Communion unworthily, the Sacrament becomes a sacrilege; the spiritual medicine becomes for that person – it is frightful to say – a form of spiritual poison. When we do not really believe in Jesus, when we do not really seek to conform our entire life to Him and receive Jesus even though we know that we have sinned against Him, then this just leads to a greater sin and betrayal.

63. In speaking of the Sacrament of Penance, I wish to gratefully acknowledge the dedication of our priests who generously offer their time to ensure that the faithful can always have the opportunity for confession. In the exercise of their ministry, they are also contributing to helping the faithful prepare worthily for Holy Communion. Pray for your priests who have faithfully made themselves available for this very purpose! Pray also that God may bless us with more vocations to the priesthood!

64. There are situations when we can honor God more by abstaining from Holy Communion than by satisfying a personal desire to sacramentally receive Him in communion. I know of a Catholic mother who because she did not want to show irreverence or contempt for what is truly the Body and Blood of Christ, abstained from Holy Communion for several years because she was living in an irregular marriage. This was the case even though she still faithfully attended Mass with her children each week and was a regular Eucharistic adorer at her parish because of her deep faith and devotion to Christ present in the Eucharist. She, nonetheless, would not present herself for Communion. She was raised to understand that Christian believers should avoid receiving Holy Communion unworthily. Aware of the scriptural admonitions and the teachings of the Church she would offer up her sacramental encounter with the Lord and make instead a spiritual communion each Sunday. So much was her young son clearly edified by her quiet example of faith and fidelity that he became a moral theologian and now teaches moral theology at a Catholic seminary.

65. In this perennial teaching that is scriptural and clear, Holy Communion is meant to be the consummation of the loving union between Jesus the Bridegroom and His Bride the Church, between Him and each believer. The Church invites everyone to the Wedding Banquet while at the same time commits herself to helping everyone arrive properly dressed in a purified baptismal garment, lest the greatest Gift – the Eucharist – becomes his or her spiritual destruction.

66. For this reason, the Church requires Catholic leaders who have publicly supported gravely immoral laws such as abortion and euthanasia to refrain from receiving Holy Communion until they publicly repent and receive the Sacrament of Penance. Not all moral issues have the same weight as abortion and euthanasia. The Church teaches that abortion or euthanasia is an intrinsically grave sin and that there is a grave and clear obligation for all Catholics to oppose them by conscientious objection. *"In the case of an intrinsically unjust law, such as a law permitting abortion or euthanasia, it is therefore never licit to obey it, or to 'take part in a propaganda campaign in favour of such a law or vote for it'" (Evangelium Vitae, 73).*

The *Aparecida* document, which Pope Francis is acknowledged as one of the main authors during his time as Archbishop of Buenos Aires, teaches clearly: *“We hope that legislators [and] heads of government ... will defend and protect [the dignity of human life] from the abominable crimes of abortion and euthanasia; that is their responsibility.... We must adhere to ‘eucharistic coherence,’ that is, be conscious that they cannot receive Holy Communion and at the same time act with deeds or words against the commandments, particularly when abortion, euthanasia, and other grave crimes against life and family are encouraged. This responsibility weighs particularly over legislators, heads of governments, and health professionals.”*

67. In the current political climate of our country, the Church can be easily accused of favoring one party and singling out politicians of a certain party with such a teaching. However, the Church is only faithfully reaffirming its perennial teaching on the Eucharist and the worthy reception of Holy Communion which applies to every single person. Eucharistic coherence means that our “Amen” at Holy Communion includes not only the recognition of the Real Presence but also a communion bound together by embracing and living Christ’s entire teaching handed down to us through the Church.

68. The Holy Eucharist is the ongoing Redemption of the world through Christ’s real presence among and within us. The Lord Jesus in the Eucharist in whom we believe and from whom we are sustained, wants to bring our whole life into communion with Him, so that we may not only live because of Him but also live for Him and with Him. Jesus also wishes to live through us, to love through us and to preach and serve through us. For Jesus to do so, we need to make the Eucharist the source and summit of our whole life, allow Him to fill us with awe and wonder, to live with a great faith in Him and His words and follow Him more closely along the path that leads to eternal life.

PART III

LOVING AND ADORING THE EUCHARISTIC LORD

69. Thus far we have stirred up our amazement at the Eucharistic mystery and have considered the nature of our total self-gift in response. Now we turn to how we might practically live out this mystery with greater faith and love for – as we pray at each Mass – *“our good and the good of all His holy Church”*? In other words, how concretely might we “follow the Ark” of the Eucharist into the future God has planned for us?

I. Make every Sunday the “Day of the Lord.”

70. For many of our contemporaries, Sunday feels like the second half of the two-day weekend. Thus, time becomes an empty succession of days, without meaning, purpose, or direction. The consequence of this is not neutral but in fact deeply damaging to us. If each week has no ultimate purpose (that is, there is no day “for” the Lord, which means a day of divine worship), then soon we believe that time, history, and our lives are also meaningless. The result is a kind of slavery to *whatever else we think is more important than the worship of God*. Without a shared time for us all to participate in divine worship, we inevitably fall under bondage to some good but creaturely fixation. It could be money, success, social advancement, entertainment, education, politics, or sports, but like the effects of endless hard labor, the result is spiritual exhaustion and discouragement.

71. Therefore, the Church teaches that Sunday is a *“day of protest against the servitude of work and the worship of money”* (CCC 2172). It means Sunday is a sign of a *liberated* people. In the Old Covenant, the Sabbath was a weekly experience which recalled liberation from Egypt for worship in Jerusalem. It announced to both Israel and her neighbors that she was no longer a slave to Egypt. In the New Covenant, Sunday is meant to be an experience which announces and renews the freedom of the New Passover to the world. Sunday is the time to herald to the world that we are no longer slaves to sin and death. This day is meant to be a weekly gift from God to His people: a day of freedom, joy, charity and peace. It is the primary day in which God renews His covenant with us. We might say that the Risen Jesus chose to celebrate His first Mass on Easter Sunday, the day He rose from the dead (Lk 24:13-35). Since then, Sunday centers around the celebration of the Mass.

72. How our world thirsts for this sign of freedom! But this freedom is not simply freedom *from* but freedom *for*. God commands us to “keep holy” the Sabbath (Ex. 20:8). To “keep holy” means to set aside for divine worship. It is inadequate to think Sunday is merely about freedom from work. Yes, it involves freedom from servile work, but this is so that we are free to participate in the work of our Redemption. Sharing in the work of the Son of God’s Cross and Resurrection is the work which gives rest and refreshment. So, Sunday *is* a day of work because we share in the liberating work of God in the sacred liturgy. What a cathedral is to a

place, Sunday is to the week: set aside for the “work” of divine worship. Sunday is not about mere inactivity. In fact, the Mass is the highest form of activity, for in it we share in the work of our salvation through our participation in the Eucharist.

73. Brothers and sisters in Christ, examine your experience of Sunday. Have you allowed Sunday to be like the other days of the week? Is the whole day set aside for your rejuvenation in God, or have you reduced the holiness of the day to an hour or two? Some persons are indeed required to work on Sunday, which of course is permitted. But for so many of us, Sunday could be more effectively “kept holy” with even minimal preparation and foresight.

74. The Saints always love Sunday and keep it holy. As a young girl, Saint Maria Goretti walked fifteen miles back and forth to Sunday Mass. Saint Lawrence of Brindisi once walked forty miles for Mass. In parts of Africa today, for example, some of our Catholic brothers and sisters walk for long hours to attend Mass. Families, individuals, and small communities who attempt to be good stewards of the Lord’s Day quickly discover a treasure which changes their whole experience of the week. Sunday is no longer just another day. It becomes the day of the Eucharist. It is the day of encountering the joy of the Risen Lord, who strengthens, nourishes, and sends them, together, on mission the rest of the week.

75. Think of the Sunday Eucharist as the sun which emits rays of warmth and light. If no rays shined forth, what good would the sun be for life on the earth? Similarly, if no good effects from Mass are perceptible on Sunday, our eyes become blind to the goodness and power of the Eucharist. I invite you: be bold in allowing rays of freedom, joy, and life to burst forth from Mass into the rest of your Sunday! How might the Lord desire that you allow these rays to shine forth precisely on Sunday? Here are some simple ideas for you to consider:

- Choose a set time when you will go to Mass on Sunday and stick to it.
- Find ways to make the experience of Sunday Mass truly joyful and festive, e.g., wear your best clothes, have a wonderful meal with loved ones afterward, have great music playing at home throughout day, telephone loved ones, enjoy a clean and renewed home (which means finishing domestic duties and chores on Saturday), spend time enjoying the Bible, savor something truly beautiful in nature or art, and perform simple works of charity.
- Try to live the Lord’s day from sunset on Saturday through Sunday evening.
- Turn off your phone for extended periods of Sunday, if not the whole day.
- If outside obligations threaten your Sunday, consider talking with your boss, family, or friends to find ways to move those commitments elsewhere.

II. Go to daily Mass, if possible.

76. The beauty of the Lord's Day is meant to spill over into the rest of the week. Saint Augustine wrote of his mother, Saint Monica: *"She did not let a day pass without being present at the Divine Sacrifice before Your altar, O Lord"*. Regarding the harsh deprivations during his nine-month imprisonment, Saint John of the Cross said that the worst suffering was not being able to celebrate Mass nor receive Holy Communion. Of course, daily duties can make daily Mass impossible for some. But for many of us, it is simply a question of appreciating the immeasurable value of the Mass and organizing our time accordingly.

77. In the Lord's prayer, Jesus taught us to ask Our Father to *"give us this day our daily bread."* Like God raining down Manna in the wilderness with the morning dew, Christ nourishes his Church daily in the Mass. When we realize that the Lord desires to renew for us the gift of the Sunday Eucharist every day of the week, how can we not be overwhelmed with gratitude and a deeper spiritual hunger for more of the Bread of Life?

78. In this busy world, is it really possible to go to daily Mass? Or perhaps we are tempted to think that this is a luxury only for clergy or those persons who have extra time on their hands? Not at all. The Eucharist, as we have seen, fuels the mission of the members of Christ's Body in the world. Christians who are active in the world have a great need for spiritual strength to bring Christ into the arena of their work. Perhaps we could even say that those who have the greatest demand in their secular pursuits are *most* in need of the great strength which comes from the daily Eucharist. Not long ago, the great Italian Saint Joseph Cottolengo encouraged daily Mass for the busiest of workers: doctors, nurses, manual laborers, teachers, parents, and so on. When they told him they didn't have the time, he would tell them starkly that they had plenty of time – they just were not managing it properly. With so many distractions and demands competing for our attention, Mass can become a daily source of peace and strength. It turns us from "Marthas" into recollected "Marys", who learn to choose the "better part" each day (cf. Lk 10:42). I challenge you to commit to at least one weekday Mass. I guarantee that you will notice within the next six months what a significant difference it will make in your life.

III. Increase your time of Eucharistic adoration.

79. Friends deepen their love and affection by spending time together. The same is true of our relationship with Christ. Eucharistic adoration prolongs the mystery of Jesus' self-offering in the Mass. To adore the Eucharistic Jesus is to lovingly savor and delight in His sacramental presence. It is not opposed to the Mass or a substitute to the Mass. Rather, Eucharistic adoration flows from the sacred liturgy and back to it again. As lovers' eyes linger in a shared gaze after and before their kiss, so adoration before the Eucharist shares a natural rhythm of the "kiss" of Holy Communion. Love survives on both contemplation and union, on the gaze and the kiss.

80. Saint Augustine teaches us this when, in speaking about the Eucharistic Body of Christ, he said that *“we consume what we adore, and we adore what we consume.”* To enter into this circle of adoration and consummation is to know a foretaste of the beatitude which the Lord desires us to know. The Saints are the best teachers of the power of Eucharistic adoration. Saint Dominic Savio once wrote: *“To be happy nothing is lacking for me in this world; I lack only the vision in Heaven of that Jesus, whom with the eyes of faith I now see and adore on the altar.”* Once a person complained to Saint Teresa of Avila that his faith in Jesus would have been stronger if he could have seen the Lord during the days of his earthly ministry. The Saint quickly responded, *“But do we not have in the Eucharist the living, true and real Jesus present before us? Why look for more?”* Who can forget the moving wisdom of the farmer who, when asked by Saint John Marie Vianney what he does for hours in front of the tabernacle, responded: *“I look at Him and He looks at me.”* Venerable J.J. Olier wrote: *“When there are two roads which will bring me to some place, I take the one with more churches so as to be nearer the Blessed Sacrament. When I see a place where my Jesus is, I could not be happier, and I say, ‘You are here, my God and my All’.”*

81. Extended time in Eucharistic adoration deepens our prayer in marvelous ways. Pope Francis spoke of this prayer as a kind of necessity during a homily in 2016: *“We cannot know the Lord without this habit of worship, to worship in silence, adoration. If I am not mistaken, I believe that this prayer of adoration is one of the least known by us, it’s the one that we do the least. Allow me to say this: waste time in front of the Lord, in front of the mystery of Jesus Christ. Worship him. There in silence, the silence of adoration. He is the Savior and I worship him.”*

82. The expression “waste time in front of the Lord” should be understood only through the lens of love, of which the saints are constant reminders. Blessed Charles de Foucauld wrote in the presence of the Eucharist: *“What a tremendous delight, my God! To spend over fifteen hours without having anything else to do but look at you and tell you, ‘Lord, I love you.’ Oh, what sweet delight.”* True, this impressive duration of time may have been an extraordinary gift to this holy man and hermit. But the faith and love he bore in his heart for the Eucharist is a supernatural gift available to every one of us, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit to those who ask.

83. To all fathers and mothers, let your children see that devotion to the Eucharist in adoration is an essential, life-giving part of your schedule! As every parent knows, children learn from consistent actions more than words. When I was a boy, I was deeply impressed by the sight of my father genuflecting before the tabernacle. His humble and straight-forward witness communicated more to me about the truth of the Eucharist than even the best of catechists. When it comes to the Eucharist, every child’s heart secretly asks: does Dad believe it? Does Mom believe it? Tell them you do! But above all, *show them you do*. Eucharistic adoration does this in a powerful way. It is never too late to start this practice, no matter the age of your children.

84. There are a host of ways to increase the time we spend in Eucharistic adoration. I'll suggest just a few for your consideration.

- Make a ten-minute visit to the tabernacle in a church or chapel on the way back from work, on the way to a family gathering, or even on the way to a simple daily errand. It's not about the length of time spent; it is about the faith, hope, and love with which you spend those moments in the Lord's presence.
- Find out when your parish has Eucharistic adoration and schedule a weekly or monthly time (perhaps 30 to 60 minutes) and stick to it. Consider inviting your spouse, family, or a friend to accompany you.
- During your time of adoration, consider praying the liturgy of the hours, the rosary, prayerfully reading the Scriptures, reading a good spiritual book, or using a collection of prayers for use in the adoration, or gazing on the Sacred Host in silence.

IV. Invite a friend to join you in adoration.

85. Call to mind a loved one who feels himself or herself to be far from the Church. Think of a friend who finds the Mass difficult to understand and to engage. Consider an acquaintance in your life who does not believe in God or in Christ. Now imagine each of these persons sitting quietly and peacefully next to you in a beautiful place of adoration for ten minutes of Eucharistic adoration. What gentle but profound effect might it have in his or her heart?

86. The Gospels present a clear pattern in which Jesus makes Himself present to people before He teaches, and certainly long before He draws them into His act of worship in His Paschal Mystery. We might say the general pattern is: first His presence, then His worship. The Lord is present in many ways. But do we trust that the Eucharistic Christ can and will touch the hearts of our friends, if we but invite them to be near Him there?

87. Of course, it takes prudence and discernment to know when and how to offer such an invitation. But the times for such friendly invitations do come! In the Gospels we see persons bringing others into the bodily presence of Christ in various ways. I'll mention three different approaches which are instructive for us today: **testimony, invitation, and carrying**.

88. The Samaritan woman at the well gives testimony to her whole village about Jesus which leads to their being in His presence for two days. Then they start to believe in Him and come to see Him for themselves (Jn. 4:41). Do we find ways to give testimony about the transformative power of the Eucharist? Do we talk in a winsome, compelling way to our family, friends, and acquaintances about the mystery of our encounter with the Eucharistic Lord? Do share with them where and how they too can encounter His presence in our churches?

89. The Apostle Andrew gives a direct, personal invitation to his brother Peter to accompany him to see the Lord. He declares to his younger brother that “we have found the Messiah” and then walks with him into the presence of Jesus (Jn 1:42). Are there not a host of persons who are one confident, loving invitation away from engaging (or re-engaging) the Lord through His Eucharistic body? What a blessing for so many of our closest loved ones and friends if we were to have Andrew’s courage to say, *“I’ve found a treasure in the Eucharistic presence of Christ. Would you like to join me there?”*

90. Faith-filled intercession for others plays a key role, especially when neither testimony nor invitation is sufficient to draw a person into Christ’s presence. A man was so incapacitated that he could not even walk to where Christ was. So his friends picked him up and they *“were trying to bring him in and set him in His [Jesus’] presence.”* Unable to carry him into the crowded house, they lowered him on a stretcher through an opening in the roof. Jesus saw their faith, forgave and healed the man, who *“went home glorifying God”* (Lk 5:17-26). We should never despair when someone we love is unable or unwilling to accompany us to the Eucharist. With deep faith, we can still lower them on the stretcher of our intercessory prayer into the Lord’s presence.

91. These three events remind us that Christ’s presence in the Eucharist is meant to be shared. They also remind us that there is no single method of drawing others into the Lord’s presence. Sometimes honest testimony is enough for those to seek Him out on their own, as with the people of Samaria. For others like Peter, it requires a direct, friendly invitation to come with us into Christ’s presence. For still others who may be spiritually “paralyzed” and for whom direct access to Eucharistic adoration is not yet a possibility, we can carry them on the stretcher of our intercessory prayers, lowered before Christ in His presence despite their immobilized condition.

V. Brother priests, make the Eucharist the source of all your priestly fruitfulness.

92. Holy Thursday is the day in which Christ instituted the inseparable Sacraments of the Eucharist and Holy Orders. As the Church has reminded us in countless ways, Holy Orders, in particular the Priesthood, is ordered to the Eucharist. For this reason, I offer this Exhortation on Holy Thursday, not only to all the faithful, but in a special way to my brother priests.

93. From where does true priestly fruitfulness spring? Saint John Paul II was a priest who bore much fruit in his over fifty years of priestly ministry: his teaching, preaching, missionary trips, social and political impact, and wise shepherding the Church through many challenges, to name but a few. But his priestly “success” wasn’t the result of his own natural talents or unaided work ethic. In a teleconference, he once shared with the young people of Los Angeles that it was his daily closeness to the Eucharistic mystery from which everything flowed. *“I am deeply grateful to God for my vocation to the priesthood. Nothing means more to me or gives me greater joy than to celebrate Mass each day and to serve God’s people in the Church. That has been true*

ever since the day of my ordination as a priest. Nothing has ever changed it, not even becoming Pope” (September 15, 1987). Despite the almost unimaginable demands of his schedule, he knelt before the Eucharist in private prayer each day.

94. When a priest makes time each day simply to be in the presence of the Eucharistic Christ, he is tapping into the deepest source of his priesthood: Jesus himself. Even when prayer seems dry or challenging, this time “wasted” with the Lord becomes the taproot for pastoral charity. How the Lord’s words to His chosen Apostles at the Last Supper penetrate the heart of us priests when we feel discouraged, alone, or a failure: *“Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit”* (Jn 15:5). When we priests have the courage to spend daily time in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, we find ourselves surprised and even overwhelmed, again and again, in the great mystery that He is truly and personally with us, that He is bringing life and fruit through even our most painful experiences, and that before He desires us to work, He wants to be with us like a father, brother, and friend.

95. My beloved brother priests, let us make the Eucharist the source and beating heart of our priestly ministry, our refuge, our consolation, and our only reward!

96. So, I invite each priest to consider how he might be able to renew and deepen his priestly commitment to make the Eucharist the true source of his life and ministry. Here are some simple ways to consider:

- Set aside time before the Blessed Sacrament each morning before engaging in pastoral work.
- Do a Eucharistic Holy Hour daily.
- Spend 30 minutes or more in adoration with fellow priests weekly or monthly.
- Start or join a *Jesus Caritas* group to provide fraternal love and support ordered around Jesus’ Eucharistic love for His priests.
- Celebrate the Mass each day, including days-off and vacations.

VI. Pastors, have one Eucharistic procession each year in your parish.

97. The well-known American author Willa Cather was not a Catholic. Nevertheless, she wrote of the impact of experiencing a Eucharistic procession. It awakened in her a deep longing for what they had. The sensual beauty and sheer public display of Catholic faith in the Eucharist made a deep impression on her imagination and her soul. Though Eucharistic processions have waxed and waned in popularity, we should consider the special opportunity provided today by this form of Eucharistic piety. It is true that the “native environment” of the Eucharist is the Mass offered in churches. At the same time, centuries of Catholic practice suggest that there is indeed something uniquely enchanting, affective, and symbolic when a procession happens.

98. Consider what is communicated non-verbally to both those who participate and those who witness it: that Christ is truly present in the Eucharist; that He personally leads His people through space and time; that the faithful are linked to Him as His body-members; that the bishop and priests are configured to Him as the head; that everyone has a place in His body; that the Church has a place and role in public, not just in private; that the Church is not afraid of the world but confidently bears the light of Christ to it; that the Church is filled with joy, peace, and confidence in Christ.

99. One need only consider any year or even every month in our age to see that the people take their passions to the streets to be seen and heard. Riots, protests, marches, and demonstrations in the streets are common, but too often they are fueled by narrow ideologies and enflamed by bitterness, resentment, anger, and a cramped secularist perspective. Imagine the witness in our neighborhoods, towns, and cities for people of all backgrounds to see that the Church has a message to bring to the streets – that of Christ’s Eucharistic presence, His victory over all evil, sin, and death – and she is enflamed with the attractive witness of love, joy, and peace.

100. Therefore, I invite our pastors, along with their closest collaborators, to consider planning one Eucharistic procession each year in your parish boundary. Imagine how one beautiful Eucharistic procession would imprint the memories of children and families with the Eucharistic mystery.

101. Of course, any Eucharistic procession should be reverent, beautiful, peaceful, festive, and well-planned. But there will be much variation from parish to parish. For a particular parish the procession could be several miles and in highly public places; it could be shorter and simply around the parish campus. Perhaps it involves a few dozen or several hundred people, or even much larger crowds. For some parishes (like those in the cooler climates) the feast of Corpus Christi may be the best time for a procession. For others (like those in warmer places), parishes may want to choose another day each year. Possibilities include the celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe (our diocesan patroness), Christ the King, Epiphany, Pentecost, the parish’s patronal feast day, and the celebration of the anniversary of the dedication of the church.

VII. Pastors, consider how you can make Eucharistic adoration a more available evangelical opportunity.

102. As we discussed above, Eucharistic adoration can be a significant opportunity for evangelization because there we truly are able to bring a friend into the sacramental, living, bodily presence of Christ. The Eucharist is the greatest treasure of the Church for it is Christ Himself – and it is the treasure to which the church invites each man and woman in every place and time. But all priests know the confused and overwhelmed look that can often appear on the face of a non-Catholic after attending Mass for the first time. We can forget how rich, complex, and biblical are the symbolic words, images, and gestures in the Mass. It is like another world with a foreign language. For those unfamiliar with Catholic liturgy, this complexity can

frequently be so alien as to be almost entirely impenetrable. Eucharistic adoration, on the other hand, is much simpler and less demanding for an un-evangelized person. It can be a kind of door or bridge to the full sacramental life of the church.

103. What would it look like if your parish made Eucharistic adoration more beautiful, available, and accessible to Catholics who could invite friends? Are times for adoration widely publicized? Is the place where adoration is held reverent, dignified, safe, and inviting? How often do Mass-going Catholics receive encouragement to invite friends and family members to adoration? Are there resources which can easily assist non-Catholics and fallen-away Catholics in beginning to learn to pray in the presence of the Eucharistic Lord?

CONCLUSION

104. If God were to offer to do an amazing work to foster faith in the Church and in the world today, what would we ask? We may like to ask for signs and wonders, lightnings and fire, like the pillars of cloud and fire as in the Exodus with Moses. Or we may ask for Eucharistic miracles like bleeding or levitating hosts to deepen our faith in the Eucharist. Perhaps we would simply ask for cultural circumstances to be more favorable to religion.

105. None of this would do any good with respect to faith. Saint John Henry Newman in a sermon entitled *“Miracles No Remedy for Unbelief”* recalls the Lord’s words that the Israelites *“refused to believe in me, despite all the signs I have performed among them”* (Numbers 14:11); and that chief priests and pharisees called a council to put Christ to death because he *“is performing many signs”* (Jn 11:47). Newman’s sobering conclusion is that *“nothing is gained by miracles, nothing comes of miracles, as regards our religious views, principles, and habits.”* He knows that too often we find our ourselves having gone *“year after year with the vain dream of turning to God some future day.”* What should we ask from God, then, to strengthen faith?

106. The answer is not in looking for outward miracles or improved circumstances. No, look elsewhere. Newman points to the way forward by saying, *“instead of looking for outward events to change our course of life, be sure of this, that if our course of life is to be changed, it must be from within. God’s grace moves us from within, so does our own will.”* His point is that if we do not love God, it is because we have not wanted to love Him, tried to love Him, or prayed to love Him.

107. What we should humbly and fervently ask from God, then, is a deepening of our love for Him with our whole heart. We should ask for this gift because love of God is the only way to God. What rouses us to love God more than the Sacrament of Love, the Eucharist? But as Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote, the mystery of love in the Eucharist is available not to our unaided senses but only to faith: *“Sight, touch, taste fail with regard to Thee, but only by hearing does*

one believe surely; I believe whatever God's Son said: nothing is truer than the word of Truth". The Church's ultimate reason to believe in the Eucharist is because she trusts Jesus. She has faith in her Lord's words spoken up and down the centuries on the lips of her priests: *"This is My Body given up for you"*. The Blessed Sacrament is thus the greatest sign given by God to stir up love in the hearts of His people until He comes again. Let us beg God for the grace to be on fire with the divine love which flows from the heart of Christ in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood.

108. My dear sons and daughters in Christ, the Eucharist is the heart of our faith. It is the center of the faith of the Church for it is Christ Himself. All the concrete expressions of Eucharistic faith I mention above represent our humble response to this mystery. If done in trusting surrender to God, they are meant to draw us closer to the eternal wedding banquet to which every Eucharistic celebration is a foretaste. May we never tire of discovering that the Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life! As from the source of a great river, everything that matters in life flows from it. As to a great mountain peak, all the striving and struggle of life seeks it.

109. For this reason, while we continue this earthly journey towards the eternal Promised Land, we rejoice that the Eucharistic Christ is our protection against powerful currents of selfishness and worldly temptations. In all of his Eucharistic hymns, Aquinas always ends them pointing out the connection between the Eucharist and heaven. In the hymn *"Panis Angelicus"*, he gives voice to the ultimate desire and longing of every human heart: *"We ask You, O God Three and One, to visit us just as we celebrate You; along Your paths, lead us to where we are headed, to the light where You dwell"*. He reminds us that the most effective way for us to prepare for eternal life is to seek to be nourished by Jesus in the Eucharist.

110. I wish to conclude this exhortation by turning to Mary, Our Mother, whom Saint John Paul II called *"a woman of the Eucharist' in her whole life"* (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 53). Let us entrust our Eucharistic life of her Son's gift of Himself to her solicitude and care. She lived her faith at the moment of the Annunciation when she was asked to believe that the One whom she conceived through the Holy Spirit was the Son of God. For us, before the Eucharistic mystery we are also asked to believe that the same Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Mary, becomes present in His full humanity and divinity under the appearances of bread and wine. Her faith-filled consent allowed God to be born in her, making her the Ark of the New Covenant. *"With her 'yes' she opened the door of our world to God Himself; she became the living Ark of the Covenant, in whom God took flesh, became one of us, and pitched His tent among us"* (cf. John 1:14). (*Spe Salvi*, no. 49). She was the first to receive Jesus in her heart. She became the first tabernacle where God dwells in the fullest possible sense. After Pentecost but before her Assumption into heaven, surely she regularly received the Eucharist from the hands of the Apostles.

111. Who more than Mary is a star of hope for us so that we can see the way to go as followers of Jesus Christ, since we have never been this way before? Who more than Mary can help us

renew our faith and fortify our love and devotion to Jesus in the Eucharist? Confident in her maternal care and intercession, let us invoke and imitate Our Lady, woman of the Eucharist:

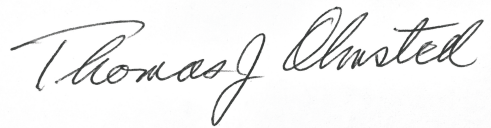
Blessed Mother, who with your generous “Fiat” unleashed the Fountain of all graces in our world, intercede for us who desire ever greater faith and devotion in your Divine Son that we might cooperate with His work of Redemption.

May the Eucharistic Lord always find in our hearts a welcome dwelling as He did in yours.

Be our refuge and companion on our pilgrim way to the heavenly home where with you and all the Saints we enjoy eternal communion with your Son who is our rock of refuge in all of life’s storms.

Amen.

Promulgated on Holy Thursday of the Lord’s Supper, April 1, 2021.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas J. Olmsted". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

+Thomas J. Olmsted
Bishop of Phoenix