

Homily of Benedict XVI for more than 800,000 young people

The Holy Father addressed his homily during the Holy Mass to a large crowd of participants at the World Youth Day.

08/21/2005

Dear young friends,

Yesterday evening we came together in the presence of the Sacred Host, in which Jesus becomes for us the bread that sustains and feeds us (cf. Jn 6:35), and there we began our

inner journey of adoration. In the Eucharist, adoration must become union. At the celebration of the Eucharist, we find ourselves in the “hour” of Jesus, to use the language of John’s Gospel. Through the Eucharist this “hour” of Jesus becomes our own hour, his presence in our midst. Together with the disciples he celebrated the Passover of Israel, the memorial of God’s liberating action that led Israel from slavery to freedom. Jesus follows the rites of Israel. He recites over the bread the prayer of praise and blessing. But then something new happens. He thanks God not only for the great works of the past; he thanks him for his own exaltation, soon to be accomplished through the Cross and Resurrection, and he speaks to the disciples in words that sum up the whole of the Law and the Prophets: “This is my Body, given in sacrifice for you. This cup is the New Covenant in my Blood”. He then

distributes the bread and the cup, and instructs them to repeat his words and actions of that moment over and over again in his memory.

What is happening? How can Jesus distribute his Body and his Blood? By making the bread into his Body and the wine into his Blood, he anticipates his death, he accepts it in his heart and he transforms it into an action of love. What on the outside is simply brutal violence, from within becomes an act of total self-giving love. This is the substantial transformation which was accomplished at the Last Supper and was destined to set in motion a series of transformations leading ultimately to the transformation of the world when God will be all in all (cf. 1 Cor 15:28). In their hearts, people always and everywhere have somehow expected a change, a transformation of the world. Here now is the central act of transformation that alone can

truly renew the world: violence is transformed into love, and death into life. Since this act transmutes death into love, death as such is already conquered from within, the resurrection is already present in it. Death is, so to speak, mortally wounded, so that it can no longer have the last word. To use an image well known to us today, this is like inducing nuclear fission in the very heart of being – the victory of love over hatred, the victory of love over death. Only this intimate explosion of good conquering evil can then trigger off the series of transformations that little by little will change the world. All other changes remain superficial and cannot save. For this reason we speak of redemption: what had to happen at the most intimate level has indeed happened, and we can enter into its dynamic. Jesus can distribute his Body, because he truly gives himself.

This first fundamental transformation of violence into love, of death into life, brings other changes in its wake. Bread and wine become his Body and Blood. But it must not stop there, on the contrary, the process of transformation must now gather momentum. The Body and Blood of Christ are given to us so that we ourselves will be transformed in our turn. We are to become the Body of Christ, his own flesh and blood. We all eat the one bread, and this means that we ourselves become one. In this way, adoration, as we said earlier, becomes union. God no longer simply stands before us, as the one who is totally Other. He is within us, and we are in him. His dynamic enters into us and then seeks to spread outwards to others until it fills the world, so that his love can truly become the dominant measure of the world. I like to illustrate this new step urged upon us by the Last

Supper by drawing out the different nuances of the word “adoration” in Greek and in Latin. The Greek word is proskynesis. It refers to the gesture of submission, the recognition of God as our true measure, supplying the norm that we choose to follow. It means that freedom is not simply about enjoying life in total autonomy, but rather about living by the measure of truth and goodness, so that we ourselves can become true and good. This gesture is necessary even if initially our yearning for freedom makes us inclined to resist it. We can only fully accept it when we take the second step that the Last Supper proposes to us. The Latin word for adoration is ad-oratio – mouth to mouth contact, a kiss, an embrace, and hence ultimately love. Submission becomes union, because he to whom we submit is Love. In this way submission acquires a meaning, because it does not impose

anything on us from the outside, but liberates us deep within.

Let us return once more to the Last Supper. The new element to emerge here was the deeper meaning given to Israel's ancient prayer of blessing, which from that point on became the word of transformation, enabling us to participate in the "hour" of Christ. Jesus did not instruct us to repeat the Passover meal, which in any event, given that it is an anniversary, is not repeatable at will. He instructed us to enter into his "hour". We enter into it through the sacred power of the words of consecration – a transformation brought about through the prayer of praise which places us in continuity with Israel and the whole of salvation history, and at the same time ushers in the new, to which the older prayer at its deepest level was pointing. The new prayer – which the Church calls the "Eucharistic Prayer" – brings the

Eucharist into being. It is the word of power which transforms the gifts of the earth in an entirely new way into God's gift of himself and it draws us into this process of transformation. That is why we call this action "Eucharist", which is a translation of the Hebrew word beracha – thanksgiving, praise, blessing, and a transformation worked by the Lord: the presence of his "hour". Jesus's hour is the hour in which love triumphs. In other words: it is God who has triumphed, because he is Love. Jesus's hour seeks to become our own hour and will indeed become so if we allow ourselves, through the celebration of the Eucharist, to be drawn into that process of transformation that the Lord intends to bring about. The Eucharist must become the centre of our lives. If the Church tells us that the Eucharist is an essential part of Sunday, this is no mere positivism or thirst for power. On Easter morning,

first the women and then the disciples had the grace of seeing the Lord. From that moment on, they knew that the first day of the week, Sunday, would be his day, the day of Christ the Lord. The day when creation began became the day when creation was renewed. Creation and redemption belong together. That is why Sunday is so important. It is good that today, in many cultures, Sunday is a free day, and is often combined with Saturday so as to constitute a “week-end” of free time. Yet this free time is empty if God is not present. Dear friends!

Sometimes, our initial impression is that having to include time for Mass on a Sunday is rather inconvenient. But if you make the effort, you will realize that this is what gives a proper focus to your free time. Do not be deterred from taking part in Sunday Mass, and help others to discover it too. This is because the Eucharist releases the joy that we

need so much, and we must learn to grasp it ever more deeply, we must learn to love it. Let us pledge ourselves to do this – it is worth the effort! Let us discover the intimate riches of the Church's liturgy and its true greatness: it is not we who are celebrating for ourselves, but it is the living God himself who is preparing a banquet for us. Through your love for the Eucharist you will also rediscover the sacrament of Reconciliation, in which the merciful goodness of God always allows us to make a fresh start in our lives.

Anyone who has discovered Christ must lead others to him. A great joy cannot be kept to oneself. It has to be passed on. In vast areas of the world today there is a strange forgetfulness of God. It seems as if everything would be just the same even without him. But at the same time there is a feeling of frustration, a sense of dissatisfaction with everyone and

everything. People tend to exclaim: "This cannot be what life is about!" Indeed not. And so, together with forgetfulness of God there is a kind of new explosion of religion. I have no wish to discredit all the manifestations of this phenomenon. There may be sincere joy in the discovery. Yet if it is pushed too far, religion becomes almost a consumer product. People choose what they like, and some are even able to make a profit from it. But religion constructed on a "do-it-yourself" basis cannot ultimately help us. It may be comfortable, but at times of crisis we are left to ourselves. Help people to discover the true star which points out the way to us: Jesus Christ! Let us seek to know him better and better, so as to be able to guide others to him with conviction. This is why love for Sacred Scripture is so important, and in consequence, it is important to know the faith of the Church which opens up for us the

meaning of Scripture. It is the Holy Spirit who guides the Church as her faith grows, causing her to enter ever more deeply into the truth (cf. Jn 16:13). Pope John Paul II gave us a wonderful work in which the faith of centuries is explained synthetically: the Catechism of the Catholic Church. I myself recently presented the Compendium of the Catechism, prepared at the request of the late Holy Father. These are two fundamental texts which I recommend to all of you.

Obviously books alone are not enough. Form communities based on faith! In recent decades movements and communities have come to birth in which the power of the Gospel is keenly felt. Seek communion in faith, like fellow travellers who continue together to follow the path of the great pilgrimage that the Magi from the East first pointed out to us. The spontaneity of new communities is

important, but it is also important to preserve communion with the Pope and with the Bishops. It is they who guarantee that we are not seeking private paths, but are living as God's great family, founded by the Lord through the twelve Apostles.

Once again, I must return to the Eucharist. "Because there is one bread, we, though many, are one body" says Saint Paul (1 Cor 10:17). By this he meant: since we receive the same Lord and he gathers us together and draws us into himself, we ourselves are one. This must be evident in our lives. It must be seen in our capacity to forgive. It must be seen in our sensitivity to the needs of others. It must be seen in our willingness to share. It must be seen in our commitment to our neighbours, both those close at hand and those physically far away, whom we nevertheless consider to be close. Today there are many forms of

voluntary assistance, models of mutual service, of which our society has urgent need. We must not, for example, abandon the elderly to their solitude, we must not pass by when we meet people who are suffering. If we think and live according to our communion with Christ, then our eyes will be opened. Then we will no longer be content to scrape a living just for ourselves, but we will see where and how we are needed. Living and acting thus, we will soon realize that it is much better to be useful and at the disposal of others than to be concerned only with the comforts that are offered to us. I know that you as young people have great aspirations, that you want to pledge yourselves to build a better world. Let others see this, let the world see it, since this is exactly the witness that the world expects from the disciples of Jesus Christ; in this way, and through your love above

all, the world will be able to discover the star that we follow as believers.

Let us go forward with Christ and let us live our lives as true worshippers of God! Amen.

Vatican Press Office

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