

## **We Are Eucharist**

The celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Winnipeg Metropolia of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Canada is a time of grace, a very special time to reflect seriously – as Church and as individual faithful – on our Christian vocation, and to make a serious effort to respond to Jesus' invitation to draw closer to him.

We now continue our series of spiritual reflections, which are an important part of our Jubilee celebrations aimed at our spiritual renewal.

Today, every Ukrainian Catholic parish throughout Canada joins together to reflect upon the theme of "We are Eucharist."

*Themes: Bread of life; the Mystery of Love; We are Eucharist*

### **Bread of Life**

The Christian vocation is a call to life, to life in the Spirit, to a life of love, compassion, and forgiveness. The dynamic action and power of the Holy Spirit is nowhere more evident than in the mystery of the Eucharist.

Jesus said: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger. He who believes in me shall never thirst. Whoever eats this bread will live forever." (Jn.6:35, 51)

If Jesus is indeed the life-giving bread of life that satisfies our hunger, then why is it that so often after celebrating the Divine Liturgy we remain spiritually hungry, unsatisfied? If the Eucharist is the very source of our spiritual nourishment, why are there so many half dead Christians, Catholics in the world today, who are dying of spiritual hunger?

Is it because we don't really believe in him, that he is really is the Bread of life and we don't really hunger and thirst for him. Why do we come to the Divine Liturgy and receive the Eucharist, but leave unchanged?

The Eucharist is Christ's gift of his total self to us. At the celebration of every Divine Liturgy, Christ gives himself to us in communion completely, body, soul, and divinity. Every Eucharist is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life.

But in order to receive this tremendous gift of God we need to be properly disposed. We must approach the Giver with the right attitude, with faith and with love. That is why at the very beginning of the Divine Liturgy the priest, in the name of the whole congregation, prays for this proper disposition of mind and heart. He prays to the Holy Spirit:

"Heavenly King, Consoler, Spirit of Truth, everywhere present and filling all things, the Treasury of blessings and the Giver of Life, come and dwell in us, and cleanse us of all stain, and save our souls, O Gracious One!"

From that moment on, over and over again, during the entire Liturgy we invoke the Holy Spirit repeatedly, asking Him to rest in us, on the Holy Gifts, and to transform the bread and wine, and us.

The celebration of the Divine Liturgy is not simply a gathering of the faithful to take part in the Eucharist as a way of fulfilling a Sunday obligation. The Divine Liturgy is the most solemn moment of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the people of God, that they might live the life of the Spirit, the life of love. The Eucharist is the extension of Pentecost; which means that Pentecost is not just an historical event that happened a long time ago in the Holy Land. It is an on-going reality.

### **The Mystery of Love**

The central theme of Jesus' talk with his disciples at the Last Supper was unconditional love and union with God. Jesus said to them: "As the Father loved me, so I have loved you. Live in my love." (Jn.15/10)

"If you love me, I will ask the Father and he will give you the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth." (Jn14:16)

Jesus insisted that we love one another and be united in his love. "This is my commandment," Jesus said, that you love one another as I have loved you." Then he prayed: "Father, that they may be one as we are one, I living in them, you living in me. So shall the world know that you sent me, and you loved them as you loved me." (Jn17:23)

Jesus then took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying: "Take, eat, this is my body." Then he took the cup of wine, and giving praise said: "Drink from this cup, this is my blood of the covenant, which is being poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Then he added: "Do this in memory of me." (Mat 26:28)

From that moment on, every time the early Christians gathered together, sang hymns, and repeated the words of consecration over the bread and wine, they remembered Jesus and his love for them, and that they must love one another as he loved them.

Every time we celebrate the Divine Liturgy we, too, remember Jesus (not only the historical Jesus, but the now Jesus) and his love for us; and that we ought to love one another as Jesus loved us. At the Eucharist we become one with Christ and with each other. This is when the Eucharist becomes a clear sign of our oneness, our communion in the love of Christ. This is when we become one body, the Body of Christ.

St. Paul puts it this way: "Because there is one bread, we who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the same bread." (1 Cor 10:17) Paul states it even more simply and directly, when he tells the Christian community in Corinth: "You are the Body of Christ!" We are the Body of Christ, especially in its weakness and brokenness.

St. Paul knew what he was talking about when he kept on insisting on this, because he experienced the reality of this truth in his conversion. Before his conversion Paul was a devout Pharisee, who was intent on wiping out this religious 'sect', followers of Christ, who were called "People of the Way". One day, as he was on his way to

persecute the Christians in Damascus, suddenly a blinding flash of light from the sky overpowered him and threw him to the ground. He then heard a voice calling: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul answered. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," the voice answered back.

It couldn't have been Jesus in his physical body, because Jesus had already died and had risen. Nor could it have been Jesus in his resurrected body, because he had ascended into heaven and was at the right hand of the Father. So who was this Jesus that Saul was persecuting? It was Jesus in his mystical body, mysteriously present in the community of believers in the city of Damascus. Jesus identified with his followers, when he said: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting."

### **We Are Eucharist**

So, when at the Last Supper Jesus said: "This is my body," he was not only referring to the bread that was on the table in front of him, but also to his disciples, who were sitting at the table with him, and to all who believed in him. Those words of consecration refer to us. We are the body of Christ. We are Eucharist.

That is why, during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. The large host on the discos represents Christ our King, the smaller particle of bread to the right represents Mary, the Queen Mother, and all the other particles of bread represent the angels, the saints in heaven, and all the faithful, who together make up the mystical body of Christ.

At the Divine Liturgy, united with Christ and with each other, together we offer ourselves in love as a living sacrifice to the Father for the forgiveness of sins and the healing of our souls and bodies.

This is the tremendous mystery that Jesus wants us to remember and enter into every time we celebrate the Eucharist. If we forget this central truth in the central act of Catholic worship, we're in trouble. St. Paul explains why, when he cautions us: "Whoever eats the bread and drinks the cup unworthily, will be behaving unworthily toward the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone is to examine himself before eating this bread and drinking this cup. Because a person who eats and drinks without recognizing the body (the whole body), is eating and drinking his own judgment. In fact that is why many of you are weak and sick, and some have died."

St. Paul seems to be suggesting here that there is a connection between how we perceive and celebrate the Eucharist and our spiritual, psychological, and even physical well-being.

When we receive Jesus under the appearance of bread and wine during the Divine liturgy, we are publicly saying that we are prepared to receive the same Jesus under the appearance of our brothers and sisters, especially those who are hurting and in need. When we do this honestly and sincerely, with the intention of reaching out to those in need, we are recognizing the whole body, and are receiving the Eucharist worthily.

But if we receive without any intention at all of receiving Jesus in our brothers and sisters; when we receive with unrepentant resentment, hatred, and greed in our hearts, we receive unworthily, and are hurting ourselves in the process. The healing power of

God's love is surely present in the mystery of the Eucharist. But a mechanical participation, with a failure to discern the Body of Christ, a callous concern for the poor, oppressed and needy can block this flow of healing love and prevent it from having the effect it is meant to have. We receive the Eucharist unworthily when we receive without love, forgiveness, and compassion in our hearts.

What is important at the Divine Liturgy is, not only what is happening at the altar, but also what is happening in our hearts. It is not only the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ that is important, but also the transformation of our hearts into the loving and compassionate heart of Jesus. What is extremely important is that we become Eucharist; that we become Jesus for others, that at the end of the Eucharist we might say with St. Paul: "I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me."

At the Last supper Jesus didn't just leave us a ritual to perform in his memory; he left us his very self as spiritual nourishment for a tough journey. At the Divine Liturgy we're not only performing a ritual; we are offering ourselves, together with Christ, as a living sacrifice; so that we might do the things that Jesus did: love, show compassion, forgive, heal, and reconcile. At the Jewish Passover Meal, during which Jesus instituted the Eucharist, the youngest male child asks the question: "What does this night mean?" The father then retells the story of God's faithfulness to his people, and how he delivered them from Egyptian slavery.

When we come to celebrate the Divine Liturgy, we might do well to bring that question with us: What is the meaning of this celebration? Why am here? Then let us remember the Father's tremendous and never-ending love, and faithfulness to us, by sending his Son, who suffered and died for us, and rose the third day, so that we might live. Let us approach the altar humbly, and boldly, and receive with thanksgiving Christ our Lord, the Divine Physician, the healers of our souls and bodies. Then let us go in peace and be Eucharist, the Bread of life for others.

### **Jubilee Prayer**

Lord, Jesus Christ, as we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Ukrainian Catholic Metropolia, we give thanks for your loving kindness and the abundant graces received during the span of fifty years.

We also humbly ask for the grace of an ever deeper realization of your loving presence; that we are all children of one Heavenly Father.

Again and again, we pray for the grace of perseverance in faith; that we may all be united in your loving and compassionate heart, and that with renewed enthusiasm, love and compassion, we might continue the work of salvation for the glory of our Heavenly Father.

May your holy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven! Amen.