



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



HOMILY FOR DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY 2005 —the morning after Pope John Paul II died.

Ralph Wright, O.S.B.

Pope John Paul II died after first Vespers of Divine Mercy Sunday—the name he had himself given to the First Sunday after Easter. In the gospel reading for this mass Jesus gives the apostles power to forgive sins “Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven, whose sins you shall retain they are retained.” Through the power given to them his priests would say not “Jesus absolves you” but “*I* absolve you”. Just as in the mass they would say “this is *my* body.”. In this mysterious way the priest speaks “in persona Christi” — “in the person of Christ”. John Paul describes the joy of forgiveness that we receive through the divine mercy in the sacrament of Reconciliation as: “ a drawing near to the holiness of God, a rediscovery of one’s true identity, which has been upset and disturbed by sin, a liberation in the very depth of self and thus a regaining of lost joy, the joy of being saved...”

What was central in John Paul’s vision? I would suggest that two ideas were at the heart of his message. It was the vision of a man who had been born in Wadowice, a small town in Poland some 50 miles from Auschwitz , with all that that place connotes for the twentieth century.

The first idea: Each Human Being is endowed by the Creator from conception with an inviolable dignity— this dignity is based on the fact that each is made in the image and likeness of God and is *invited* to share in the life of the Trinity. *Invited* but never forced, because each person is endowed by the Creator with a sovereign freedom. The Church therefore according to John Paul, *pro-poses* truth, *im-poses* nothing.

The second idea is this. The truth will make you free. This freedom depends on an awareness of truth, *objective* truth, the way things actually *are*. This truth was proclaimed by Jesus and taught by his apostles and their successors. It is explored by all Christians through their reason and believed in through faith which is a gift of the Holy Spirit . It is this Holy Spirit who leads us each day deeper and deeper into the mystery of God.

If these were the pivotal ideas that energized John Paul’s whole apostolic ministry, it was the Eucharist that became ever more central in his teaching. Through the Eucharist each individual was enabled to be incorporated into the holiness that Christ had already won for us on Calvary . This very year, as you know, he proclaimed “The Year of the Eucharist.”

Many of you came to Fr Laurence’s series of talks on the Eucharist which

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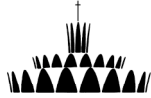
occurred on Wednesday evenings during this past Lent. I found them very enlightening. As I listened I became conscious of my own inadequacy in my teaching over the last thirty years or so, whether in the classroom or from the pulpit, of the amazing blessing of the mystery of faith that *is* the Eucharist. My failure, whether because of the blindness caused by my own sins or for some other reason, to be stupefied, as John Paul puts it, by the extraordinary action that we take part in each time we come to mass. At each mass we “download”, as it were, (i.e. make our own by personal col-laboration) the “power-of-union-with-God” that Jesus’ death on the cross won for each human being He won it for us by dying for our sins. We, each individually, through the amazing mystery of the Eucharist, are enabled to be united to Jesus Christ, the head of the mystical body. This union brings us (individually) deep joy, deep peace and a blazing new love, sacrificial love, for our brothers and sister, all human beings, wherever they may be. If we were conscious that this is what can happen to us at each mass as we join the priest in offering *all* of ourselves and our lives, with Jesus, to the Father, not even wild horses would be able to keep us from Sunday mass — and weekdays too!

We would be constantly urging our sons to consider the call to the priesthood so that they too could bring in the mass this holiness, this ‘union-with-the-Lord-won-on-Calvary’ to the People of God who in our day are so especially hungry for this genuine life, this genuine freedom, this “putting on of the very mind and heart of Jesus Christ.”

I would like to end with one quote from John Paul’s encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, the Church of the Eucharist, and then close with a passage from his document *Mane Nobiscum* with which he opened the Year of the Eucharist.

#8 Ecclesia de Eucharistia

When I think of the Eucharist, and look at my life as a priest, as a bishop and as the Successor of Peter, I naturally recall the many times and places in which I was able to celebrate it. I remember the parish church of Niegowic, where I had my first pastoral assignment, the collegiate church of Saint Florian in Krakow, Wawel Cathedral, Saint Peter’s Basilica and so many basilicas and churches in Rome and throughout the world. I have been able to celebrate Holy Mass in chapels built along mountain paths, on lakeshores and seacoasts; I have celebrated it on altars built in stadiums and city squares.... This varied scenario of celebrations of the Eucharist has given me a powerful experience of its universal and, so to speak, cosmic character. Yes, cosmic! Because, even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated *on the altar of the world*. It unites heaven and earth. It embraces and permeates all creation. The Son of God became man in order to restore all creation in one supreme act of praise, to the One who made it from nothing. He, the Eternal High Priest who by the blood of his Cross entered



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the eternal sanctuary, thus gives back to the Creator and Father all creation redeemed. He does so through the priestly ministry of the Church, to the glory of the Most Holy Trinity. Truly this is the *mysterium fidei*, which is accomplished in the Eucharist: the world which came forth from the hands of God the Creator now returns to him redeemed by Christ.”

Mane Nobiscum John Paul II #19

When the disciples on the way to Emmaus asked Jesus to stay “with” them, he responded by giving them a much greater gift: through the Sacrament of the Eucharist he found a way to stay ‘in’ them. Receiving the Eucharist means entering into a profound communion with Jesus “Abide in me, and I in you” (Jn 15: 4). This relationship of profound and mutual “abiding” *enables us to have a certain foretaste of heaven on earth*. Is this not the greatest of human yearnings? Is this not what God had in mind when he brought about in history his plan of salvation? God has placed in human hearts a “hunger” for his word (cf. Am 8:11), a hunger which will be satisfied only by full union with him. Eucharistic communion was given so that we might be “sated” with God here on earth, in expectation of our complete fulfilment in heaven.”