

THIS IS MY BODY WHICH IS GIVEN FOR YOU

Fr. Juan Vecchi, March 2000



The Eucharist is central to the Year of Jubilee, as indicated by the Holy Father in his lead-up to this year. Indeed the Eucharist has always been the most expressive moment of the life and faith of the Christian community. So the Jubilee finds its deepest meaning in the eucharistic presence of Christ in our midst - an encounter with salvation which is not just in the past but reaches us today and opens us to the future with confidence.

The International Eucharistic Congress to be held in Rome in June is meant to be a grateful expression of faith in the real presence of Christ in human history and an opening up of the Christian community to his complete self-giving. So for us too the personal and communal renewal of the Jubilee includes a convinced and joyful rediscovery of the riches of the Eucharist, and of the responsibilities to which it calls us.

The sacramental process of preparation for this year (Baptism, Confirmation, Reconciliation) brings us to the Eucharist as a vantage point from which to contemplate the mystery of the Trinity in the life of the world and of our own existence. [Note: these introductory suggestions on the Eucharist helps us to see its place amongst the stages of the Jubilee as proposed for Salesians in AGC 369. This letter is particularly suited to the East/post-Easter stage and invites personal reflection and dialogue at com-

munity and province level].

1. A EUCHARISTIC 'HOUR'

We Salesians do not lack guidelines and other help to see the Eucharist in our spirituality, community, pastoral-educative practice. But the reflection is ongoing especially in the Church which has been looking at cultural developments vis-à-vis the Eucharist in various contexts in which we work. All this helps us to penetrate the mystery more deeply.

1.1 The ecclesial process

We start with Vatican II - and its positioning of the liturgy as the source and high point of Christian life. Liturgical renewal was not just about changes to rites but changes to deeper attitude and mentality. So, the new Roman Missal highlights the communal character of the eucharistic celebration, the privileged position of the Word of God, the use of language which is closer to contemporary sensitivities. The advantages of this are there to be seen but at the same time have given rise to new doctrinal and pastoral questions. And the search goes on - theological reflection which offers new syntheses, perspectives and pastoral practice which takes into account the problems of believers in modern times. There is still a time of change and some confusion. It awakens our conscience as pastors and educators who, for example, have to explain the 'breaking of the bread' with the abundance of motives and explanations that the Church's reflection offers, without giving way to fleeting fashions and unconfirmed opinions.

1.2 The question

The Church's process has been marked by cultural transformation affecting the celebration of the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist. We are at a critical moment regards historical memory. Spontaneity of expression (one cultural development) may offer rites and customs whose underlying significance is easily forgotten. Discos and rock concerts may impress us, but they don't pretend to have any meaning for anyone beyond for those taking part. In fact individualism can exist in the crowd because the event is self-satisfying only. On the other hand it expresses a need for personal involvement, direct experience, emotional expression. These are not the most disturbing modern phenomena, however. Others are more serious. What of the non-practising believer, for whom believing can be separated from practice, and from the sacramental experi-

every Eucharist be our guide in this.

I send you my cordial greetings and my prayers that your Jubilee pilgrimage, both as individuals and as communities, may be ever more intense in the light of the Risen Christ who is living and working in our communities and in each one of us.

Juan Vecchi

avourable preconditions provided by the environment. Nowadays there is frequently need for education to the most fundamental attitudes and actions: silence, prayer, singing, choral movement, gestures. We must not undervalue the importance of this factor. Our experience is that participation in the Eucharist is improved where there are youth groups who are enthusiastic in the preparation of liturgical music. What is true of music is also true of the liturgical, of the proclamation of the readings, of every expression that forms part of the Eucharist. Particular attention will be needed for education to the listening to biblical texts. The Eucharist is permeated by the Word of God. Its richness cannot be appreciated without an appropriate introduction to the Bible.

We often ask too much of the Eucharist, expecting it to become a didactic and pedagogical occasion. This is not the primary element and it can lead to an imbalance. If we know how to carry out the formative process well, the Eucharist can become a celebration of the sacrifice of Christ.

CONCLUSION

There remains in my mind always a thought I once heard in a meeting on catechesis and the Eucharist. For the first Christians, catechesis was a kind of progressive journey towards the eucharistic mystery celebrated by the community. The catechumens were led by the hand to the eucharistic mystery through an ordered explanation of Christian doctrine and life. The baptized, after their introduction to the Eucharist, meditated on and celebrated God's work. They came to understand their starting point more fully and the road they had covered.

This is the journey we still find in our present eucharistic celebrations.

Why do we not try to do the same things ourselves, personally and as a community? Light and generosity will be set free in our lives as consecrated persons. May Mary most holy with whom we fell ourselves united in the celebration of

ence?

The Council's question 'How to celebrate the sacraments' has become 'Why celebrate them at all?' If I am already repentant, why go to confession? If we love each other, why get married? If the Lord is always with me, why go to Mass? These questions can affect the way the sacraments are celebrated. They are questions which recur amongst the young and indicate a defective formation to the significance of the sacramental experience, as also the widespread weakening of understanding of the value of symbolic and ritual behaviour. As pastors and educators we cannot undervalue the incidence of these phenomena, which can lead to the Eucharist being regarded as an act without real meaning for life.

"How to celebrate the sacraments?" has become "why celebrate them at all?"

On the other hand, efforts to answer these questions have often been found to be weak, and sometimes even have compromised the identity of the sacrament, risking its being reduced to just a fraternal meeting. The complexity of these phenomena must be kept in mind so that our experience of Eucharist not be disjoined from life.

1.3 Our Eucharist

We can now try to examine our own eucharistic life. The liturgical renewal has had positive effects on us too. Amongst the more promising aspects of our fraternal life there is the daily eucharistic celebration which, as our Constitutions put it "expresses the triple unity of sacrifice, priesthood and community, a community whose members are all at the service of the same mission." (C 88). Our communities are reborn everyday around the altar - more evident on the weekly community day when we can celebrate more calmly and with greater participation.

Our manner of celebrating offers some elements for reflection. There are instances of worthy, joyful celebration, but also instances where something is lacking in attitudes, gestures, language. To some extent this may reflect the past where some actions seemed only like 'ceremonies' to add

to a sacra-
warns us



ment. But the Church
against giving way to

secularising tendencies which can trivialize moments of great importance.

Other aspects of our experience of the Eucharist makes us reflect. I am thinking of the generous service we offer in numerous chaplaincies, which expresses our generous pastoral service. But communities also need to find frequent occasions for concelebration which is the source of our life as brothers in the Spirit.

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More pressing remarks need to be made about the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist which constitutes for the whole Church the central sign of the Lord's Day and the heart of the Christian week. The 'secularised Sunday' is considered a day of

relaxation to be enjoyed individually. It suggests the idea of an individual separated from the human community and even from the family under the pretext of R&R. This mentality can make its way even into our midst...a Sunday without community and without the Eucharist!

More frequently, thanks be to God, the situation is different. Many communities have done something to see the Eucharist as the pivot around which our consecrated life revolves. Many have arranged a period of Eucharistic adoration in the evening, with beneficial effects on their community life.

Which brings us to another point - the implications of the Lord's eucharistic presence in our House. Almost everywhere chapels are arranged with taste and dignity, but there has been a falling off in the personal and communal encounter with the Lord. The significance and value of some time spent before the eucharist has occasionally been questioned on the basis of opinions con-

that was Don Bosco's, i.e. the proposal of holiness to young people. We don't allow ourselves to be deceived by an idea of holiness that savours of the miraculous and is meant only for the extraordinary ones. We keep before our eyes the model of youthful sanctity which Don Bosco presented so clearly and naturally to his boys - a holiness built on a generous will, on the knowledge and friendship with God, on the use of the sacraments, on the daily commitment to one's own maturing, on genuine happiness, on service to companions, and on self-giving in other fields attractive to the young. These are our educational objectives.

In any case the young who frequent our places have the right to be told by us of the destiny to which God has called them and how he thinks of them and loves them as a Father. There is nothing more beautiful that we can do for them. As to how we do it, we need to reflect seriously to see whether we are managing to avoid the risk of putting forward a kind of Christianity characterized by more things to do than by personal relationships with the Lord. It happens not infrequently in our environments that we meet well disposed youngsters willing to dedicate a good deal of their time and activity to those who are younger and poorer, but find it difficult to understand and practise a sacramental encounter with the Lord. This should make us reflect seriously on the image of Christianity we are putting across.

If we once again place the Eucharist at the centre of our pedagogical and pastoral projects it will help us to be aware, and to make others aware, that the desire to commit oneself to the good of others gets off the ground only from the experience of each one being welcomed by Christ.

As a third point for our attention I would like to emphasize the importance of an authentic education to the eucharistic celebration. We know how liturgical experience can appear irrelevant to many of the youngsters with whom we work. We are also aware of the resources which rites and symbols can provide when we are dealing with an expression of authentic faith.

In past times eucharistic pedagogy could count on many fa-

4.5 The educative process with young people.

If our communal and personal commitment to the rediscovery of the Eucharist is authentic, it will result in abundant pastoral fruits. Pastoral activity is not a more or less refined technique placed at the service of the Gospel: it is rather the witness of a life which stems from a deep communion with the Lord.

A first application of this in the field of pastoral work concerns the educative community. Renewed attention to the Eucharist will enable us to make plans according to the spirit of the Gospel. Charity has its own specific way of seeing, evaluating, reacting. The Eucharist tells us, for instance, that a Christian community can never organize its experience of faith merely on the model of a business enterprise, and this at many levels. The kingdom has its own unique and unmistakable dynamics and logic. We must overcome the temptation of finding it not practical, because the Eucharist makes itself daily both relevant and practicable for us.

The most immediate application of this point will be the recognition that only the Eucharist will be able to give the proper shape to the educative and pastoral community. The form of encounter, exchange of views, sharing of responsibility cannot be recognized unless we start from authentic communion in the mystery of Christ. Outside this communion there can be no EPC for the simple reason that apart from this communion there can be no Church.

The charismatic experience of Valdocco confirms in us the knowledge that the secret of effective pastoral activity is an explicitly eucharistic environment in which even those who come in contact with it only marginally know intuitively that the generous and affectionate reply they receive is born of the charity of Christ.

There is a second setting in which the eucharistic mystery requires of us a greater attention and growing conviction: **our educative and pastoral projects.** The Eucharist can suggest ways to us of examining both the objectives of our projects and the way we attain them.

At the level of objectives we must make our own the objective

cerning the eucharistic presence and devotion - opinions which have no foundation in the Church's teaching.

This used to find a simple expression in our 'visits'. It may be useful to listen to the warning of Karl Rahner, one of the most outstanding theologians of our time: "Anyone who doubts the value of a visit to the Blessed Sacrament should ask himself whether his objections to such a devotion are not in reality the protest of the workaholic against the forceful reminder to place himself occasionally before God with all his being, recollected and relaxed, in a calm and tranquil atmosphere and maintaining a reinvigorating and purifying silence in which the Lord speaks".

1.4 Pastoral practice

Educative and pastoral situations vary so widely that it would be wrong to make a single general evaluation. We can say there is great generosity and spirit of sacrifice in presiding at eucharistic celebrations. Many of our priest confreres devote themselves assiduously to the service of the people of God, especially on Sundays. In our oratories and youth centres, our schools, we find difficulties of various kinds in teaching the eucharistic mystery...lack of family support and witness, previous negative experiences. This could create a lack of confidence in proclaiming the truth. Some limit celebration of the Eucharist to big occasions thus running the risk of distorting the meaning of the sacrament from within. Some think that the youngsters are not sufficiently catechetically prepared, forgetting that for them the Eucharist is not only the culmination of their lives but the source as well. From some parts you hear another reasons for infrequent celebration - the balance between celebrations in our youthful environments and those which involve the Christian community on a wider scale..

It must be said that in many educative projects the problem has been solved successfully with a variety of opportunities for celebration. The most negative aspect, emerging here and there, is the pretext of a so-called lay aspect

of educational activity which would not allow for eucharistic celebrations!

Our charism is such that we carry within us, written in our hearts, a way of preaching, of acting, of a certain kind of liturgical music, and of an all-round style to the Eucharist which make the young feel at home. We can offer this to the whole Church.

The risk of misunderstanding and distortion is not just hypothetical. Creativity is quite different from arbitrariness. Children often amaze us by their intuitive grasp of liturgical symbols: it goes far beyond our expectations, providing the one guiding the celebration is truly a man of prayer.

A final element for our reflection from a pastoral standpoint, touches on the figure of the Salesian priest as minister of the Eucharist. The secular viewpoint seems reluctant to accept the mediation of the priest and sacraments, and there is also a reaction to an outdated theology which saw the sacramental task as almost the only one for the priest. Salesian tradition has helped us to broaden our perspective, but we mustn't forget that the sacraments are still the priest's greatest, most specific and most fruitful task.

1. An invitation to contemplation

Contemplation is the attitude most fitting for the eucharistic ministry. Like the disciples at Capernaum, we want to note the paradox of Jesus offering and be amazed at the radical nature of what he says, which confounds our human logic with the superabundance of his divine love.

2. *AN INVITATION TO CONTEMPLATION*

2.1 "Do this in memory of me".

The fundamental reference for understanding the Eucharist is the Lord's Last Supper. A continual re-meditation on this event in the life of Jesus, on the basis of the gospel text, is indispensable. The Supper appears as a long prepared event, ardently desired by Jesus and anticipated in various ways at significant moments in his life. The Supper is not just ONE of the events in Jesus' life but is in-

in common on the Word.

It would be a good thing too if the communal Eucharist were to be open, as now happens in many places, to the young people with whom we want to form a single family. This would enrich our assemblies with youthful freshness... Our Constitutions tell us: "The Eucharist is the central act of every Salesian community; it is a daily festive celebration in a living liturgy.

The second lot of suggestions is the visible linkage between the Eucharist and fraternal life. To speak of Eucharist, and especially to celebrate it, has no meaning if the community does not set itself to overcome the tensions and divisions to which it is liable. In this we must be sincere and call a spade a spade. It may be useful to read over again chapters 10 and 11 of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians in which he points to the fact that the Eucharist is incompatible with divisions. Sacramental communion does not lead us to communion of life with Christ if we exclude our brothers from our esteem and dealings.

A third line of thought we may explore is our personal relationship, internalized and convinced, with the mystery of the Eucharist. "We can form praying communities only if individually we become men of prayer". (9C 93). In the first place we need to develop a deeper knowledge of this sacrament... it may be years since we read any serious work about eucharistic theology! We must rediscover too the message that comes to us from Don Bosco, i.e. the synthesis of prayer and apostolic dedication combined in 'Da mihi animas'. It will be important for each of us to grasp the occasion of grace of this Jubilee, to return to the authentic roots of our own vocation and renew our commitment to pastoral charity towards the young.

But in this process we must keep in mind and avoid the risk of certain false notions. It would be naïve to think one could be generous and selfless in the service of the young while neglecting to cultivate a strong eucharistic devotion. A son and spiritual disciple of Don Bosco will be able to find a daily space for silence before the Eucharist in the traditional form of 'visits' or in other expressions of authentic adoration and communication.

to make himself loved”. Only evangelical charity, drawn from the heart of Christ in communion with his Body and Blood, can give the educator a true spiritual ascendancy. Totally purified of forms of self-promotion and sympathy-seeking, and fully free to spread amongst young people the fascination of men of God. For this reasons ‘Da mihi animas’ is completed in ‘cetera tolle’. It is not possible to participate in the saving action of Christ without subordinating to this commitment all other interests and desires. This way we understand Don Bosco’s motto as a prayer of self-offering. ‘Cetera tolle’ applies to everything; it is all-embracing, as is the Eucharist itself. Don Bosco translated it into words and actions of a very concrete nature: he promised God that he would give of himself to the young till his very last breath.

I invite you to renew each day in the Eucharist the personal prayer of ‘Da mihi animas, cetera tolle’.

[Note: the Rector Major suggests that the following sections be used for community discussion and reflection]

4.4 A journey in our communities.

These reflections we have been developing suggest many applications, and in the first place for our Salesian communities.

The Eucharist is essentially a community celebration. **The first suggestion concerns the moments of celebration in the community**...not infrequently it will be a time which is less strenuous, a more active participation, a more careful preparation, a fresh way of looking at daily life. We need to discover a way of celebrating the Eucharist in a more dignified manner...careful attention to expressive gestures, worthy proclamation of the texts of the Word of God, the beauty of the singing, respect for moments of silence...

Young people are particularly sensitive to the genuine nature of the symbolic gestures in which the liturgy abounds, and they frequently form an idea of our faith more by observing the sincerity and quality of our celebrations than by listening to what we say. In this climate we can suggest a reappraisal of concelebration, at least weekly on the community day. We could also consider a greater frequency of communal adoration of the Eucharist, or we could give particular attention to the Sunday and Feast-day liturgies through a reflection

ality the decisive event for grasping the meaning of his mission and the interpretation which he himself gives of his life and death.

We shall never sufficiently meditate on and adore the mystery of love enclosed in this event.

2.2 “My body is given...my blood is shed”.

The preceding reflections have already helped us to grasp the connection between the Eucharist and the paschal mystery of Christ. One of the key words is ‘sacrifice’. For the average person of today this seems to be a throw-back to the past. Apart from the word itself, the reality of the sacrifice cannot go unremarked without distorting the sense and meaning of Eucharist.

In his life, Jesus displays opposition to and total rejection of a certain concept of sacrifice, but on the other hand he interprets the supreme moment of his mission when he says that he is offering his Body “in sacrifice’ for us. The sacrificial concept which Jesus rejects is one which tries to make the offering to God an attempt by man to win favours to himself...when participation in the Eucharist is understood more as a precept to be fulfilled than a Grace to be accepted; when we go to Mass for the gifts that God has waiting for us rather than the Gift which is God himself...the external forms seem Christian but the reality is far from being so.

For us, meditation on the eucharistic sacrifice constitutes an excellent occasion for renewing our apostolic dedication as a participation in the attitude of Jesus the Good Shepherd who saves mankind through the gift of himself.

2.3 “Take and eat”.

The ‘table’, the ‘shared meal’ or ‘banquet’ have a long theological and liturgical tradition based on the memorial of the Last Supper. We shall always need to be careful not to centre the meaning on ourselves as though it were mainly a friendly meeting of Christians, but to refer it rather to the gift of food for the life which the Father gives us in Christ. The Eucharist is the grace, the invita-

tion, the occasion of our communion with the Risen Christ and with the Father. The whole pedagogical process of the celebration leads to this culmination through repentance, praise, listening to the Word, faith and our humble offering.

It is important not to lose sight of the fact that he 'explains the Scriptures to us' especially when he gathers us together for the Sacred Supper. Our Constitutions favour this perspective which links the Word with participation in the sacrifice. "The hearing of the Word finds its privileged place in the celebration of the Eucharist". With greater emphasis on the apostolic meaning, those of the FMA declare: "Nourishing ourselves at the table of his Word and his Body, we become like him 'Bread' for our brothers". This is one of the aspects we frequently overlook in our celebrations: the manner of reading, the attitude of listening, proper church fittings and ornaments.

It is the daily moment which is most efficacious for ongoing formation especially if we make it not an object of learned cogitation or study but open ourselves to welcome Christ and communion with him. An equally strong motive for emphasizing this aspect is the importance attaching to the ministry of the Word for us educators and pastors.

2.4 "I in you and you in me".

The real presence. The living sense of the presence of God which characterizes our spirituality and which Don Bosco was at such pains to inculcate in his boys and collaborators, finds in this its root and foundation. Today, as yesterday, only those who learn to see his presence in the Body and Blood of Christ are able to contemplate God in action.

Jesus is really present in his Word, in which he already gives himself to us as light and food. Jesus is present in prayer, especially in the Liturgy of the Hours: the same Jesus incorporates us into His prayer, the supreme prayer of the Risen Lord. Christ is really present in the community, in the minister who presides at the celebration. After the celebration he prolongs his presence in the sacrament for the benefit of all those who want him and seek him (the sick, those who visit him) and have not been able to come to the celebration; he continues to be really present also in the sick and the

spiritual fruits it brings with it.

It is not difficult to gather the experience of the skilled educator who, while telling the first Salesians the story of his life, highlighted the kinds of behaviour and attitudes to which he attached a permanent value.

This leads us to some self-examination; it makes us wonder whether our pedagogy has the clarity about objectives and emotional impact that the eucharistic mystery has, without which the figure of Don Bosco is inconceivable...the first cause of difficulty in our pastoral work relating to the Eucharist can consist precisely in the lack of a eucharistic atmosphere in our communities and environments.

4.3 The Eucharist and 'Da mihi animas'.

From the brief remarks we have made, the importance of the Eucharist in the thought of Don Bosco is clear, and hence also its place in the unique spirituality we must faithfully translate for our own time. But the element which reveals more than any other the extent to which the eucharistic mystery marked the life of Don Bosco and hence must also mark our life as Salesians, is his 'Da mihi animas coetera tolle'. These words are the plan and process of Don Bosco for modelling himself on Christ.

Seen against the background of the Eucharist, the motto is a prayer. In the first place it's a recognition that the principal actor is God. It introduces us to the apostolic service of our fellows through the invocation we address to the Father. To say 'Give me souls' is primarily to invoke the Lord's intervention. We are asking the Father to make us a centre for the spreading of the Kingdom, able to attract souls to Christ and hence to salvation. Such a prayer implies for us a patient configuration to Christ. Only on his lips does the prayer 'Da mihi animas' not sound pretentious. We know that in the Eucharist Jesus wants to share with us this charity.

When Don Bosco interprets his motto through the words 'Try to make yourself loved' he is not merely proposing to his collaborators the development of their natural gifts of empathy but asking them to share the process by which Christ "studied

Though Don Bosco was capable of breath-taking activity and explosive joy, before the Eucharist he appears to us as the man of silent prayer. We need to meditate on this attitude of his. The silence is not an extrinsic and devotional element but an essential component which refers to the mystery. Often the hectic life to which we are called in days filled with apostolic commitments, has an essential need for this regenerating silence: it is a condition for making sure that the celebration does not become an external formality which finds us incapable of listening to the Word and of communion with the Lord.

4.2 An original pedagogy.

His personal experience and priestly concern for the souls of his youngsters led Don Bosco to draw up a catechetical preparation for approach to the Eucharist. In the pages of the Memoirs of the Oratory in which he speaks of his first communion are some of the elements of spiritual pedagogy which he will foster all through his life and propose insistently to his boys.

Don Bosco describes how, through the efforts of his mother, he was able to make his first communion a year before his companions. Reading between the lines we can discern his thought as Master of the spirit of young people, as he writes in the Preventive System: "Avoid as a plague the opinion that the first communion

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should be deferred to a later age(...) When a child can distinguish between Bread and bread, and shows sufficient knowledge, give no further thought to his age, but let the Heavenly King come and reign in that happy soul". Then there are his repeated references to the climate of recollection surrounding that event.

With the same insistence Don Bosco emphasizes the link between confession and communion, for which his mother not only encouraged him but prepared him with her recommendations about sincerity, repentance and a purpose of amendment, which were the very teachings that Don Bosco would pass on later to his boys. And then there is the reference to the newness of life to which the sacramental experience is linked and to the

poor.

This is an aspect of the mystery on which we must meditate at length and contemplate in silence of prayer and docility to the illumination of the Spirit. The eucharistic presence will open us to greater humility and authenticity. The Pope addressed a pressing invitation which come home to us: "I recommend to priests, to men and women religious and also to the laity, to continue and redouble their efforts to teach the younger generations the meaning and value of adoration and eucharistic devotion..."

3. THE CALL TO CELEBRATION

3.1 "I received from the Lord".

Once we have grasped the significance of the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, it should not surprise us that the Church, guided by paschal experience, has placed at the centre of its life and public identity the frequent and persevering practice of the 'breaking of the bread'. The process which links our Eucharist with the apostolic 'breaking of the Bread' and the Lord's Last Supper is marked by a long historical route and slow evolution of rites. It's not surprising that the Church preserves the words and actions of Jesus with affectionate attention, placing them at the heart of her finest celebration and passing them on with faithful care from one generation to the next.

Beyond the variations in the external forms of the rite, there is a significance we must not overlook. The Eucharist is a 'celebration', a ritual action which has as its subject the community of believers presided over by its own pastors in communion with the Bishop and with the Pope. The Eucharist does not appear with characteristics of the private action of a single person or occasional group. It manifests the hallmarks of a communal act.

The celebration of the Eucharist places us immediately in a relationship with others.

No one can be unaware of how important this is in an era marked by strong individual convictions, sometimes re-

flected in the daily experience of our communities. The celebration of the Eucharist places us immediately in a relationship with others. The very fact of coming together is itself a great act of faith - not some plan we have worked out for ourselves, but the knowledge we must show a community of disciples. The liturgical actions we carry out have meaning only to the extent that they refer us to something that He is doing today, through us.

Those of us who are priests must call to mind that our duty of presiding at the celebration is not the exercise of authority over the Eucharist, but a service of representing the Lord according to the Church's directives. Anyone who thought he could interpret and decide for himself about the rites in the name of ministry would display an extremely clerical concept of ministry which imposes on the community the priest's personal ideas.

3.2. **“You are the Body of Christ”.**

“If you want to understand the Body of Christ, listen to what the Apostle says to the faithful: ‘Now you are the Body of Christ and individually members of it’. (1 Cor 12:27)... This text of St. Augustine leads us to another point: the Eucharist as the sacrament which constitutes the Church.

The eucharistic celebration does not exist as an end in itself. Its purpose is to give rise to a humanity which lives in a communion of love and commitment with Jesus. The importance of this truth for our daily life and our pastoral activity will not escape anyone... the building of the Kingdom, of the Church, of our fraternal life does not appear as a task needing a great quantity of goodwill, but rather as the result of the Lord's Easter victory which we have always before us so that we can tend towards it and let ourselves be permeated by it. All the recent documents on religious life endorse this point and prompt us to a deep discovery of the eucharistic origin of the common life.

3.2 **“We proclaim your death”.**

Since it is at the origin of the Church the Eucharist is also at

the origin of the Church's mission. Vatican II had already taught authoritatively that “all the sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate are bound up with the Eucharist and are directed towards it”. We do not treat these statements as vague and mere comment, but we try to identify their real implications for our spiritual and apostolic life.

To say that the mission is born of the Eucharist means that we recognize that our educative and apostolic activity cannot be other than by participation in the mission of Jesus. The statement in our Constitutions according to which “the Salesian spirit finds its model and source in the very heart of Christ, Apostle of the Father” sees its greatest realization precisely in the Eucharist.

4. **A CALL TO CONVERSION**

When we apply what we have been saying to Salesian spirituality there are some images and sayings which spring almost at once to our minds: our three devotions, the pillars of the preventive system, the dream of the two columns. But generalized slogans, or the brief maxims of Don Bosco were the result of spiritual experience and long pedagogical practice.

4.1 **Don Bosco, man of the Eucharist.**

Don Lemoyne wrote in the Biographical Memoirs “Many people told us what we experienced every day. We assisted at his Mass many, many times and our faith was always intensified at the sight of the devotion which breathed from him by his exact performance of the sacred ceremonies, his clear pronunciation of the words, and in the fervour which accompanied his prayers”. The heights of intensity reached by Don Bosco in celebrating the Eucharist, sometimes accompanied by extraordinary phenomena, were not rare and isolated moments, but the result of a process marked by rigorous interior discipline and a well-tried fidelity.

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