

**Homily for the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe - Cycle B**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**

**November 21, 2021**

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Reverend Fathers, Deacons, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Yesterday I returned to Springfield after an intense week with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in Baltimore. It was good that there was a change in format for the meeting this year. Instead of having a morning of reflection at the end of the week, as we normally have done in the past, we started the week with Exposition and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Morning Prayer, Rosary, the Sacrament of Penance, and Benediction. It was good to see lots of Bishops going to Confession. That helped set a good tone and spirit for the meetings that followed. Much was discussed and decided, the most significant of which was approving a document on the meaning of the Eucharist, which has been given the title, *The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church*. It has the essentials of the doctrine and the discipline on the Eucharist and will be helpful as we prepare for the Eucharistic Revival in our diocese and nationwide.

Our Diocese is planning to participate in this Eucharistic Revival by observing a Year of the Eucharist, which will be opened at our former Cathedral, Saints Peter and Paul Church in Alton, on December 8, 2022, then conclude December 8, 2023, at our current Cathedral in Springfield. Parish activities throughout the Eucharistic Year will be encouraged, such as Corpus Christi processions, the Eucharistic miracle display, Eucharistic adoration, and study of Eucharistic documents. Our Diocesan Eucharistic Year will also include the Centennial Celebration of the transfer of the See City of our Diocese from Alton to Springfield in October of 2023. The details of the day are still being planned. The Eucharistic Revival will culminate with a National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis July 17-21, 2024.

Since much of the reporting on the meeting has been distorted through the secular media, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the main points of what this document actually says.

Contrary to what you may have seen in the headlines of newspapers, this document was not primarily about the eligibility of certain Catholic politicians to receive Holy Communion. The criteria for the worthy reception of Holy Communion are discussed, but they flow from the foundational understanding of the meaning of the Eucharist, as explained by Christ

Himself when He said, “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you” (n. 4, quoting Jn 6:53).

First of all, it is important that we understand the Eucharist as a sacrifice “because all that Jesus did for the salvation of humanity is made present in the celebration of the Eucharist, including his sacrificial death and resurrection” (n. 14).

The core belief of Catholics about the mystery of the Eucharist is our faith in the Real Presence of Christ: “The reality that, in the Eucharist, bread and wine become the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ without ceasing to appear as bread and wine to our five senses is one of the central mysteries of the Catholic faith. This faith is a doorway through which we, like the saints and mystics before us, may enter into a deeper perception of the mercy and love manifested in and through Christ’s sacramental presence in our midst. While one thing is seen with our bodily eyes, another reality is perceived through the eyes of faith. The real, true, and substantial presence of Christ in the Eucharist is the most profound reality of the sacrament” (n. 21).

It is also important to understand the relationship of Holy Communion, with a capital “C”, to communion, with a small “c”, which

refers to the bond of unity we share with Christ and with other members of the Catholic community. “The Sacrament of the Eucharist is called Holy Communion precisely because, by placing us in intimate communion with the sacrifice of Christ, we are placed in intimate communion with him and, through him, with each other” (n. 25). When that communion with Christ and the Christian community is ruptured through sin, our suitability to receive Holy Communion is adversely affected until we repent, confess our sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and receive absolution from a priest.

An example of a serious sin that impedes us from receiving Holy Communion is willfully missing Mass on Sunday. “During every Mass we are united with all the holy men and women, the saints, who have preceded us. The obligation to attend Mass each Sunday, the Lord’s Day, on which we commemorate the Resurrection of Jesus, and on other Holy Days of obligation, is therefore a vital expression of our unity as members of the Body of Christ, the Church. It is also a manifestation of the truth that we are utterly dependent upon God and his grace” (nn. 27-28).

Our response to God’s great gift of the Eucharist is thanksgiving and worship. “The word ‘Eucharist’ literally means ‘thanksgiving.’ Even our manner of giving thanks comes from God, for we do so by following the

command of the Lord: *do this in memory of me* (Lk 22:19). . . . We are actively giving thanks when we join in singing and in the responses; when we kneel, stand, and sit; and when we pay attention to the liturgical seasons where the entire history of what God has done for us, in and through his Son, is revealed to us” (nn. 30-31).

An essential part of our grateful response to God’s generous gift of Himself in the Eucharist is how we treat other people. In this regard, “Pope Francis has warned us that in our ‘throwaway culture’ we need to fight the tendency to view people as ‘disposable’: ‘Some parts of our human family, it appears, can be readily sacrificed for the sake of others considered worthy of a carefree existence. Ultimately, persons are no longer seen as a paramount value to be cared for and respected, especially when they are poor and disabled, “not yet useful” – like the unborn, or “no longer needed” – like the elderly.’ As Christians, we bear the responsibility to promote the life and dignity of the human person, and to love and to protect the most vulnerable in our midst: the unborn, migrants and refugees, victims of racial injustice, the sick and the elderly” (n. 38, quoting *Fratelli Tutti*, n. 18).

Our failure to love God and our neighbor as we should is called sin. “Christ began his public ministry by calling people to repentance and

conversion: “Repent, and believe in the gospel’ (Mk 1:15; cf. Mt 4:17). It is thus fitting that, at the beginning of every Mass, we are invited to acknowledge our sins in order to prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries. . . . While all our failures to do what is right damage our communion with God and with each other, they fall into different categories, reflecting different degrees of severity. This brings us to the distinction between venial and mortal sins. Venial sins are those sins and everyday faults that, although they reflect a degree of selfishness, do not break the covenant with God. They do not deprive the sinner of friendship with God or of sanctifying grace. Venial sins are not to be taken lightly, but they do not destroy communion because they do not destroy the principle of divine life in us. Indeed, reception of the Eucharist strengthens our charity and wipes away venial sins, while also helping us to avoid more serious sins. . . . There are some sins, however, that do rupture the communion we share with God and the Church, and that cause grave offense to human dignity. These are referred to as grave, or mortal, sins (see 1 Jn 5:16-17). One commits a mortal sin by freely, knowingly, and willingly choosing to do something that involves grave matter and that is opposed to charity, opposed to love of God and neighbor” (nn. 44-46).

“One is not to celebrate Mass or receive Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin without having sought the Sacrament of Reconciliation and received absolution. As the Church has consistently taught, a person who receives Holy Communion while in a state of mortal sin not only does not receive the grace that the sacrament conveys; he or she commits the sin of sacrilege by failing to show the reverence due to the sacred Body and Blood of Christ. St. Paul warns us that *whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. 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* (I Cor 11:27-29). To receive the Body and Blood of Christ while in a state of mortal sin represents a contradiction. The person who, by his or her own action, has broken communion with Christ and his Church but receives the Blessed Sacrament, acts incoherently, both claiming and rejecting communion at the same time. It is thus a counter-sign, a lie -- it expresses a communion that in fact has been broken” (n. 47).

“We also need to keep in mind that ‘the celebration of the Eucharist presupposes that communion already exists, a communion which it seeks to consolidate and bring to perfection.’ The Eucharist is the sacrament of

ecclesial communion, as it both signifies and effects most fully the communion with Christ that began in Baptism. This includes communion in its 'visible dimension, which entails communion in the teaching of the Apostles, in the sacraments and in the Church's hierarchical order.' Likewise, the reception of Holy Communion entails one's communion with the Church in this visible dimension. We repeat what the U.S. Bishops stated in 2006: 'If a Catholic in his or her personal or professional life were knowingly and obstinately to reject the defined doctrines of the Church, or knowingly and obstinately to repudiate her definitive teaching on moral issues, however, he or she would seriously diminish his or her communion with the Church. Reception of Holy Communion in such a situation would not accord with the nature of the Eucharistic celebration, so that he or she should refrain.' Reception of Holy Communion in such a situation is also likely to cause scandal for others, weakening their resolve to be faithful to the demands of the Gospel" (n. 48).

"One's communion with Christ and His Church, therefore, involves both one's "invisible communion" (being in the state of grace) and one's 'visible communion.' St. John Paul II explained: 'The judgment of one's state of grace obviously belongs only to the person involved, since it is a question

of examining one's conscience. However, in cases of outward conduct which is seriously, clearly and steadfastly contrary to the moral norm, the Church, in her pastoral concern for the good order of the community and out of respect for the sacrament, cannot fail to feel directly involved. The *Code of Canon Law* refers to this situation of a manifest lack of proper moral disposition when it states that those who "obstinately persist in manifest grave sin" are not to be admitted to Eucharistic communion.' It is the special responsibility of the diocesan bishop to work to remedy situations that involve public actions at variance with the visible communion of the Church and the moral law. Indeed, he must guard the integrity of the sacrament, the visible communion of the Church, and the salvation of souls" (n. 49).

"Before we receive Holy Communion, we should make a good examination of conscience to ensure that we are properly disposed to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord. If we find that we have broken communion with Christ and his Church, we are not properly disposed to receive the Eucharist. However, we should not despair since the Lord in his mercy has given us a remedy. He loves us and deeply desires to forgive us and to restore our communion with him. . . . In the words of Pope Francis, we say

to all Catholics in our country: “Don’t be afraid to go to the Sacrament of Confession, where you will meet Jesus who forgives you’” (n. 50).

Today the Church celebrates the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. As we receive Christ our King today in Holy Communion, may we remember that the “Lord is with us in the Eucharistic Mystery celebrated in our parishes and missions, in our beautiful cathedrals and in our poorest chapels. He is present and he draws near to us, so that we can draw nearer to him. The Lord is generous to us with his grace; and so we, by his grace, should always humbly ask him to give us what we need. . . . Let us adore Jesus who ever remains with us, on all the altars of the world, and lead others to share in our joy!” (nn. 58-59).

May God give us this grace. Amen.