

May 28, 2017

Sacrament of Charity:

The Eucharist and the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick

In last week's column we took a look at the Holy Eucharist and how it relates to the Sacraments of Initiation. Following Pope Benedict XVI's 2007 Apostolic Exhortation on the Sacrament of Charity, we will now take some time to reflect on the relationship between the Eucharist and Confession: The Sacrament of Reconciliation and Last Rites: The Anointing of the Sick.

Right off the bat the Holy Father reminds us that a love for the Eucharist leads to a growing appreciation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Understanding that the Eucharist, who is Jesus Christ, is love, and that He has died out of love for us, gives us good reason not to offend Him. A healthy (and holy) knowledge of our own sinfulness, and appreciation for the price Christ paid for our redemption, can lead us to the heart of both Sacraments. However, something is prevalent in our culture today that was for the most part hidden in others and we must be aware. Pope Benedict says, "We know that the faithful are surrounded by a culture that tends to eliminate the sense of sin and to promote a superficial approach that overlooks the need to be in a state of grace in order to approach sacramental communion worthily." (para. 20) Losing the sense of the seriousness of sin will cause us lose faith in and devotion to the Blessed Sacrament.

Consequently, Pope Benedict urges bishops to reinvigorate catechesis on the Eucharist and promote frequent confessions with their dioceses. He calls priests to make anew a call to continual conversion by being vigilant in their celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The confessionals ought to be a clear and visible sign of the importance of this Sacrament. And lastly, he encourages priests and the faithful to increase their practice of gaining indulgences because it shows us "how closely we are united as the Communion of Saints within the Church." Both the Sacrament and indulgences can be helpful in a renewed appreciation between the Eucharist and Confession.

Concerning the Sacrament of the Anointing of the sick, Pope Benedict exclaims, "If the Eucharist shows how Christ's sufferings and death have been transformed into love, the Anointing of the Sick, for its part, unites the sick with Christ's self-offering for the salvation of all, so that they too, within the mystery of the communion of saints, can participate in the redemption of the world. The relationship between these two sacraments becomes clear in situations of serious illness." (para. 22) Viaticum (the reception of holy communion when there is a probable danger of death) becomes the "seed of eternal life" since it gives the sick a glimpse of the fullness of the Pascal Mystery (a general term used to describe the redemptive work of Christ).

– Paul A. Ray