

June 11, 2017

The Sacrament of Charity:
The Eucharist and the Sacrament of Holy Orders

We pick up once again on our series on the Apostolic Exhortation “The Sacrament of Charity” by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI this week by looking into the relationship between the Holy Eucharist and the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Up until now, we’ve reviewed the connection between the Blessed Sacrament and the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick. Now, we continue onward and look at the very Sacrament which makes the Eucharist even possible.

It is clearly seen, first, that the connection between the Holy Eucharist and Holy Orders is the most obvious during Mass. The priest or bishop presiding at Mass, during consecration, stands in persona Christi (in the person of Christ the Head) to fulfill Christ’s command to “Do this in memory of Me” (Lk. 22:19). Jesus, in the Upper Room before His Passion, instituted the priesthood and the Eucharist at the same time. He Himself played the role of priest (offering the sacrifice to God), victim (being the very lamb who took on the sins of His people), and the altar itself. Since, therefore, Christ’s sacrifice was once and for all (Rm. 6:10; Hb. 7:27; Hb. 9:12; Hb. 9:26; Hb. 10), He gave His disciples the gift (Holy Orders) to be able to activate a means to distribute the graces merited by Him on the cross. This is the strongest relationship the Eucharist can have with another Sacrament.

Pope Benedict stresses the importance that the priest offering Mass understands that he has, as St. Augustine said, “... the office of the good shepherd, who offers his life for his sheep.” Priestly ordination is the indispensable condition for a validly celebrated Mass. This is one reason why the priesthood is so very important. No priesthood equals no Mass, which then equals no Catholic Church. The priest represents us, the laity, the whole body of believers, as He offers the Son to the Father on the altar. He stands as our representative. He should be conscious of the fact that the Holy Mass is not about him, or us either. His sole purpose is to point us to Christ, the true Sacrificial Lamb who made all this possible.

In view of how important the priesthood is for the Church, and because it’s too extensive to cover here, next week we will break down three aspects the priesthood itself to discover their own unique and particular relationship with the Eucharist priestly celibacy, the shortage of vocations and pastoral care. – Paul A. Ray