

June 14, 2017

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

Continuing with Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist as the Sacrament of Charity, we split into two articles the relationship between the Holy Eucharist and the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Last week, we looked into the union between Holy Orders, as a Sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ, and the Eucharist. This week we hope to dive into two separate aspects within Holy Orders, namely, priestly celibacy and the shortage of priests in today's world, and its relationship with the Blessed Sacrament.

The Holy Father saw fit to write briefly about the importance of priestly celibacy in his exhortation on the Eucharist to reinforce its long-standing meaning and why we have it. The Sacrament of Holy Orders, first of all, calls for complete configuration with the one being ordained with Christ. Pope Benedict says, "*The fact that Christ Himself, the eternal Priest, lived His mission even to the sacrifice of the Cross in the state of virginity constitutes the sure point of reference for understanding the meaning of the tradition of the Latin Church. It is not sufficient to understand priestly celibacy in purely functional terms. Celibacy is really a special way of conforming oneself to Christ's own way of life.* (para. 24)" Not only this, but the priesthood itself has a nuptial meaning. The ordained "weds" Christ which means he then has a profound identification with his Bridegroom and His Most Sacred Heart. Just as one man pledges his life and love towards his bride in the Sacrament of Matrimony (which we'll discuss next week), a priest pledges his whole being towards **his** Bride, Christ Jesus. "*Priestly celibacy,*" the Pope continues, "*lived with maturity, joy and dedication is an immense blessing for the Church and for society itself.*" The Holy Eucharist, therefore, is the "coming together" of a priest with his Beloved, the One to whom he's wed, in a complete and undivided way.

Pope Benedict, moreover, was also well aware of the shortage of priests. His concern was not that God Himself stopped calling men to the priesthood, but that men, because of the lack of the clergy teaching the richness and blessings of the priesthood, and promoting discernment and an attitude of interior openness to the priesthood, have not given God an open heart. With help of a supportive family, and most especially an understanding of the Catholic faith, and a deep love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, men, especially young men, will be able to hear the whispering call of almighty God to the religious life or the priesthood. We need priests. With no priests there is no Eucharist, with no Eucharist there is no Catholic Church. "*We must have*", the Holy Father ends with, "*greater faith and hope in God's providence.*" As He continues to call men to the priesthood and that He will always provide for His flock.

NEXT WEEK: The Blessed Sacrament and Holy Matrimony – *Paul A. Ray*