

## Pope Benedict XVI Points to a Eucharistic Call to Charity and Justice

Pope Benedict XVI's newest apostolic exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, or *Sacrament of Charity*, focuses on the Eucharist as the sacrament of love. It was released on Feb. 22, 2007, the day after Ash Wednesday and corresponded to the preparations by the universal Church to remember the first Eucharist during Holy Week. The exhortation emphasizes how the gift of the crucified Christ, made out of love for the liberation of the world, calls Christians to extend that same love to all of humanity through charity and work for justice. A Eucharistic encounter with God's love, the Pope says, leads us to see all people "from the perspective of Jesus Christ," to "become 'bread that is broken' for others, and to work for the building of a more just and fraternal world."



Quoting from his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, which focused both on the meaning of the love of God as well as the practice of love by the Church, Pope Benedict emphasizes that "'worship' itself, eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented." This Eucharistic "practice of love" has several important implications, according to Benedict:

### *The Eucharist Calls Christians to Reconciliation and Peace*

First, Pope Benedict points out that the Eucharist is the "sacrament of communion between brothers and sisters." This sacrament "urges those in conflict to hasten their reconciliation by opening themselves to dialogue and a commitment to justice," he writes. It is this "restoration of justice, reconciliation and forgiveness," he says, that "are the conditions for building true peace." It is only when we understand this, he continues, that we can truly work to "transform unjust structures and to restore respect for the dignity of all men and women, created in God's image and likeness."

Christians themselves, he says, must be "promoters of peace and justice." "All who partake of the Eucharist must commit themselves to peacemaking in our world scarred by violence and war, and today in particular, by terrorism, economic corruption and sexual exploitation," he writes. Because "Christ shed his blood for all," Benedict explains, "we must denounce situations contrary to human dignity" and "at the same time affirm the inestimable value of each individual person."

### *The Eucharist and World Hunger*

Another important theme in the exhortation is that the Eucharist—"the food of truth"—urges us to open our eyes to situations of injustice and our responsibility to make things right. It "demands that we denounce inhumane situations in which people starve to death because of injustice and exploitation, and it gives us renewed strength and courage to work tirelessly in the service of the civilization of love," Pope Benedict says.

Noting the ever-increasing number of refugees and displaced persons, the Pope urges, "We must denounce those who squander the earth's riches, provoking inequalities that cry out to heaven." "Are these human beings not our brothers and sisters?" he continues, noting that "these are situations for which human beings bear a clear and disquieting responsibility" and that "less than half of the huge sums spent worldwide on armaments would be more than sufficient to liberate the immense masses of the poor from destitution."



## *The Eucharist Calls Christians to Protect Creation*

The Eucharist should also inspire us to protect creation and to work for the renewal of the world, the Pope says. We should maintain "concern about threats to the environment present in so many parts of the world" and we should be committed "to working responsibly for the protection of creation," he writes. The Eucharist, he says, which "powerfully illuminates human history and the whole cosmos," calls us to also see the physical world and its renewal as "part of God's good plan." This relationship between the Eucharist and the cosmos can help us to grasp the profound relationship between creation and the renewed world that is to come, "inaugurated in the resurrection of Christ, the new Adam," the Pope writes.

## *The "Precious Legacy" of the Church's Social Teaching*

Finally, echoing *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict notes that while the Church must refrain from becoming a political institution, "she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the struggle for justice." Rather, he says, "The Church 'has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper.'"

The "precious legacy" of the Church's social doctrine, "handed down from the earliest ecclesial tradition," includes "great wisdom that guides Christians in their involvement in today's burning social issues," he concludes. Christians are called by the Eucharist to "assume their specific political and social responsibilities," guided by Catholic social teaching, the Pope writes.

Reaching out to the world is part of the Eucharistic experience, according to the Pope. He writes, "Worship pleasing to God can never be a purely private matter, without consequences for our relationships with others: it demands a public witness to our faith" in all issues, from defense of life, to "the promotion of the common good in all its forms."

### **Discussion/Reflection Questions**

1. Pope Benedict XVI lifts up the Church's social teaching as a guide in living out our Eucharistic responsibilities to address the social issues facing the world. What specific Catholic Social Teaching principles inform Pope Benedict's discussion of the social aspects of the Eucharist?
2. What is the connection between the Eucharist, love, and work for justice? What is the relationship between the Church and justice? Christians and justice?
3. Based on Pope Benedict XVI's exhortation, in what ways can people of faith be "bread that is broken" for others"?
4. According to Pope Benedict XVI, what is the relationship between the institutional Church and politics? Christians and politics?

### **Prayer**

With Pope Benedict XVI, we pray that our Eucharistic communion would become a concrete practice of love to our broken world.

Called to reconcile our sisters and brothers in conflict,  
Help us to be Eucharist for others.

Urged to denounce the structures that provoke inequalities,  
Help us to be Eucharist for others.

Summoned to work responsibly to protect God's creation,  
Help us to be Eucharist for others.

Guided by the precious legacy of the Church's social teaching,  
Help us to be Eucharist for others.

In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, we pray that we might "become 'bread that is broken for others,'" and that we can "work for the building of a more just and fraternal world."

