

Introduction

Devoted.

That's a strong word. It means to vow...

To give oneself over. To bind oneself to. To remain with.

To hold fast to something.

There is a shade of meaning here, too: to persist in spite of difficulty.

Luke tells us that the early Christians were *devoted*...

They held fast...

To the teaching of the Apostles...

To the communal life...

To the breaking of the bread... the meal where the community experienced Christ's presence...

And to the prayers

Pope Benedict, in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum caritatis* – the Sacrament of Charity – called us to that same vision.

There, he reminded us that the Eucharist is a Mystery to be Believed... Celebrated... and Lived.

Year of Faith / Eucharist – Mystery to be Believed / Gift

The disciples were devoted “to the teaching of the apostles”

They bound themselves to... gave themselves completely to... the gospel.

And they invited others to do the same... to walk through the doors of faith.

In this Year of Faith, we are reminded: as the baptized, that is our calling as well.

To hold that door of faith open – and invite others through.

To share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

To invite others not just to agree with a set of teachings or propositions...

But to *believe*...

At its root, the word means: to trust... to give one's heart to...

To enter into a living relationship with Christ – God-with-us.

That's why Pope Benedict spoke of the Eucharist as a Mystery to be Believed.

Not just that we assent to what the Church teaches about the Eucharist.

But that in the Eucharist we are invited into a living relationship with Christ... who offers himself as a gift... God's gift given for us... revealing God's love for all of us.

In the eucharist, as the Holy Father wrote, the Trinitarian God, "who is essentially love, becomes fully a part of our human condition" and through the Holy Spirit we become sharers in this "perfect communion of love" (8).

Isn't that a beautiful image? We are invited into the very heart of God.

Year of Worship / Eucharist – Mystery to be Celebrated / Reception

The disciples were devoted "to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers."

They held fast to the Eucharist – even when persecution came.

Like the Martyrs of Abitinae [AD 304 / Diocletian Persecution]...

The Roman Emperor had decreed that Christians could not assemble for worship, under penalty of death.

According to some versions of the story, the local governor had warned them not to gather... but that if they did, he would be forced to act.

What did they do? They gathered the next Sunday.

When asked why, they simply replied: *Sine dominico non possumus*

Without the Sunday assembly, the Eucharist, we simply cannot be.

It is like the air we breathe; life would be impossible without it.

We'd rather die than give that up.

Why such devotion?

Because it was there that they met the Risen Lord.

As do we.

In the word proclaimed and the community gathered—priest and people, head and members.

And especially in the Bread broken and shared; in the Blessed Sacrament.

What we are doing here, tonight, is not – cannot – be disconnected from what we did this morning.

As Pope Benedict wrote: “The act of adoration outside Mass prolongs and intensifies all that takes place during the liturgical celebration itself” (66).

In other words, Adoration is like Mass suspended, stretched out... so we can pay particular attention...

Have you ever had a moment when time stood still?

Maybe: When you stood before the grandeur of nature – at the foot of a mountain piercing the heavens, or on the shores of an azure sea with the waves lapping at your feet, or as the sun sank below the horizon in a blaze of oranges and reds and scarlets, or lying under a night sky with myriad stars stretching out to infinity.

Or: When you held your newborn for the first time... and he or she grasped your little finger in their tiny hand... and opened their eyes... and looked into the depths of your soul

Or: When you rested in the arms of your spouse, after having given yourselves to each other in self-emptying intimacy, two having become one.

If liturgy is the trysting place of God, where God the Lover comes to be with us, the Beloved...

And where we are changed by that meeting...

Then here, this liturgy, is where Lover and Beloved can gaze upon each other... in quiet and intimacy....

And we can let God’s love soak into our bones.

And so continue the work of making us more like Christ.

Not just for our own sake – but for the sake of the world.

Listen to Pope Benedict’s profound wisdom:

“[I]t is precisely this personal encounter with the Lord that then strengthens the social mission contained in the Eucharist, which seeks to break down not only the walls that separate the Lord and ourselves, but also and especially the walls that separate us from one another” (66).

Year of Witness / Eucharist – Mystery to be Lived / Return-Gift

And so the disciples didn't go at it alone.

They also devoted themselves "to the communal life"

To being "together... and [holding] all things in common"

To sharing their meals "with exultation and sincerity of heart"

Loved first... they were able to love others.

And that's what attracted so many early followers: "See how they love one another."

So... if we stay here, if we think Mass or Adoration is just about me-and-Jesus... we've got it wrong.

Having encountered Christ in the liturgy, we've been changed.

And changed, we are sent. All of us.

To live Eucharistically, making our lives a constant self-offering to God.

To be missionaries.

I remember when our daughter Mary was 5. On one of those long car rides between St. Cloud and Chicago, she asked (innocent, curious); "Daddy, why are there poor people?"

Perhaps it was because I was deep into my theological studies, or perhaps it was the Holy Spirit at work – but I answered: "Because we don't take the Mass seriously enough."

There is a deep connection between Eucharist and social justice—between what we do in here and what we do out there—that we need to remember.

As Pope Benedict challenged us: "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" (SC 83).

-yes, in evangelization, in explicitly proclaiming Christ;

-but also in works of charity, as Pope Benedict continues:

"Because of our intimate encounter with God in the Eucharist, we are able to see others—not with our own eyes and feelings—but with the eyes of Christ, who has compassion for all."

-and in striving for justice – again, in the words of the Holy Father:

"Our communities, when they celebrate the Eucharist, must become ever more conscious that the sacrifice of Christ is for all, and that the Eucharist thus compels all who believe

in him to become ‘bread that is broken’ for others, and to work for the building of a more just and fraternal world.... Each of us is truly called, together with Jesus, to be bread broken for the life of the world” (88).

It means... that if we dare to take part in the Eucharist... and gather here in Christ’s presence... we must also... as Pope Benedict called us...

Commit ourselves to peacemaking, in a world scarred by violence... war... and exploitation; (89)

We must:

Denounce every affront to human dignity, and work to affirm the value of each person; (89)

We must:

Confront those who squander the earth's riches, wounding creation and provoking inequalities that cry out to heaven (cf. *Jas* 5:4); (90)

We must:

Strive to overcome the situations of extreme poverty in which a great part of humanity still lives... (90)

Conclusion

Because, in the end, Eucharist is more verb than noun.

It is God’s gift giving.

It is our grateful reception... and transformation.

It is our sacrificial living in return.

In the end, Eucharist is to be: “Firmly believed... devoutly celebrated... and intensely—joyfully—lived...”