

Loving God and Our Neighbor:

Living the Mission of the Eucharist



**A PASTORAL LETTER TO THE PEOPLE
OF THE DIOCESE OF KALAMAZOO**



**Most Reverend Paul J. Bradley
Bishop of Kalamazoo**



Loving God and Our Neighbor:

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A PASTORAL LETTER TO THE FAITHFUL PEOPLE
OF THE DIOCESE OF KALAMAZOO



By Most Reverend Paul J. Bradley, D.D., M.S.W.
Bishop of Kalamazoo

Episcopal motto: *“Waiting in Joyful Hope”*

*Jesus said: “I am the Bread of Life.
Whoever comes to me will never go hungry,
and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”*

— Jn 6:35

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INTRODUCTION:

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all fall asleep, but we will all be changed. These are the words of St. Paul to the Church in Corinth (1 Cor 15:51). The mystery St. Paul shares with his fellow Christians is that the gift of Eternal Life, won for us by the Suffering, Death and Resurrection of Jesus, ensures that, though we will die at the end of our lives in this world, our souls will be changed and we will live with God in the fullness of life forever.

In the busyness of our human lives, amidst life's joys and sorrows, no matter how much we suffer from pain, illness, fear, anxiety, injustice, or the absence of love in our lives, Jesus Christ is our hope. Because God our Father loves us unconditionally, and because of Jesus' act of Redemption for all on Calvary, we are filled with joy. Why? Because Jesus heals our wounds; He comforts us; He protects us and He strengthens us so that we can live fully, and freely, in Him.

Once we have truly experienced this great mystery at the heart of our Catholic faith, we will realize that Jesus loves us so much that He wants to be one with us. St. Paul uses a very profound, nuptial image for how Jesus wants to be one with us: His love for us is like a bridegroom's desire to be intimately united with his bride, to become "one flesh." In an even greater way, Jesus loves each one of us so much that He wants to become one with us in every dimension of our lives. He accomplishes this oneness through the gift of Himself, the gift of His Body and Blood.

Jesus unites Himself to us under the forms of bread and wine that are transformed into His own Body and Blood. We call this gift "Eucharist," which comes from the Greek word for thanksgiving (ευχαριστία) because the most appropriate response we can have to Jesus' amazing gift is a profound, "thank you."

EUCHARIST AS MISSION: THE PURPOSE OF THIS PASTORAL LETTER



You may have read that a recent survey conducted by *The Pew Research Center (What Americans Know about Religion, Pew Research Study, July 2019)* concluded that most Catholics do not understand this fundamental teaching of the Church concerning the *Real Presence of our Lord* in the Eucharist. According to this research, nearly seven-in-ten Catholics (69 percent) believe that the bread and wine remain *symbols* of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ during the Mass. Just one-third of U.S. Catholics (31 percent) believe that the bread and wine *actually become* the Body and Blood of Jesus during Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

As Bishop of our beloved Diocese of Kalamazoo, it is not only my responsibility but also my privilege to make every effort to ensure that the teaching of the Church on the Eucharist is made known to all members of our Catholic community in southwest Michigan in all its fullness so that they can know, and take comfort in, this essential mystery of our faith. Therefore, I want to share with you what we believe and *why* this teaching is so important to our experience of God's love and goodness. This teaching is at the center of what it means for us to live the Eucharist by knowing, loving and serving Jesus. That is why I am inviting you to reflect with me prayerfully on three essential aspects of the Eucharistic Mystery:

1) Real Presence/ Spiritual Nourishment: What happens when the bread and wine are transformed into Christ's Body and Blood is real. It is miraculous! It is not merely symbolic. **When we receive the Eucharist, Jesus Himself comes to us into our minds, our hearts, and our bodies.** He lives within us providing spiritual nourishment and filling us with the power of His grace. The fact that this happens each time we receive the Eucharist is a miracle of God's amazing love and grace that we should never take for granted.

2) Unity: Jesus gives Himself to us because He loves us and He wants to be united with us. When Jesus is our first priority, everything else finds its proper place. Since the Eucharist truly is the "source and summit" of Christian life, then our reception of Holy Communion should be a grateful, loving encounter with Jesus, the Lord of Life. When we receive our Lord in Holy Communion, He becomes one with us, and we become one with Him in the same "holy moment" (*sacra-mentum*). This is not merely a symbolic unity, since a sacrament is what it signs. It is genuine Communion with God Himself, the actual coming-together-as-one of Jesus and each one of us, when we receive Him with an open heart. Of course, our souls must be free of any serious sin before receiving this most precious Gift. This is why we are grateful that Jesus' forgiveness and mercy are readily available to those in need of it in the Sacrament of Penance (Confession). Once we are in a state of sanctifying grace, this amazing gift of Jesus' Body and Blood nourishes, renews, and fully prepares us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to love God and to love our neighbor.

“

the **Eucharist** makes it possible

for us to receive our **Lord**

with a **clean heart**

and to accept **His** invitation

to be **missionary
disciples**

in **service** to others

”


3) Serving others: By receiving the Holy Eucharist, God’s grace fills us to overflowing. As stewards of this grace, we are compelled to share it generously with all God’s people. This is what “Living the Mission of the Eucharist” means. Together with the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Penance (Confession), **the Eucharist makes it possible for us to receive our Lord with a clean heart and to accept His invitation to be missionary disciples in service to others.** Allowing Jesus to transform us to be more like Himself, and the Gift of Himself for us on the Cross, to give ourselves to Him and to others, is at the heart of missionary discipleship.

Pope Francis consistently teaches that our baptism calls us to be missionary disciples of Jesus Christ who bring His Good News, the Gospel, to others — in our homes and workplaces, in our parishes and neighborhoods, as well as through our individual contributions of time, talent and treasure to the Church’s worldwide mission. “Before all else,” the Holy Father says, “the Gospel invites us to respond to the God of love who saves us, to see God in others and to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others” *Evangelii Gaudium* / (*The Joy of the Gospel*, par. 39).



As missionary disciples of Jesus Christ, who have been intimately united with Him and with His Church in the Eucharist, our mission is to proclaim the Good News, visit the sick, comfort those who are in any kind of trouble, and serve the poor and vulnerable in Jesus' name. We then return to Jesus, to receive Him again in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood. Each time we encounter Him in the Eucharist, we recommit ourselves to the mission He calls us to live. It is a continuous, circular motion: we receive the Eucharist to obtain the spiritual strength to fulfill our mission, which brings us back to be renewed in the Eucharist; over and over, Jesus remains our strength so that we can live a Eucharistic life.

As our Holy Father says:

A God who draws near out of love, walks with His people... We could never have imagined that the same Lord would become one of us and walk with us, be present with us, present in His Church, present in the Eucharist, present in His Word, present in the poor. He is present, walking with us. And this is closeness: the shepherd close to His flock, close to His sheep, whom He knows, one by one. (Pope Francis Homily, Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, June 7, 2013)



Holy Communion

Our intimate connection, our Communion, with Jesus is not just for our own benefit. It strengthens our relationship with every member of the Body of Christ, the Church, for the benefit of all. Each time we are united with Christ through the reception of Holy Communion, Jesus sends us out to share in His work. As members of Christ's Body, we are called to act as His hands, His feet, and His compassionate heart. Just as we are inspired by Veronica's kindness to Jesus, as depicted in the Sixth Station of the Way of the Cross leaving the imprint of His face on the towel she used to comfort Him, so also in response to our loving service to others (spouses, family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, even strangers), Jesus leaves this same imprint of His face on those we serve with love. Others can see Jesus through us and our works of service. We need to pray, reflect, and seek opportunities to re-encounter Jesus so that we can come to a deeper realization of what takes place within us each time we receive Jesus' Body and Blood.

And so we come to see that the Sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist is the sign of God's constant desire to be one with His people, and He does so through this powerful sacrament that makes us one with Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

Through the Eucharist, **His divinity is united with our humanity**, and that is what compels us, and enables us, to share this wonderful experience with everyone we meet.



Jesus Comes to Us

The Eucharist is a gift freely given by Jesus to His disciples, and to all of us, at the Last Supper. Jesus is the one who gives us the gift, but He is also the Gift itself. Because He loves us and wants to be united with us, Jesus is both the Giver and the Gift. Once again, we look to the beautiful image of a bride and bridegroom: when two people love each other so much that they want to be united in love forever, they give themselves completely (mind, body and spirit) in the Sacrament of Matrimony. That is what Jesus does — He gives Himself to us in His Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, in this sacramental way, as an ultimate sign, as well as cause, of His love and care for us.



The Eucharist is both a sacrifice (the Memorial of Christ's Passion, Death and Resurrection) and a banquet (the joyful celebration of a new Passover Feast.) *As the Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, "The Mass is at the same time, and inseparably, the sacrificial memorial in which the sacrifice of the cross is perpetuated and the sacred banquet of communion with the Lord's body and blood. But the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice is wholly directed toward the intimate union of the faithful with Christ through communion. To receive communion is to receive Christ Himself who has offered Himself to us" (CCC 1382).



Jesus is the Bread of Life

"Truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53). Jesus offers Himself to us as the Bread of Life and the gift of life eternal. From Him, we receive nourishment, strength and transformation in both our souls and our bodies. Each time we receive His Body and drink His Blood, we are renewed in Christ's life. It is our responsibility to receive Him with the proper disposition so that we will be able to know, love and serve Him wholeheartedly.

Not only do we believe that Jesus is with us in the Eucharist when we receive Holy Communion during Mass, but also we believe He continues to be with us when we adore Him in the Blessed Sacrament outside of Mass. As the United States Conference of Bishops (USCCB) has stated:



The Body of Christ under the appearance of bread that is kept or “reserved” after the Mass is commonly referred to as the “Blessed Sacrament.” There are several pastoral reasons for reserving the Blessed Sacrament. First of all, it is used for distribution to the dying (Viaticum), the sick, and those who legitimately cannot be present for the celebration of the Eucharist. Secondly, the Body of Christ in the form of bread is to be adored when it is exposed, as in the Rite of Eucharistic Exposition and Benediction, when it is carried in Eucharistic processions, or when it is simply placed in the tabernacle, before which people pray privately. [As outlined in “The Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist: Basic Questions and Answers,” a document produced by the Committee on Doctrine of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and approved by the full body of bishops at the June 2001 General Meeting.

Because we believe that the bread and wine are truly transformed into the Body and Blood of Jesus, we firmly believe that He remains present with us in the Eucharist, which is why the Blessed Sacrament is also reserved in the tabernacle in our churches. In a very similar way, when we receive Jesus Himself in the Eucharist, each one of us becomes a living tabernacle. With that in mind, consider for a moment:

Do we extend the reverence and respect we have for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament to one another and to all we meet, who bear the image of God within them?

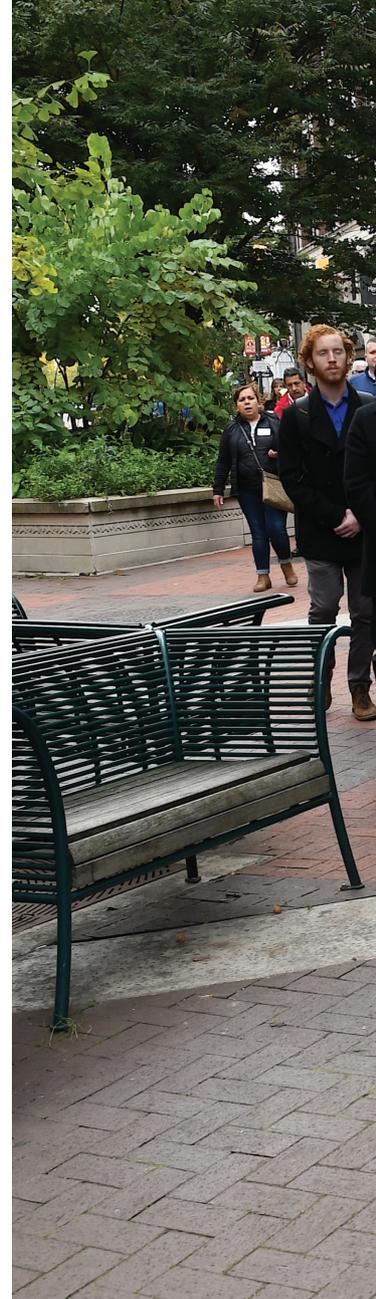
“Here I am, Lord.
I have come to
do your will”

— Heb 10:7

This great miracle, which we acknowledge as the Real Presence, means that we have unprecedented access to our Lord and Savior. He comes to us and makes Himself available to us in the most extraordinary ways imaginable.

The *Catechism* reminds us that the only appropriate response to Christ’s gift of self is one of thanksgiving: “The Eucharist is a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Father, a blessing by which the Church expresses her gratitude to God for all His benefits, for all that He has accomplished through creation, redemption and sanctification” (CCC 1360).

As we offer our prayers of thanksgiving following our reception of Holy Communion, or as we adore Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, we should pray in the words of Sacred Scripture, “*Here I am, Lord. I have come to do your will*” (Heb 10:7). Jesus comes to us in the Eucharist, but we also go to Him, gratefully offering Him the gift of ourselves.





JESUS SENDS US FORTH

Our encounter with Jesus Christ in the Eucharist should never leave us with a sense of complacency, concerned only with our own needs. If, as the *Catechism* teaches, “The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented to it” (CCC 1324), then our Lord’s gift of self to us is intended to inspire and strengthen us for service to others. Every work of charity we perform in Jesus’ name, and every witness we give to the demands of charity, mercy and peacemaking, has its source in the Eucharist. God’s love and mercy extended to us in the Eucharist is what allows us to help bring Christ’s saving grace to the world.



This is why the story does not end at the Last Supper or on Calvary. Instead, the disciples received the Great Commission from Jesus as He was about to return to His Father in heaven (cf. Mt 28: 18-20). As baptized and confirmed Christians, we too receive the Commission to go out to the whole world, proclaiming and teaching the Gospel to the ends of the Earth, in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. By our own efforts, most of us would not get very far as evangelists, missionaries, or ministers of the Gospel; but, with the help of God's grace, we can bring the transformative love of Jesus to all we meet.

In the familiar passage of St. Luke's Gospel (Lk 10:1-9), when Jesus sends His 72 disciples to proclaim the Good News to the people, He makes it clear that He will provide us with everything we need to do His work. He even tells us, *"Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals; and greet no one along the way."* All we need is Jesus Himself, who accompanies us every step of our journey of faith.

“Whatever you did for one of the
least brothers or sisters of Mine,
you did for me.”

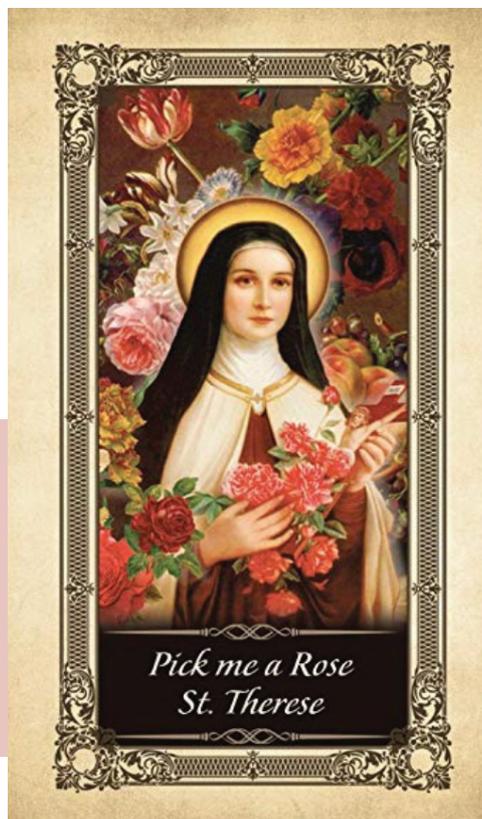
— Mt 25:40

The works of charity that we perform by the grace of God after we have encountered Jesus in the Eucharist may not be heroic acts by the world’s standards. Still, our reception of the Eucharist should enable us to perform ordinary works of charity each day, to work for justice and to be peacemakers wherever we find ourselves — in our homes and families, our neighborhoods and parishes, our country and our Church.

In addition to works of charity, our regular reception of the Body and Blood of Christ should empower us to be women and men of courage who are not afraid to advocate for the dignity of life at every stage of the life spectrum, and to work for the common good in all aspects of life. Regardless of our state of life — old or young, married or single, rich or poor, clergy or laity — when we receive Holy Communion, we also receive Jesus’ mandate to preach, to bring healing, to inspire, to comfort and to serve all God’s people according to our individual gifts and talents. All of us are called to serve others with the compassionate heart of Jesus, especially the poor and vulnerable.

Remember Jesus’ words in the Parable about the Final Judgement: “Whatever you did for one of the least brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me.” (Mt 25:40) Every one of the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy, which are ordinary but critically important daily works of charity, find their inspiration in these words of Jesus

St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, known as the “Little Flower”, once said: “I know of one means only by which to attain to perfection: love.” (St. Thérèse *Letter to her cousin, Marie Guerin*). Little things lovingly carried out in Jesus’ name are all that our Lord expects of us. His grace makes all our good works possible.





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Jesus awaits our return

In addition to the graces we receive in the Eucharist, we should also find our strength through regular prayer and daily devotions, such as the Morning and Evening Prayer of the Church (Liturgy of the Hours), Eucharistic Adoration, the regular praying of the rosary and other Marian devotions. They provide opportunities for us to express our personal piety and to participate in the many and varied cultural religious expressions to be found in our local parishes and communities of faith.

Those whom Jesus sends out nourished by His Eucharistic Presence are called and invited to come back and repeat the experience over and over again. That is why participation in the Sunday Mass is so important, beyond an obligation to observe God's commandment. The Eucharist gives us an intimate connection to Jesus, and we need this grace to sustain us in our witness to Him and our service to others.

Our family, our Domestic Church

In addition to the liturgy we celebrate in our parish church, there is also the faith life of the “domestic church”, which we should observe in our homes and with our families. We believe that every home and family should be a place where we can pray together, focus on spiritual formation and encourage acts of charity and service for others. In many ways, the family home is an *ecclesia* (a church) for an assembly of believers, whose missionary outreach certainly includes our own family members, but also encompasses all those whom we encounter outside the home, at work or school or in our social activities. Because our reception of the Eucharist during Mass is grace-filled, we will carry Jesus with us wherever we go and in whatever we do, and especially to those with whom we live each day.

All the while we are doing what Jesus calls us to do — whether that is completing household chores, taking care of children or those who are sick or elderly, performing our jobs or the ministries and apostolic work we do, Jesus is with us. He also waits for us to return so we can receive Him again in Holy Communion, spend time adoring Him in the Blessed Sacrament, and speak with Him and listen to Him in our daily prayers and devotions. God's gift of Himself to us in the Eucharist is never a one-time experience. The Eucharist is always available, offering to us again and again the gift we need as we go about our daily lives.



Because Jesus is always present to us, especially in the Eucharist, He is also always ready to share with us His love and mercy, His strength and hope. What a magnificent treasure we have been given in the Lord's Body and Blood. We should never hesitate to return to Jesus as often as we can.

The great saints, such as St. Francis of Assisi, St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, our own Michigan native Blessed Solanus Casey, and many others, are powerful examples of people who were constantly pouring themselves out for those in need, but who realized that their strength could only come from frequent reception of, and prayerful time before, the Holy Eucharist. We all know men and women who are truly saintly people, those whom Pope Francis likes to refer to as "next door saints," (*Gaudete et Exultate / Rejoice and Be Glad*, par. 6 and 7) people who love Jesus and who perform small things with great love in His name. We can learn from their example. If we ask them why they keep coming back to Jesus, especially to Jesus in the Eucharist, they will more than likely report that it is only with His grace that they can keep doing what they do, and that they are deeply grateful for the opportunities Jesus gives to receive Him, and serve Him in the Eucharist. We learn from these saintly people that the good works that we do should always be rooted in our love for Jesus and His love for us, and through us, to those whom we serve. Unless we draw from the divine strength of Jesus, we run the risk of burnout, or spiritual exhaustion, which results from relying more upon ourselves than upon Christ.

In our diocese, we are so blessed to know that the Eucharist is available to us on a daily basis. We need to thank God for making this possible through our priests and we should take advantage of this spiritual blessing as often as we can.

An Invitation

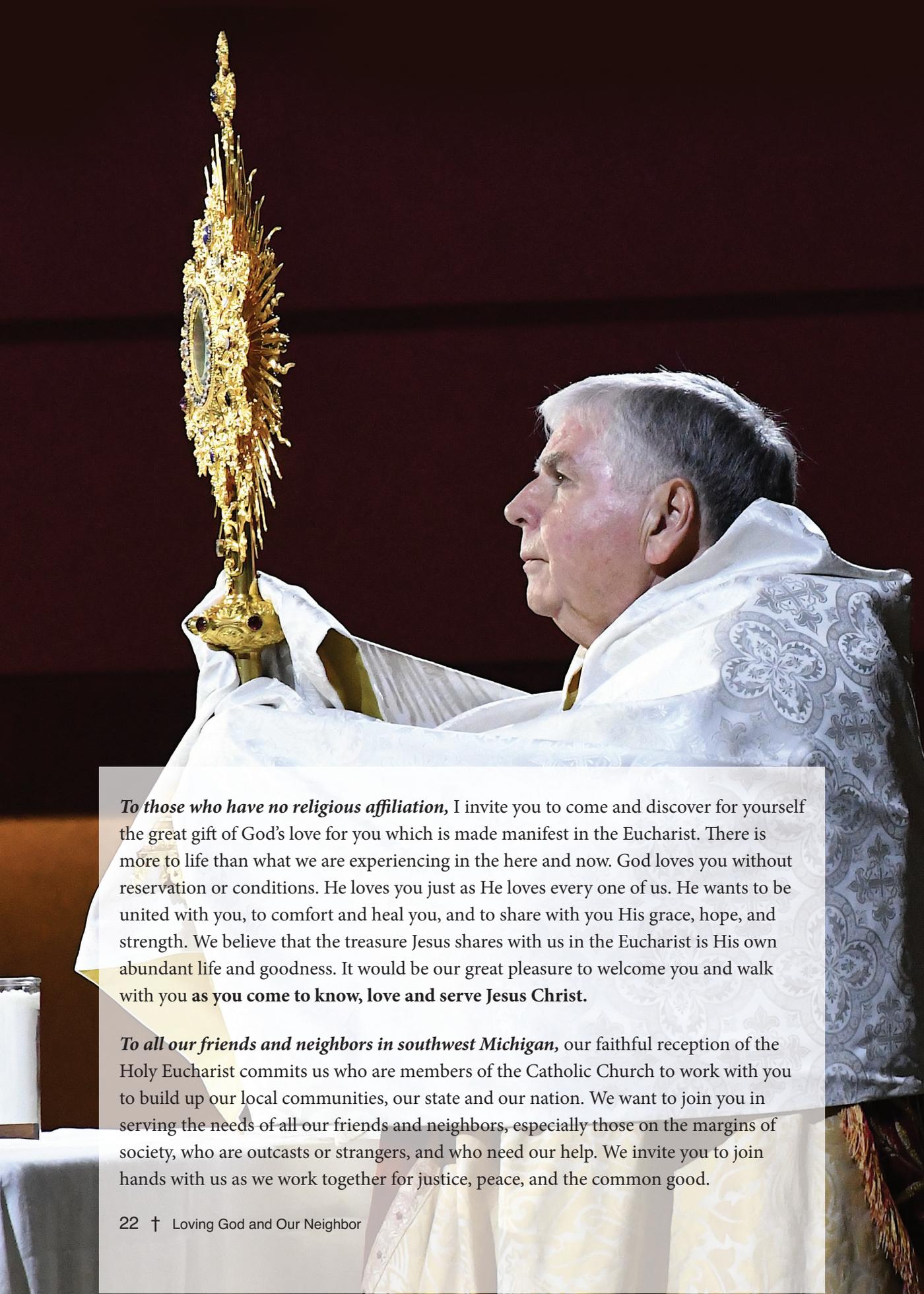
I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to share the Good News of Christ's love for us, and of His Presence in the Eucharist, with as many others as you can. I realize that your response to this invitation will take different forms depending on your relationship to Jesus and to the Catholic Church, but I offer this invitation with great sincerity and a genuine desire for your willing affirmative response.

To faithful Catholics, I invite you to continue, and to strengthen, your commitment to frequent and worthy reception of this sacred sacrament. By the grace of God's loving mercy, experienced powerfully in the Sacrament of Penance, may you grow in your understanding and appreciation for Christ's gift of Himself to you. Renew the promises made at your baptism to be active missionary disciples empowered by the Eucharist to serve others generously, and you will discover that the rewards you receive will far outweigh whatever sacrifices you have to make to help carry on the mission of our Church.

To our priests: My brothers, I implore you to take seriously the charge that has been given to you, the keepers and guardians of the Eucharist. I remind you that you cannot be an effective priest until your life is Eucharistically-centered. Your prayerful participation in daily Mass and your faithful observance of a Holy Hour are both essential to keeping you strong and spiritually nourished so that you can worthily fulfill your responsibilities.

To inactive Catholics, Our Church misses you. Through your baptism, you are part of our Family of Faith, and on behalf of our diocese, I sincerely regret — and apologize for — whatever it was that led you away from us. I invite you to rediscover the miracle that takes place when Christ comes to us in the Eucharist. Take full advantage of the Sacrament of Penance, and then receive Him with an open heart and mind; experience once again (or perhaps for the first time) what full participation in the life of the Church can mean for you. Allow Christ to heal, comfort, and strengthen you so that you will feel compelled to share this Good News with others. Please come back to us. We need you, and we believe you need the graces that can only come from the Eucharist.





To those who have no religious affiliation, I invite you to come and discover for yourself the great gift of God's love for you which is made manifest in the Eucharist. There is more to life than what we are experiencing in the here and now. God loves you without reservation or conditions. He loves you just as He loves every one of us. He wants to be united with you, to comfort and heal you, and to share with you His grace, hope, and strength. We believe that the treasure Jesus shares with us in the Eucharist is His own abundant life and goodness. It would be our great pleasure to welcome you and walk with you **as you come to know, love and serve Jesus Christ.**

To all our friends and neighbors in southwest Michigan, our faithful reception of the Holy Eucharist commits us who are members of the Catholic Church to work with you to build up our local communities, our state and our nation. We want to join you in serving the needs of all our friends and neighbors, especially those on the margins of society, who are outcasts or strangers, and who need our help. We invite you to join hands with us as we work together for justice, peace, and the common good.

The Diocesan Eucharistic Congress

On October 19th, 2019, our Diocese of Kalamazoo hosted a historic Eucharistic Congress. I invited all the faithful to join with me, and all our clergy, at the Diocesan Eucharistic Congress, to come together as one before our Lord in the Most Blessed Sacrament, united in our shared mission, strengthened by the source and summit of our faith in the Eucharist, and inspired to be guided by the Holy Spirit. My dear sisters and brothers, we filled our large venue to overflowing with **more than 1,000 people of all ages**, from our many diverse ethnic backgrounds — including our large Hispanic population, our growing Burmese population, and some of our African-American and Native-American sisters and brothers as well. They came from just about every parish in the nine counties of our diocese. They came to spend the day with Jesus, Present in the Eucharist. We began with Mass, carried Jesus in procession through the large hotel to a room reserved for Adoration throughout the day, and concluded with a procession through the hotel, around the nearby streets of Kalamazoo, ending with Benediction.

It was a grace-filled celebration, and a special moment in the life of our diocese. We joined together in prayer as People of Faith with a renewed commitment to confront the culture of today, introducing the person of Jesus to the nine counties of southwest Michigan, and to find new ways for the Church to carry out the mission of Jesus throughout the Diocese of Kalamazoo in the years to come.

I believe this significant participation are 1,000 faithful members of our Church and their enthusiastic response an indication that our people are hungering, thirsting, and yearning for a renewed focus on this most Precious Gift of the Eucharist; there was clear evidence of that fact at that Eucharistic Congress. I believe that our people are longing for their bishops, priests, and deacons to lead by example. We need to show that we know that Jesus is present in His Word by the way we proclaim and live the Word; and that we love Jesus in the Eucharist, in the way that we revere His Sacred Presence, and let it transform our hearts into hearts of charity and compassion.

Another reason why I convened this historic Eucharistic Congress is because of the stark realities we experience regarding the practice of our faith. For example, we know that in our diocese only 30 percent of all registered Catholics are practicing their faith regularly, which is, sadly, consistent with the national average. We know from census data that more than 60 percent of the people in southwest Michigan profess no religious affiliation (what the media has dubbed “nones”). Many of us may even experience in our own families the fact that while the faith of many young people is extremely strong, for others, the Catholic faith is not always being passed on as effectively today as it was in previous generations.



CONTINUING THE MISSION OF JESUS

During one of his recent Sunday Angelus reflections, Pope Francis identified a specific characteristic of missionary disciples. He put it this way:

“The missionary disciple has first of all a center, a point of reference, which is the person of Jesus.” (Angelus Address, June 25, 2017)

What I think Pope Francis means is that we should not be advancing our own agenda, but the mission of Jesus, the one He gave His twelve Apostles and to His Church. We are Jesus’ disciples, His followers; we are called to be His messengers, bringing His life-giving Word to the world.

As we move closer to our 50th anniversary, it is my sincere hope that our diocese will become mission-driven. Imagine what it would be like if we all opened ourselves to a renewal of heart by the Holy Spirit. What if we all shared this Good News of Jesus and the wonderful gift of the Eucharist to others as easily or fervently as we talk about other interests, such as good movies, or our favorite sporting event? What if our biggest problems would be trying to manage traffic jams in our parking lots after Mass, or trying to deal with the waiting lists for enrollment in our Catholic schools, or how to welcome and manage all those who heed Jesus’ call to follow Him and to serve the Church as priests and sisters, or how to accommodate all those who are returning to the practice of their faith? Just imagine how wonderful all of that would be.

As Jesus’ disciples, when we share a common vision, and take seriously the mission Jesus has entrusted to each of us — when we come to Mass and receive the Eucharist with the sure faith that Jesus is truly present with us — when we allow the Holy Spirit to set us on fire with the



love for Jesus in our hearts, and move from maintenance mode to a mission-driven mode — then, by the power of God’s grace, wonderful, life-changing and Spirit-activated things will take place.

Christ’s Vision for the Future

Jesus taught us the most important Commandment: to *love God and love our Neighbor* (Mt 22:37-39). He has also given us the Great Commission: “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*” (Mt 28: 18-20). We know that the Scriptures tell us often that God is always close to the poor, and Jesus identified Himself with humanity in its poverty. The Gospels show us, often in great detail, how Jesus freely gave Himself to heal, comfort, and raise up all who were oppressed by poverty, illness, injustice, or any kind of suffering.

So, as Jesus’ disciples, we too must “*hear the cries of the poor.*” How do we do that in the face of such poverty and suffering in the world? By ourselves, we could never give enough money to a brother or sister begging on the street corner to change his or her life; but, empowered by our Communion with Jesus in the Eucharist, and enlightened by His Holy Spirit, we can see with eyes of faith that the one who begs is a fellow human being, made in the image and likeness of God. Consider the profound impact of a genuinely Eucharistic life: *What if each of us, after receiving Jesus’ gift of Himself in the Eucharist, recommitted ourselves to loving God with all our hearts and loving our neighbors (all people) justly as Jesus commands? Wouldn’t that resolve all the problems we struggle with in the world today? Can you visualize a world in which everyone is treated with the dignity and respect due a child of God? **This is Christ’s Vision for the Future.***

My Sisters and Brothers, I am convinced that Jesus is calling us to become one with Him in Holy Communion, but also to help Him carry His message of love, justice, and peace to everyone we meet. How do we carry out this mission? First and foremost, by the way we live, by our personal witness to the Gospel and to the teachings of our Church, and then, by the words we use to teach about Jesus and to spread His Good News.

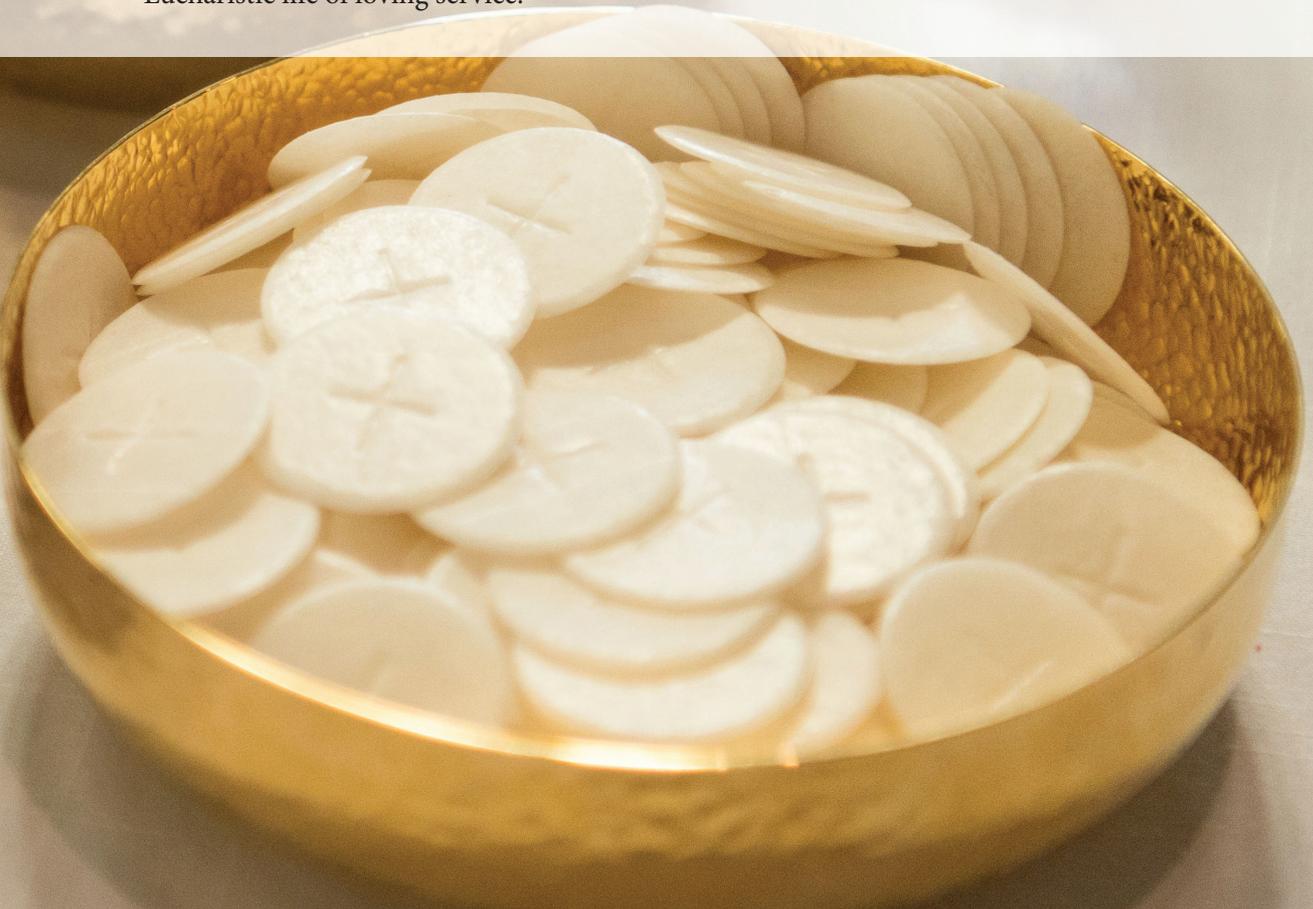
As Jesus selflessly gives Himself, never holding back, to the ultimate measure of giving His life for us, and now giving Himself through the Eucharist, so are we called to share ourselves just as generously, making sure that our Faith in God is the priority in our lives. We are called to be generous stewards of the great Gift Jesus gives us in the Eucharist through gifts of our time, talent and treasure. Through that generous gift of ourselves, we are in some measure giving back to God what He most desires: ourselves. This fathomless Mystery of love is expressed most perfectly in the Eucharist.



A Year of the Eucharist

My Sisters and Brothers, the Eucharist is the key that allows us to unlock and embrace our understanding of Jesus' vision. I believe with all my heart that He is calling us to become one with Him in Holy Communion and to become His joyful missionary disciples, proclaiming His message of love, justice, mercy, and peace to everyone we meet.

Therefore, in order to continue the promotion of Jesus' mission that flows from the Eucharist and our outreach to those in need through works of charity and justice, I am pleased to announce a ***Year of the Eucharist*** in our diocese during calendar year 2020. Throughout this year-long period of prayer, reflection and action to be observed and celebrated throughout southwest Michigan, we will explore in greater detail the themes discussed in our Eucharistic Congress and in this Pastoral Letter. During the Year of the Eucharist, we will pay special attention to the ways to foster our love and devotion to Jesus, who unites Himself with us in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood, and then sends us out to continue our mission as His disciples. In light of the significant lack of clarity in our own Catholic people's minds about the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and the clear evidence of enthusiasm and energy of those who recently attended the Eucharistic Congress, the time is right for our diocese to devote an entire year to a greater understanding and a deeper love and devotion for Jesus' Presence among us, and a new or renewed awareness of what our responsibility is to live a Eucharistic life of loving service.



We will officially open the **Year of the Eucharist** with a special diocesan Mass at our Cathedral Church of St. Augustine on January 5, 2019. In the very near future, a detailed plan of activities and special times of prayer, along with programs of enrichment at the diocesan and parish levels, will be published. There will also be a host of liturgical, catechetical and evangelical resources available for individual and family spiritual enrichment during this special year. Finally, I am very much looking forward to making pastoral visits to every Parish Collaborative and Catholic School throughout the diocese which will include the celebration of Mass, as well as Eucharistic Adoration, along with other planned activities.

It is my great hope that by the time we conclude our **Year of the Eucharist** in December 2020 with the Closing Mass, we will all be able to witness the visible fruits of our prayer and charitable works, made evident in a diocese that is truly Eucharist-centered.

A Diocesan Synod

Finally, it is my intention that the Year of the Eucharist will help to prepare us for a diocesan synod that will take place during our 50th Anniversary Year Celebration in 2021. It is my sincere hope that such a synod will be a reflective and prayerful process of pastoral planning for the future of the Church in the Diocese of Kalamazoo.

The years ahead will bring new opportunities and challenges for our Church. This underscores the urgent need for prayerful consideration of living out our lives in ways that are consonant with the Eucharist we receive, and which motivate us to move beyond just *maintaining* our pastoral plans of the past, to focusing on the Church's mission to all people. To accomplish this, we need to forge a common vision and plan for the Diocese of Kalamazoo, through our various parishes, schools, Catholic Charities, and numerous other organizations that bear witness to Christ's life-changing work entrusted to all of us throughout southwest Michigan.

As we celebrate the Year of the Eucharist, you will learn more about the synod process. With God's help and the active collaboration of all our clergy, religious and lay faithful, a diocesan synod, which would be the first in the 50-year history of our diocese, can be for us the beginning of the exciting work of pastoral revitalization. Dedicated to receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we will be able to face the realities of the present with enthusiasm, and to prepare for the challenges of the future with confidence.



The Blessed Virgin Mary intercedes for us

Our heartfelt gratitude for the Lord's gift of Himself in the Eucharist extends in a special way to our Blessed Mother. Mary was the vessel chosen by God the Father to give His only Son to us in the Mystery of the Incarnation. She remains a powerful advocate for our reception of Him in the Eucharist. Through her intercession, and in light of the fact that we have recently consecrated our diocese seeking Her intercession and protection, may we come to receive Him in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood, to adore His Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament, and to serve Him as faithful missionary disciples, both here in our diocese and to the ends of the earth.



As Pope Benedict XVI wrote so beautifully about the gift of the Eucharist:

The Eucharist makes us discover that Christ, risen from the dead, is our contemporary in the mystery of the Church, His Body. Of this mystery of love we have become witnesses. Let us encourage one another to walk joyfully, our hearts filled with wonder, towards our encounter with the Holy Eucharist, so that we may experience and proclaim to others the truth of the words with which Jesus took leave of His disciples: “Lo, I am with you always, until the end of the world” (Mt 28:20).

[*Sacramentum Caritatis / The Sacrament of Charity*, par. 97]

CONCLUSION:

My dear Family of Faith: Through our baptism, Jesus has given us the privilege of sharing in His saving mission. Each of us has our own, unique part to play. We are not only charged with the responsibility of cooperating with Jesus' grace so that we will be able to enter into Eternal Life at the end of our Journey of Faith, and to help one another, especially those closest to us in our lives, to do the same; but we are also called to help build Jesus' Kingdom of justice, love and peace in this world along our way. In order to accomplish so challenging a mission, Jesus has given us the Precious Gift of Himself in the Eucharist, to be our strength, our help, the Source of our very lives united with His. When we love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and when we love our neighbor, with the love of Jesus, we are living the mission of the Eucharist.

May this pastoral letter encourage all of us to be filled with gratitude as we realize anew how much our God and Father loves us; may we be in awe at the amazing and miraculous ways Jesus remains with us to be our food for our journey through this world; and may we be inspired by and enflamed with the Holy Spirit to be the joyful missionary disciples of Jesus, sharing the Good News of salvation to all those we can reach in our world.

May this prayer, which I hope you will pray regularly, be answered by God leading us to a time of spiritual renewal within each of our own hearts, and bearing fruit throughout the nine counties of our Diocese of Kalamazoo.

YEAR OF THE EUCHARIST PRAYER

**Loving God and our Neighbor:
Living the Mission of the Eucharist**

Loving God and Father, we give You thanks and praise! You have revealed Yourself to humanity as the source of all creation, while at the same time as the One who wills us into existence, loves us unconditionally and extends Your mercy to us even in our sinfulness.

As the greatest expression of Your love, You sent Your only-begotten son, Jesus, to be one with us by taking on our human nature, while remaining one with You in His divinity.

Jesus taught us Your love, revealed You as Our Father, and showed us what it means to fulfill the greatest of all Your commands: to love You with all our heart, soul, mind and strength; and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Having fulfilled the mission You gave Him, to redeem the human race and to bring us the gift of salvation, Jesus revealed the perfect way to remain with us through the gift of the Eucharist, His Body and Blood, as our food and drink, to nourish us on our journey of faith, and to give us the strength to fulfill the Great Commandment of loving God and neighbor just as He did.

Please send Your Holy Spirit upon each of us and upon our entire diocese so that, just as You inflamed the hearts of the frightened Apostles on the original Feast of Pentecost, so too, may the same Holy Spirit ignite the faith in our hearts. May this holy fire of Your love renew our devotion to this miraculous gift of the Eucharist, and set our hearts aflame with love for You, so that we will joyfully share the Good News of Your love with all those we meet, especially the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized and those who have never heard of Your love, but who desperately need it.

May our dear Blessed Mother, to whose maternal care and protection we have consecrated our diocese, intercede on our behalf and help us to do what she always did in saying “yes” to Your holy will. May her prayers move us to stay close to her son, Jesus, through His self-gift in the Eucharist, and help us live as His joyful disciples in this world, that we may one day be brought to the joy of our Heavenly Home. We ask this through Jesus, our Eucharistic Lord, now and forever. Amen.

Assuring all who read this letter of my daily prayers for you, and asking for your prayers for me, and all the Clergy and Faithful of our diocese, I remain Faithfully yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Paul J. Bradley
Bishop of Kalamazoo



APPENDIX:

WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE GREAT MIRACLE, THE BLESSED SACRAMENT, THE EUCHARIST

Who? When we receive Holy Communion, we encounter Jesus Christ in the most intimate way possible. The bread and wine have been changed — not in appearance but in reality. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the bishop or priest who presides over the Mass and prays the Eucharistic Prayer’s words of consecration effects a miraculous change. Now the former bread and wine truly are the Body and Blood of Christ. When we eat this “bread” and drink this “wine,” we receive the Body and Blood of Christ and become one with Him.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that “the Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life. The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented to it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ Himself, our Pasch” (CCC 1324). Nothing is more important than the Eucharist because this sacrament allows the Church and her members to live fully all that they are called to be and do.



Christians who are growing in their understanding and practice of this sacred mystery seek to deepen their relationship with Jesus and to be transformed in holiness through this encounter with the Risen Lord. They also strive to accept their responsibilities as missionary disciples called to serve others, especially the poor and vulnerable. We will never know everything about the person of Jesus or about the mission we are called to carry out as His disciples. This is why the Church urges us to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in prayer, in order to better reflect upon and renew our understanding of this mystery as we mature in our faith and in our service to others.

What? The miracle that happens when the bread and wine are transformed into Christ's Body and Blood is not merely symbolic. It is real. Jesus Christ enters into our minds and hearts and bodies. He lives within us providing spiritual nourishment and filling us with the power of His grace. The fact that this happens each and every time we receive the Eucharist is a miracle of God's love we should never take for granted. We should also be sure to be in a "state of grace" (without mortal sin) whenever we receive our Lord in the Eucharist.

The Church wants to make this experience of intimacy with our Lord available to everyone who has the capacity to understand and accept it. A child who has attained the age of reason is schooled in the most basic elements of Church teaching about the Eucharist. He or she is taught to recognize Jesus in the transformed bread and wine and to accept that something totally unique happens each time Christ is received in the Eucharist. These fundamental teachings are meant to initiate a process of growth in understanding that takes place as the child matures in the spiritual life. The Eucharist always remains the same, but our need for it, our uses of the grace it provides, and our appreciation of the magnitude of Christ's gift to us change as we grow and experience the different stages in life.

All of us should ask ourselves: How different is our understanding of the Eucharist now than it was when we made our first Communion? Has there been an increase in our devotion to the Eucharist, our love for the Lord who gives Himself to us in this way, or our need for this great sacrament to keep us strong in faith and able to do what Jesus asks us to do?

How? Sacraments are signs that cause what they signify. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, “The Eucharist is the efficacious sign and sublime cause of that communion in divine life and that unity of the People of God by which the Church is kept in being. It is the culmination both of God’s action sanctifying the world in Christ and of the worship men offer to Christ and through Him to the Father in the Holy Spirit” (CCC 1325).

Why? Jesus gives Himself to us because He loves us and He wants to be united with us. He also gives Himself to us because He wants us to know the joy that comes from loving and serving others. When Jesus is our first priority, everything else finds its proper place. If the Eucharist truly is the “source and summit” of Christian life, then our reception of Holy Communion should be a grateful, loving encounter with the Lord of Life. Since Jesus gives Himself to us because He loves us, then we should give ourselves to others with the same selfless generosity.

As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, “As bodily nourishment restores lost strength, so the Eucharist strengthens our charity, which tends to be weakened in daily life” (CCC 1394). Our reception of the Body and Blood of Christ is intended to help us live holy lives and to share Christ’s gifts with others through our charity toward all. By our reception of the Holy Eucharist, we are filled to overflowing with the grace of God. As stewards of these divine gifts, we are compelled to share them generously with all God’s people.

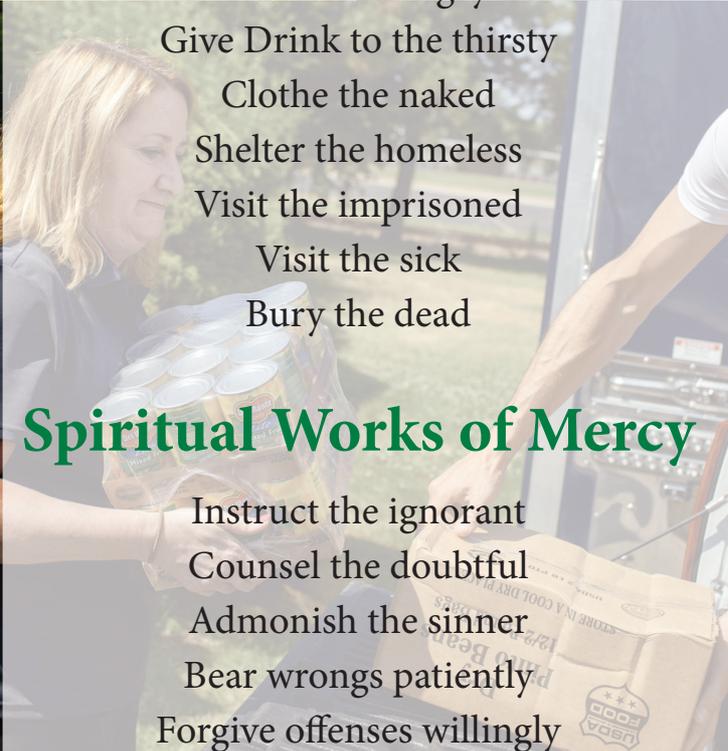
It is also important to recall that our Communion with the Body and Blood of Christ increases our union with the Lord, forgives our venial sins, and preserves us from grave sins. Since receiving this sacrament strengthens the bonds of charity between each of us and Christ, it also reinforces the unity of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ (CCC 1416).

The Eucharist also allows us to prepare for and participate in the life of heaven while still on earth. “Having passed from this world to the Father, Christ gives us in the Eucharist the pledge of glory with Him. Participation in the Holy Sacrifice identifies us with His heart, sustains our strength along the pilgrimage of this life, makes us long for eternal life, and unites us even now to the Church in Heaven, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and all the Saints” (CCC 1419).



Corporal Works of Mercy

- Feed the hungry
- Give Drink to the thirsty
- Clothe the naked
- Shelter the homeless
- Visit the imprisoned
- Visit the sick
- Bury the dead



Spiritual Works of Mercy

- Instruct the ignorant
- Counsel the doubtful
- Admonish the sinner
- Bear wrongs patiently
- Forgive offenses willingly
- Comfort the sorrowful
- Pray for the living & dead

