

Diocesan Eucharistic Congress, 6-3-23  
Odessa Marriott Hotel and Conference Center  
Keynote Talk by Bishop Michael J. Sis

My friends, I am so glad YOU are HERE.

It's not very often that we have a chance to GATHER TOGETHER in one place with people from all our churches in the 37 counties that make up the Diocese of San Angelo.

Our diocese has the largest territory of ALL the 15 Catholic dioceses in Texas.

We BECAME a diocese way back in 1961. And TODAY is the FIRST time we are having a Diocesan Eucharistic CONGRESS.

Not only is it a great privilege to hear INSPIRING MESSAGES from our keynote speakers, Scott Hahn and Mike Aquilina, but this is ALSO a time for us to BOND as fellow Catholics in West Texas.

We are HERE TODAY because we want to FOSTER a REVIVAL of Eucharistic faith here in West Texas.

MY presentation this afternoon is asking, "HOW can we do that?"  
"What we can EACH ONE of us DO to FOSTER a Eucharistic Revival in our diocese?"

Here is a good place to START:

Come to MASS:

Remember, the Third Commandment says, "Keep holy the Lord's Day."  
For Catholics, this includes coming to Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation.

When we take seriously our commitment to come and participate actively in the Mass, even when it is INCONVENIENT, when we arrange our schedule with the Mass as a priority, rather than just an AFTERTHOUGHT, our lives give witness to the Eucharist.

We have inherited a PRECIOUS TREASURE in the Holy Eucharist.  
We must NEVER take it for GRANTED.

I ALSO recommend, when it is possible, that you try to come to WEEKDAY Mass sometimes: It is a shorter, simpler, quieter, and more meditative experience of the Mass.

In my day, I have seen God do some powerful things through weekday Mass.

Another thing you can do is INVITE people to come WITH you to church. Jesus is in the Eucharist. So, BRING people to him.

Next, BESIDES bringing people to Jesus, you can help to bring JESUS to people.

We need more volunteers to help bring Holy Communion to those who are in jails, prisons, hospitals, nursing homes, and homebound.

This is a very rewarding ministry, and the people you visit will be very appreciative, because you are bringing Jesus to THEM.

Another way for you to contribute to this REVIVAL is to volunteer in service as a catechist, youth minister, or RCIA team member, to help introduce people to the Eucharistic Lord Jesus, so they can get to KNOW him better and be TOUCHED and HEALED by him.

Regardless of whether you take on one of those catechetical roles, ALL of you can do your part to EXPLAIN our faith to others, just in your own informal, spontaneous conversations.

Learn how to explain the BASIC FACTS about the Eucharist, so you can DEFEND the TRUTH of our faith when it is misunderstood or misrepresented.

The fact is, the Eucharist is NOT just a SYMBOL.

It is not just a MEMORIAL.

The bread and wine really BECOME the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

This has been our CONSISTENT belief as Catholic Christians since Jesus Christ FOUNDED our Church in the year 33 AD.

You can become FAMILIAR with the passages in the BIBLE that teach the REALITY of the Eucharist:

- For example, Jesus said in John 6:53, “If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink of his blood, you have no life within you.”
- You can also point out what Jesus said at the LAST SUPPER, in Matthew 26, “This IS my body. This IS my blood of the Covenant. Do this is memory of me.”  
He didn’t say, “This REPRESENTS my body,” or “This SYMBOLIZES my body.”
- Also point out what St. Paul teaches in First Corinthians chapter 10: He says that the cup of blessing that we bless is a participation in the Blood of Christ,  
And the bread that we break is a participation in the Body of Christ.

(Those are just a few examples.)

ANOTHER thing I encourage you to do to foster a Eucharistic Revival is to start some FAITH-SHAIRNG GROUPS in your local churches.

There are lots of different materials that you could use for small group processes.

For example, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops is preparing a series of 7 sessions that you can use for small-group discussion for the Eucharistic Revival. The series is called “Jesus and the Eucharist,” and it will be ready in September.

Or you could use some of the other materials that we have provided here at this event today, in your “swag bags.” We have provided you free copies of *This is My Body* by Bishop Robert Barron and *Real Presence* by Dr. Timothy O’Malley.

If you are looking for more RESOURCES, you can go to the WEBSITE of our diocese at [sanangelodiocese.org](http://sanangelodiocese.org).

There is a special section there with materials for the Eucharistic Revival, so you can keep learning and growing.

Here is ANOTHER idea. It is very simple.

When you are DRIVING, and you pass in front of a Catholic church, make the Sign of the Cross, and say in your heart some expression of love for Jesus.

For example, whenever St. Francis of Assisi would pass in front of a church, he used to say, "I ADORE you, O Christ, in this tabernacle, and in all the tabernacles of the world."

Similarly, when you are out about town running ERRANDS, or when you are visiting other cities or states or countries, you can take just a FEW MINUTES to carry out the traditional Catholic practice of "PAYING A VISIT."

You stop in briefly, in any Catholic church.

You look for the tabernacle with the lit sanctuary light, kneel or sit in a pew, and simply express your LOVE for Jesus Christ. It's REFRESHING.

St. John Bosco said, "Do you want the Lord to give you MANY GRACES? Visit him OFTEN. Do you want him to give you FEW graces? Visit him SELDOM."

Another thing you can do is sign up for Eucharistic Adoration:

We have FOUR official chapels for Perpetual Adoration in our diocese.

We need some of you to become part of the teams, by committing to a particular hour each week.

We need to build up those teams some more.

We have printed some INFORMATION about our Perpetual Adoration Chapels in the WORSHIP AIDS here today.

Also, BESIDES those four chapels, some of our other parishes offer extended hours of Eucharistic Adoration on certain days.

And remember: It is still Eucharistic Adoration, regardless of whether the Blessed Sacrament is EXPOSED in a monstrance, or locked in the TABERNACLE.

BOTH situations are Eucharistic Adoration, and both are spiritually VALUABLE.

They are opportunities to express LOVE, GRATITUDE, and AWE in the presence of the Lord.

In one of the parishes where I used to live, there was an old man who used to sit for hours in a pew in the church, near the tabernacle, in silent prayer. Somebody asked him, "What do you DO while you are sitting there for so long?"

He said, “I just smile at the Lord, and he smiles back at me.”

Another way you can contribute to a Eucharistic Revival here in our area relates to the Sacrament of Matrimony:

We have some couples in West Texas who live together like husband and wife, without being married sacramentally.

If you are living in an irregular marital situation, I invite you to take the steps that are needed to get married by the Church, and come back to receiving the Eucharist.

Our Tribunal Office and field advocates are ready to ASSIST you.

In this NEXT section of my talk, let’s consider what we can do to FOSTER Eucharistic Revival by IMPROVING the QUALITY of LITURGIES in our local parishes.

For example, when you serve as an USHER or Hospitality Minister:  
You can help create an atmosphere of WELCOME and WARMTH, so people will feel AT HOME and want to come BACK.

When you serve as a READER, I encourage you to prepare well, and practice.

When you proclaim the Mass readings loud and clear, with confidence and faith, you bring the Scriptures to LIFE in the hearts of the listeners.

When that happens, I sometimes say to myself, “Wow, God SPOKE to me in that reading!”

For those who are CHOIR members:

When you put the time and hard work into practicing and making good musical selections, you are helping draw people to Jesus Christ in the Eucharistic liturgy.

Some of you are ALTAR SERVERS:

It is a privilege to be THAT CLOSE to the action of the Eucharist.

So, approach your ministry with DEDICATION, mindful of the holiness of the action.

Be ATTENTIVE, and think ONE STEP AHEAD, so the Mass will flow gracefully and prayerfully.

When you serve on an ART AND ENVIRONMENT team:  
Your work makes a BIG DIFFERENCE in using the transcendental gift of BEAUTY to attract people to the Lord in an atmosphere that is harmonious, orderly, and prayerful.

Also, remember that we would NOT have the Eucharist without PRIESTS. All of us need to do our part to create in our diocese a vibrant CULTURE of VOCATIONS, to encourage MORE of our young men to listen to God's call to the priestly ministry.

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In the NEXT section of my talk, I want to offer you a FEW TIPS to help EVERYBODY participate more actively in the Mass, from START to FINISH:

First, remember the Eucharistic FAST: This means refraining from consuming food or drinks other than water, for at least one hour before the reception of Holy Communion.

Water and medicine can always be taken at any time before receiving the Eucharist.

Those who are elderly or who are ill, as well as those who care for them, are EXCUSED from fasting.

The point of the Eucharistic fast is to REMIND ourselves that NO earthly food can COMPARE with the spiritual food of the Holy Eucharist.

Also, it is very helpful to read and reflect on the Mass READINGS ahead of time.

As you are headed to the church, ask yourself, "For WHOM am I offering my Mass today? Who needs my prayer support?"

When you get there, I recommend sitting in a PLACE in the church that fosters your attentiveness and minimizes your distractions.

Listen attentively to the SCRIPTURE readings.

There is a beautiful GESTURE that we all make right before the proclamation of the Gospel:

We all make a small sign of the Cross on our forehead, our lips, and our heart. We silently say to ourselves something like this:  
 “May the words of the Holy Gospel remain always on my mind, on my lips, and in my heart.”

At the time of the OFFERTORY:

It is GOOD to offer something from your own sacrificial giving as an expression of your personal stewardship.

Also, offer YOURSELF spiritually upon the altar, along with the bread and wine.

Offer your joys, your work, your pain, and suffering, in union with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Then, at the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer comes a prayer called the *Sanctus* (“Holy, Holy, Holy”).

When the priest introduces the *Sanctus*, notice that he mentions the ANGELS in Heaven.

At this point in the Mass, in the *Sanctus*, we are acknowledging that, in the Eucharist, we are UNITED with God and with our fellow members of the Church in the Mystical Body of Christ, including:

- Those here on earth,
- Those who are in purgatory (we pray for them), and
- The angels and saints in Heaven (They are cheering us on as we run the race.)

The *Sanctus* is found twice in the Bible, in Isaiah chapter 6, and in Revelation chapter 4.

In both places it is a prayer of the angels in Heaven worshipping before God’s throne.

So, when we proclaim it together, this prayer shows the mystical UNION of Heaven and earth that takes place in EVERY Mass.

In the Eucharist, we are CONNECTED in the Mystical Body of Christ. We are not alone.

At the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer comes the Great AMEN.

When you proclaim this Amen along with the whole congregation, let it express your assent to the entire Eucharistic Prayer that the priest has just prayed.

The word “Amen” in Hebrew means “truly, certainly.”

You are affirming the truth of the action that has just taken place. You are making the Eucharistic prayer YOUR OWN.

When it is time for the Communion Procession, let it be your ALTAR CALL. As you walk up the aisle with the others, you are FELLOW PILGRIMS on a journey to the promised land of Heaven.

If you are not receiving Communion that day, make an Act of SPIRITUAL Communion in the silence of your heart.

After you go back to your PEW, KNEEL if you can, and give THANKS to God for the gift you have just received, and for anything else in your life that you are GRATEFUL for.

Use your own words. You might say something like this:

“THANK you, Jesus. I LOVE you, Jesus. How can I make my life better reflect YOUR PRESENCE that I have just RECEIVED?”

As we go out the door of the Church, we make the Sign of the Cross with holy water, as a REMINDER of our baptismal vocation to carry Christ’s presence into the WORLD.

Then, the NEXT thing can do is to live a life COHERENT with the Eucharist:

Give WITNESS to our Eucharistic faith by the way you LIVE.

When you receive Holy Communion, you carry Christ in you, so the way you TREAT people should REFLECT that fact.

If we are going to give CONVINCING WITNESS, then the way we live must reflect the HOLINESS that we have received in the Eucharist.

This includes:

- The way we treat our FAMILY members,
- The way we treat co-workers and strangers,
- The LANGUAGE we use,
- And our LIFESTYLE.

These need to be COHERENT with the holiness of the Eucharist.

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The FINAL section of my talk today is about the Catholic “AND”:

This is a very important word in Catholic thought, and it helps to explain SO MUCH of what we BELIEVE and what we DO (the word “and”).

For example:

- What is important – faith or works? Faith AND works are both important.
- What about Jesus: Is he God or human? Fully human AND fully divine.
- Do you believe Scripture or Tradition? We believe in both Scripture AND Tradition.

If you pay ATTENTION, you see over and over again the wisdom of the Catholic AND.

So, to foster a true Eucharistic Revival, we must remember that a consistent and complete Eucharistic spirituality is one that sees the connection between SACRAMENT and SERVICE.

A Christian life that includes just one of them, without the other, is INCOMPLETE.

At the Last Supper, Jesus issued TWO COMMANDS:

- “Do this in memory of me” - Command to do the EUCHARIST.
- “I have given you a model to follow...If I, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet.” - Command to SERVE one another.

So, the Institution of the Eucharist and the Foot-Washing at the Last Supper represent TWO SIDES of the same COIN of the Christian life: SACRAMENT and SERVICE.

That’s why we should always be able to see a LINK between:

- dignified WORSHIP of Christ on the altar
- SERVICE of Christ in our neighbor in need.

Mother Theresa of Calcutta realized this.

On the wall of the chapels of the Missionaries of Charity, she had them paint, near the Crucifix and Tabernacle, the words "I thirst."

She taught her sisters the intimate CONNECTION between:

- Profound devotion to the Sacrament of the Eucharist, and
- Picking up the poor and destitute off the streets of Calcutta, serving them, caring for their basic needs, trying to see Christ himself in the least of their brothers and sisters.

I'd like to conclude my presentation with some profound words written by Saint Theresa of Calcutta:

"As soon as we receive Jesus in Holy Communion, let us go in haste to give Him to our sisters, to our poor, to the sick, to the dying, to the lepers, to the unwanted, and the unloved.

"In each of our lives Jesus comes as the Bread of Life - to be eaten, to be consumed by us. This is how He LOVES us. Then Jesus comes in our human life as the hungry one, the other, hoping to be fed with the Bread of our LIFE, our HEARTS by loving, and our HANDS by serving."