

# Assembly of the Clergy of the Diocese of Paisley

## Reflections on *Sacramentum Caritatis*

### Some General Reflections

1. I would like to note first of all the similarity between the titles of Pope Benedict XVI's Post-Synodal Exhortation on the Eucharist, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, and that of his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*. The Pope is showing us that love is the heart of the mystery of God. This love is revealed in Jesus Christ who loves us to the end. The Eucharist is the sacrament of Christ's sacrifice in which he showed us how great his love is and in which he loved us to the end. The sacrament of the altar reveals the truth about love and the truth about God who is love. This has to be an essential dimension of how we perceive, approach and carry out our ministry as priests: to be servants of the truth of the mystery of God who is Love.

2. Another key perspective of *Sacramentum Caritatis* derives from the Pope's conviction, that the renewal brought about by Vatican II, in liturgy as in other areas of the Church's life, needs to be interpreted according to a hermeneutic of reform in continuity. So, in terms of the liturgy, *Sacramentum Caritatis* appears to be another step in what is being called the "reform of the reform". The Pope understands the liturgical renewal of Vatican II to be in continuity with the earlier tradition of the church rather than as a rupture from it.

This hermeneutic of reform in continuity can be detected in *Sacramentum Caritatis* in the following points:

- Eucharistic doctrine based on the Eucharist as sacrament of the paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection;
- The strong presentation of the relationship between the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation;
- Emphasis on the spiritual, devotional and interior dimensions of "full, conscious and active participation" in the Eucharist;
- The understanding of the *ars celebrandi* as the proper celebration of the rite itself and as faithful adherence to the liturgical norms in all their richness.
- The emphasis on reverence for the Eucharist and in its encouragement of forms of Eucharistic adoration;

- The emphatic re-statement of the indispensable role of the priest at the celebration of the Eucharist together with a corresponding encouragement for vocations to the priesthood
- Clear sorrow for the fact that some communities may be without a priest on a Sunday;
- Encouragement of the recovery of Gregorian chant and to encourage a certain familiarity with the Latin original of the more common prayers and responses in the Mass;

It is doubtful if *Sacramentum Caritatis* can be interpreted properly without an appreciation of the hermeneutic of reform and continuity initiated by Pope John II and carried forward by Pope Benedict XVI. It is clear that the Holy Father, reflecting the views of the Synod of Bishops, is of the view that any other kind of interpretation of Vatican II, especially one based on a hermeneutic of revolution and rupture, is likely to be harmful to the spiritual lives of the faithful.

3. *Sacramentum Caritatis* makes the paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection the key theological-doctrinal perspective of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is above all the sacrament of Christ's sacrificial death and victorious resurrection. This is the radical "novum" of the Eucharist. The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' act of self-oblation. More than statically receiving the Incarnate Logos, we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving.

I did not pick out this aspect of *Sacramentum Caritatis* just for the beauty of the theology, but because it conditions how we celebrate the Eucharist. If the Eucharist is above all the action of God, the sacrament of Christ's paschal mystery, it should be celebrated above all as a sacred mystery. The Pope goes on in *Sacramentum Caritatis* to paint a picture of the celebrant as the faithful, humble, respectful and attentive servant of God's mysteries and of the assembly as actively participating in a conscious, devout and reverent manner, which is above all a spiritual participation. Indeed, the whole assembly approaches the Eucharist with their sins forgiven and living lives marked by Eucharist consistency. The Pope is at pains to present to us a theology of the Eucharist according to the principle of *lex orandi- lex credendi*, the sacred liturgy and the mystery of faith, united by what is their common basis, the paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection.

Again if the radical newness of the Eucharist is that we are drawn into Christ's self-giving in the paschal mystery, then, as the text says, this is more than statically receiving the Incarnate Word. It is entering into Christ's act of worship to the Father. Holy Communion is part of the Mass, but the Mass is more than the receiving of Holy Communion: it is entering into Christ's self-giving. If the Pope frets over Sunday assemblies without a priest, look more deeply at what the Mass is! If I have expressed reservations about the too convenient substitution of weekday Mass with a lay-led communion service, look here at what the Eucharist is! If I emphasize vocations to the

priesthood, look here! If I tell communities that I prefer them, if possible, to be made up of priest and people rather than priest-less communities, look here at the full meaning of the Eucharist! Holy Communion is the fruit of the Eucharist and has its place for the good of souls in acts of worship outside the Mass, but Holy Communion firstly finds its true meaning within the Eucharist and within the Mass understood and celebrated as the liturgical action of the paschal mystery which draws us into Christ self-giving.

### **Some Specific Points**

1. I have encouraged you to make the Sacrament of Penance available to the people as much as possible. In the context of a reflection on the centrality of the Eucharist within the Catholic sacramental system, *Sacramentum Caritatis* encourages priests to be generous, committed and competent ministers of the sacrament. *Sacramentum Caritatis* encourages frequent confession, telling us not to give up on the sacrament because it is difficult. We should make sure that confessionals are serviceable. The Holy Father reminds us that Rite III, with general confession and collective absolution, is not for normal pastoral use. I know that this abuse does not happen in this diocese, but the norm is still worth re-stating. I add also that what people sometimes call *Rite II-and-a-half*, or any other version of the sacrament that limits the integrity of the confession of sins, is to be avoided at all costs. The sacrament of penance must be a key priority of all parish pastoral planning. More importantly, it is key activity in the ministry of every priest.

2. I raised the matter with you of the order of the sacraments of initiation for children. *Sacramentum Caritatis* also raises the matter making the point that the Holy Eucharist brings Christian initiation to completion and represents the centre and goal of all sacramental life. It asks if the close link between Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist is clearly recognized. It emphasizes that pastoral practice should reflect a more unitary understanding of the process of Christian initiation. In a situation where practice varies from country to country and even from diocese to diocese, the Pope asks that concretely it needs to be seen what practice better enables the faithful to put the sacrament of the Eucharist at the centre, as the goal of the whole process of initiation. I interpret that as asking what practice is more likely to help young people put the Mass at the centre of their lives. What practice is more likely to help young people go to Mass regularly on a Sunday?

3. The present reality of the diocese is one marked by a slight shortage of priests relative to the number of parishes we have. I have recently had to enter into negotiations with two parish communities about re-structuring. *Sacramentum Caritatis* emphasizes the great gift of the Eucharist and underlines the indispensable ministry of the priest as the celebrant of the Eucharist. I repeat that vocations to the priesthood must be a pastoral priority for the diocese, for every priest, for every parish, for every family, for every Catholic school. Please continue to have Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament for vocations. We should surely be able to hope for at least one new seminarian each year from this diocese. In order to cover the vacancies in parishes created by retirements, by

re-assignment and by other circumstances, in the first few days of September I will invite a number of priests to take up new posts, effective from the end of September.

4. As part of the “ars celebrandi”, the art of celebrating Mass, *Sacramentum Caritatis* mentions respect on the part of the celebrant for the approved texts of the Mass. I mention this because a new English version of the Roman Missal is being prepared and parts of it are at an advanced stage of preparation. The positive attitude of the clergy will be crucial in helping the faithful to adjust to new texts. We will need to be ready for this.

5. *Sacramentum Caritatis* encourages the recovery of Latin in the liturgy. This applies in a particular way to large scale international events. One thinks of Masses in Rome and Lourdes. However, it has a more general application to priestly formation, and to diocesan and parish life. With regard to liturgical music, the Pope acknowledges all good music for the liturgy, but adds a personal desire of his that Gregorian chant be suitably esteemed and employed as the chant proper to the Roman liturgy. We should be aware that these proposals are made fully in accord with Vatican II’s Constitution on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. This is an example of Pope Benedict XVI’s principle that the liturgical renewal needs to be conducted according to the principle of reform in continuity. I am glad to see that the Diocesan choir has taken the lead in this regard in pastorally sensitive way. Some parishes also use simple Gregorian chant on occasion. I encourage this development without it becoming a burden on you or on your people. On a different but related topic, you will have heard about the expected indult which will allow priests to celebrate Mass according to the 1962 Roman Missal. We will need to see what the specific terms and conditions of the indult are, but I do not foresee too many problems in this diocese.

6. As it considers the parts of the Mass, *Sacramentum Caritatis* assesses the sign of peace in a very positive way as most expressive of the Eucharist as the Sacrament of Peace. The sign of peace also has value for our times as a symbol human longing for peace. At the same time, in order to avoid undue distraction before Holy Communion, *Sacramentum Caritatis* recommends that the Sign of Peace be characterized by a certain sobriety and is best restricted to the people in the immediate vicinity. From their own experience, priests will immediately recognize the pastoral wisdom of this recommendation. A footnote indicates that the Sign of Peace may be moved to another place in the Mass, such as before the presentation of the gifts. We await developments with interest.

7. My attention was drawn to the Pope’s advice on the distribution and reception of Holy Communion, and he exhorts us to make every effort to ensure that this simple act preserves its importance as a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus in this sacrament. Is Holy Communion a simple act in our churches? I think there is room for reflection on this and I invite you consider if Holy Communion is a simple act in your liturgy.

8. At the conclusion of his reflection on the main lines of the relationship between the priesthood and the Eucharist, the Pope expresses his gratitude and the gratitude of the whole Church to the many bishops and priests (and deacons) who carry out their mission with fidelity, devotion and zeal. There are many other things that can and should be said

about *Sacramentum Caritatis*, but as I reach the end of this address, I want to thank you for your priesthood and for the devoted service to give to your parishes and to the diocese. If there is one thing I have learned in the many exchanges with parishioners I have had over priests retiring, over priests moving, and over parishes possibly restructuring, it is how much the people love and appreciate their priest. They see in you the priestly servants of God's love. Finally I want to thank the priests who earlier offered such rich spiritual and pastoral reflections to this Assembly. I also express my gratitude to those responsible for organizing this Assembly so well. May God bless you all.

+Philip Tartaglia

14<sup>th</sup> June 2007