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In the current situation, where we are witnessing a revival of Eucharistic adoration, it is important to recall the parameters that should govern this prayer: the central place of the Eucharistic celebration, from which this prayer springs and to which it refers. Father Lino does this with the help of the most recent documents of the Magisterium. A whole series of practical implications follow from this which deserve to be taken into consideration, by us too.

Prayer before the Eucharist: tradition and contemporaneity

original in Spanish

The practice of preserving the Eucharistic species dates back to the early days of the Church and is rooted in the development of Eucharistic worship outside of Mass, which has manifested itself in various forms throughout the history of the Latin Church.

In reality, the first place where God who came to dwell among men, was 'guarded' and worshipped was the family of Nazareth, and the first 'monstrance' was the manger in Bethlehem. The Eucharist is a radically new way of God's presence among men, making them living members of his own body, in the dynamism of the building of the Church and the new Jerusalem.

In our day, we are witnessing a laudable increase in the esteem and practice of prayer before the Eucharist, a fact that would have been considered mere illusion in the decades following the closing of Vatican II, when some came to think that the practice of Eucharistic adoration was living its last hours.

But this awakening should not hide from us the fact that Eucharistic adoration is very demanding and that, perhaps for this reason, some prefer to pray before an image or an icon.

In the words of Benedict XVI:

"Adoring the Body of Christ, means believing that there, in that piece of Bread, Christ is really there, and gives true sense to life, to the immense universe as to the smallest creature, to the whole of human history as to the briefest existence"¹.

¹ BENEDICT XVI, *Kneeling in adoration before the Lord*, homily of 22 May 2008 on the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 23 May 2008.

Recognising that "in that piece of bread, Christ is really there" and that, moreover, "he gives true sense to life, to the immense universe as to the smallest creature, to the whole of human history as to the briefest existence", means exercising faith in all its richness and in all its demands. This is the faith that we all share and that we wish to nourish, above all, with the Word of God, with the liturgy, with the very life of faith of the Church throughout its two thousand years of existence. Faith that must be accompanied by a relationship of joyful friendship, intimacy, serenity, peace... with the One who, in the consecrated bread preserved in our churches, is truly "God with us".

On the other hand, under the action of the Holy Spirit, many Christians today feel the supernatural need – and follow it – to kneel before the One who, in his infinite love, first knelt before us, washing the feet of the Apostles.

1. From the great crisis to the current situation

Looking back over the period from Vatican II to the present day, we can identify a first moment of serious crisis in Eucharistic adoration, a series of documents in which the Magisterium has sought to defend and encourage it, and, finally, the current situation of a certain recovery.

1.1. The crisis after Vatican II

Immediately after the Council, Eucharistic worship outside the Mass faced such a profound and progressive crisis that it led to speculation about its disappearance. Pope Benedict XVI recalled this:

"During the early phases of the reform, the inherent relationship between Mass and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was not always perceived with sufficient clarity. For example, an objection that was widespread at the time argued that the eucharistic bread was given to us not to be looked at, but to be eaten. In the light of the Church's expe-

rience of prayer, however, this was seen to be a false dichotomy. As Saint Augustine put it: *nemo autem illam carnem manducat, nisi prius adoraverit; peccemus non adorando* – no one eats that flesh without first adoring it; we should sin were we not to adore it." (SCa 66).

"Many Christian faithful, including numerous priests and consecrated persons, long for the external splendour that surrounded some of the manifestations [of Eucharistic worship] in times past, such as the so-called Major Exposition, for which permission had to be sought from the local Ordinary when it was to be held on an extraordinary basis, or the worship of the Forty Hours. The evening Eucharistic celebrations, authorised in 1953, and a somewhat unbalanced application of the post-conciliar liturgical reform in the 1960s and 1970s, in addition to the wave of secularisation in those decades, brought these and other aspects of popular piety to the brink of disappearance"².

With the passage of time, the crisis gradually subsided and was even overcome with renewed vigour. This was due to many factors in which it is not difficult to discern, with the eyes of faith, the discreet but effective action of the Holy Spirit, who blows where he wills and as he wills (cf. Jn 3:8), and has moved spirits and inspired the Magisterium to intervene with the necessary frequency and in the appropriate ways.

Nor should we forget the fidelity in Eucharistic worship outside of Mass, and of course also in the celebration itself, of so many believers and religious communities who endured the inclement weather and kept the lamp of the Shrine burning. Many of these people have suffered in silence, but they have rendered a great service to the faith and piety of the Christian people. The Lord, who sees what is hidden (cf. Mt 6:6), will reward them.

² Mons. J. LÓPEZ MARTÍN, "Prólogo", en DíEZ VALLADARES L.E., *Acoger la presencia. El culto eucarístico fuera de la Misa tras la reforma litúrgica del Vaticano II*, Secretariado Trinitario ("Mundo y Dios" 39), Salamanca 1998, 11.

1.2. The constant action of the Magisterium

The post-Vatican II Magisterium regarding Eucharistic worship outside of Mass opens the way for us to recover the values of Eucharistic theology which, for various reasons, have been gradually lost, or at least relegated.

Based on the essential importance of the mass, on the Eucharistic presence outside of the celebration, which is at the summit of the other forms of Christ's presence, on the essential intrinsic link between adoration and the mass, and other reasons of faith, the Magisterium of the Church has not tired, throughout the second half of the last century and up to the present day, of instilling the practice of Eucharistic worship with a renewed understanding of it. A simple list of the main documents suffices:

1965	Encyclical <i>Mysterium fidei</i> (Paul VI)
1967	Instruction <i>Eucharisticum Mysterium</i> -EM- (S. C. of Rites – Consilium)
1973	<i>Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass</i> (S.C. Divine Worship) -RCCE- The most authoritative and comprehensive codification of worship outside of Mass, which, in a sense, rises to the level of liturgical celebration.
1979	Instruction <i>Inestimabile donum</i> (S. C. for Divine Worship)
1980	Letter <i>Dominicae Cenaе</i> -DC- (John Paul II)
1983	<i>Code of Canon Law</i>
1984	<i>Ceremonial of Bishops</i>
1992-1997	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>
2003	Encyclical <i>Ecclesia de Eucharistia</i> (John Paul II)
2004	Apostolic Letter <i>Mane nobiscum Domine</i> -MND- (John Paul II)
2004	Instruction <i>Redemptionis sacramentum</i> -RS- (S. C. for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments)
2004	<i>Suggestions and Proposals</i> for the Year of the Eucharist (S. C. for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments)
2007	Apostolic Exhortation post-synodal <i>Sacramentum caritatis</i> -SCa- (Benedict XVI)

All these documents contain expressions of esteem for Eucharistic adoration and ardent exhortations to practise it, as well as presenting the guidelines for its correct understanding and consistent practice.

"The Ordinary should diligently foster Eucharistic adoration, whether brief or prolonged or almost continuous, with the participation of the people. For in recent years in so many places "adoration of the Most Holy Sacrament is also an important daily practice and becomes an inexhaustible source of holiness", although there are also places "where there is evident almost a total lack of regard for worship in the form of eucharistic adoration." (RS 136)

"It is highly recommended that at least in the cities and the larger towns the diocesan Bishop should designate a church building for perpetual adoration; in it, however, Holy Mass should be celebrated frequently, even daily if possible, while the Exposition should rigorously be interrupted while Mass is being celebrated." (RS 140)

This request is taken up again by Benedict XVI in his 2007 post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis*:

"With the Synod Assembly, therefore, I heartily recommend to the Church's pastors and to the People of God the practice of eucharistic adoration, both individually and in community. (194) Great benefit would ensue from a suitable catechesis explaining the importance of this act of worship, which enables the faithful to experience the liturgical celebration more fully and more fruitfully. Wherever possible, it would be appropriate, especially in densely populated areas, to set aside specific churches or oratories for perpetual adoration. I also recommend that, in their catechetical training, and especially in their preparation for First Holy Communion, children be taught the meaning and the beauty of spending time with Jesus, and helped to cultivate a sense of awe before his presence in the Eucharist.

Here I would like to express appreciation and support for all those Institutes of Consecrated Life whose members dedicate a significant amount of time to eucharistic adoration. In this way they give us an example of lives shaped by the Lord's real presence. I would also like

to encourage those associations of the faithful and confraternities specifically devoted to eucharistic adoration; they serve as a leaven of contemplation for the whole Church and a summons to individuals and communities to place Christ at the centre of their lives.” (SCa 67)

For his part, Cardinal Claudio Hummes, then Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy, in a letter dated 2007 gave precise indications regarding persons (each diocese should assign a priest to this pastoral ministry), places (a church in each diocese dedicated to Eucharistic adoration), duration (according to actual possibilities) ...

1.3. The current recovery of Eucharistic worship

Various signs indicate that the crisis in Eucharistic worship is giving way to a certain recovery, which, however, we must take care to ensure that it is done in the proper manner.

Confirmation of this trend is the recent proliferation of churches where Eucharistic adoration takes place for long periods of time, in some cases 24 hours a day, or the multiplication of initiatives in which the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament is omnipresent... Similarly, both online and in bookshops, aids for Eucharistic adoration are available, although such aids are not always properly oriented, as they are based on inadequate positions. If an advertisement for a centre of Eucharistic adoration does not include terms such as "Mass", "Eucharistic celebration", "Sunday", "word of God", and, on the contrary, when the Eucharist is mentioned, it means "Jesus in the Eucharist" exposed in the monstrance, we can deduce that, with regard to the assimilation of conciliar Eucharistic doctrine, there is still a long way to go... Precisely one danger, which could be fatal to Eucharistic adoration, would be to simply recover the ways of the 19th century without taking into account the precise guidelines of post-conciliar doctrine. But it is a fact that these data tell us that Eucharistic worship outside the Mass is interesting and attractive, so our responsibility will be to qualify it.

Today, we are witnessing a significant return to Eucharistic worship outside of Mass, but... Eucharistic adoration is often proposed as a practice in which one can come into direct contact with the Presence, almost without the need for any ecclesial or ministerial mediation.

Furthermore, practices and relationships with the Eucharist, in a world marked by individualism and a self-service mentality, are strongly influenced by personal experiences: there are those who seek help in the difficulties of life, those who come to find a space of silence in the hustle and bustle of the city, or those who approach the Eucharist as a form of spiritual therapy in a society that causes much loneliness. And Eucharistic adoration is not easy; it is not enough to be in the presence of the Eucharist, that would be too little; prayer before the Eucharist is the fruit of a long journey; one must be initiated into it. Contemplating the Eucharist is not only fixing one's gaze on the bread and the chalice, it is also allowing oneself to be surprised by the fragility of the signs and the fullness of the saving reality they contain, listening, concentrated on the Mystery, all the words of revelation that give meaning to this mystery of the broken bread and poured wine, the Paschal Mystery of the Lord's glorious Body and Blood, in which the whole history of salvation is concentrated and offered, and in which we participate fully in Eucharistic communion.

And without forgetting that Eucharistic adoration is not necessarily linked to the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. In every church where the Blessed Sacrament is kept, we can pray before the tabernacle that contains the sacramental Presence, the true heart of the Christian community. What was once called the "visit to the Blessed Sacrament" remains entirely relevant. Why not make our churches places of prayer, both personal and for the parish community? Why not "inhabit" our churches in this way so that they are not closed for so long or become mere cultural monuments?

But it must always be clear that in Eucharistic worship outside of Mass, the instructions provided in the appropriate Ritual for the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament must be observed:

- *relation to the celebration* from which it comes and the communion for which it is intended,
- *on the altar*, with the same candles and decorations as for Mass,
- with sufficient *attendance by the faithful*,
- for a *reasonable amount of time* (it cannot be exposed to give the blessing... and it continues to be done).

We must feel the need for a profound and continuous catechesis of the people on the Eucharistic Mystery, starting from the liturgical celebration itself, perceived in its true value and in its capacity as a sign. It is necessary to lead the believer, through the rites and prayers of the Church, to a vital understanding of the Mystery of the Lord.

Those who believe and live their faith in the Eucharist must be helped to perceive and live the centrality of the celebration and the exact hierarchy of values existing within the Mystery itself.

We can therefore affirm that Eucharistic adoration is regaining a growing vitality in our day, including through interesting contributions to doctrinal and pastoral deepening, not only from the Magisterium but also in the field of theological reflection, a vitality that was absolutely unimaginable during the last third of the last century. However, let us not forget that this revitalisation could prove fruitless, and even be diluted, if our current practice does not respect the theological, liturgical and ecclesial framework provided by the aforementioned documents of the Magisterium³.

³ Cf. COMISIÓN EPISCOPAL PARA LA LITURGIA, *La exposición de la Santísima Eucaristía. Fundamentos, sugerencias y materiales*, Libros litúrgicos, Madrid 2024.

2. Eucharistic worship *outside of mass* today

Even though it did not directly address the issue of Eucharistic worship outside of Mass, as if to counterbalance certain excesses that had in some cases led to Eucharistic adoration being given greater splendor than the main celebrations of the liturgical year, the Second Vatican Council laid the foundations for a profound revision of the traditional forms of Eucharistic piety, emphasising the need for its connection with the liturgy, to which centrality and superiority are attributed. The papal Magisterium, with Paul VI's timely encyclical *Mysterium fidei* in 1965, shortly before the close of the Council, avoided breaking with tradition, recalling the importance of Eucharistic worship outside Mass and the particular sanctifying grace that derives from its practice, so that the countless benefits would not be lost because of a reductive opposition to the mystery.

By inviting a more conscious participation in the Eucharistic celebration, the Second Vatican Council laid the foundations for a new approach to the Eucharist by the faithful. Traditional forms of Eucharistic devotion, in fact, while on the one hand bringing the faithful closer together than the liturgy—which was conducted in a language they did not understand—on the other hand kept the faithful 'at a distance', in sacred fear of an inappropriate approach.

In the post-conciliar period, the appreciation of the participation of the lay faithful in the mission of the Church and in particular in its *munus sanctificandi*, the institution of extraordinary ministers of communion, the possibility of communion in the hand and the reduction of Eucharistic fasting have marked a significant change – not without limits – in the relationship of the faithful with the sacred, a process that is still ongoing.

Two clear principles are found in the first numbers of the Introduction to *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass*: “The celebration of the Eucharist is the centre of the entire Christian life, both for the Church universal and for the local

congregations of the Church” (n. 1); “The celebration of the eucharist in the sacrifice of the Mass, moreover, is truly the origin and the goal of the worship which is shown to the eucharist outside Mass” (n. 2). The terms 'centre', 'source and summit' immediately suggest a complex reality, whose elements are oriented towards a luminous point that draws everything else to itself and gives meaning to everything else.

Like the Eucharistic celebration, prayer before the Eucharist must also be seen in the same perspective and requires the same formative effort. In other words, formation in this prayer has its first root in formation in following Christ, making him the centre of one's existence⁴.

We prepare ourselves for the encounter with the Lord above all by educating ourselves to a vital and prayerful approach to his word, which opens the heart to hope, announces the joy of forgiveness, sustains the path of conversion and decisively directs the believer towards God. Only in this way is the Eucharistic celebration experienced as an event of faith—with all the limitations that are experienced on a progressive journey—and the contemplative prayer that springs from it has all the authentic flavour of true communion with Christ.

The Eucharist is not exhausted in the celebration of Mass, even though it is its central expression. Moreover, given its centrality, all other expressions of worship, liturgical or otherwise, derive from it or lead to it: they extend in various ways, in time and in form, the celebratory richness of the Eucharist.

All this is especially true for direct expressions of Eucharistic worship outside of Mass. Mass undoubtedly represents *the origin and consummation*⁵, but these are in turn *an extension of the grace of the sacrifice*⁶.

⁴ Cf. MISCHLER D., “Adorer à la table de l’Eucharistie”, *Notitiae* 31 (1995) 542-558.

⁵ Cf. *EM* 3e.

⁶ Cf. *EM* 3g.

According to the ancient practice of the Church, the Eucharist has always been preserved to be brought to the sick and to those who, for various reasons, are unable to participate in the celebration. Over the centuries, this practice has given rise to various forms of Eucharistic worship, which Christian communities are called to rediscover and live out always: public and personal silent adoration; brief and prolonged exposition, with readings from the Word of God, songs, prayers, sacred silence; the solemn annual exposition; Eucharistic processions, Eucharistic congresses, etc. The light of the Eucharist not only illuminates the spirit of those who contemplate and adore it but also radiates and spreads into all aspects of life and into the very flow of things and of the world, defining its dimensions and contours. Thus, the Eucharist releases all its transforming power, not only on bread and wine, but also on the faithful, making their lives a spiritual worship pleasing to God, as Christ pleases the Father.

"In consequence, the devotion which leads the faithful to visit the Blessed Sacrament draws them into an ever-deeper participation in the Paschal Mystery. It leads them to respond gratefully to the gift of Him who through His humanity constantly pours divine life into the members of His body.¹¹⁰ Dwelling with Christ our Lord, they enjoy His intimate friendship and pour out their hearts before Him for themselves and their dear ones, and pray for the peace and salvation of the world. They offer their entire lives with Christ to the Father in the Holy Spirit and receive in this wonderful exchange and increase of faith, hope and charity. Thus, they nourish those right dispositions which enable them with all due devotion to celebrate the memorial of the Lord and receive frequently the bread given us by the Father"⁷.

Therefore, if on the one hand the permanent presence of Christ in the sacrament leads us to honour the mystery of the Lord's body and blood with Eucharistic worship, on the other hand it reinforces the need for ever more authentic participation in the Mass and for a life

⁷ EM 50.

that, through communion in the Eucharistic sacrifice, is given and consumed for the love of our brothers and sisters.⁸

These paragraphs from the Italian bishops accurately summarise the main lines on which to base the post-conciliar understanding of Eucharistic worship, based on the magisterial documents that have dealt with the subject.

The main elements that characterise and nourish devotion to the Blessed Sacrament can be divided into three fundamental areas:

* *the centrality of the Eucharistic celebration*, the emphasis on which enriches Eucharistic worship outside Mass with dynamic values, giving the sacramental presence of Christ its true meaning;

* *communion*, the human response to the gift of the Eucharist, a point of reference for assessing the meaning and purpose of Eucharistic worship, understood in its twofold dimension: sacramental communion and vital communion, solidarity;

* *witness*, through which the faithful, inspired by contemplation and open to the commitment of love, express in their lives what they have "by faith and sacrament in the celebration of the Eucharist"⁹.

Together with these, the eschatological dimension of Eucharistic worship and the importance of the Word of God in moments of prayer before the Sacrament complete the new post-conciliar coordinates.

The liturgical renewal has had the effect of restoring the various moments of the Eucharist to their proper identity; if you like, we could say that it has rebalanced the emphases. The Eucharistic celebration itself cannot be treated as a moment of lesser importance than Eucharistic adoration outside of it, as has been the case for centuries. And this rebalancing may have seemed to some to be a loss of the meaning of adoration. A study of the documents mentioned above shows that this impression is unfounded: as they repeatedly affirm, the Eucharistic mystery must be considered in its entirety to

⁸ *Eucaristia, comunione e comunità. Documento pastorale dell'Episcopato italiano* (22.V.1983), Paoline, Turin 1987, nos. 97 and 99.

⁹ *EM* 13.

discover, appreciate and take advantage of all its richness. A deficient overall vision of the Eucharistic mystery or an inadequate appreciation of the sacramental sign leads to an impoverished consideration of the Real Presence itself and, as happened in the past and has not yet been completely overcome, to the imposition of certain forms of Eucharistic worship outside Mass almost "in competition" with liturgical participation, or in contrast to the liturgical spirit.

"The attitude of adoration in the celebration opens and motivates adoration outside of Mass, and this promotes, through personal, silent or communal prayer, the permanence of the attitude of adoration. Both aspects of Eucharistic adoration are based on the reality of Christ's presence in the Blessed Sacrament. Like the beloved disciple, every Christian faithful truly says, before the Eucharist, moved by the Holy Spirit, the affirmation of recognition: 'It is the Lord!' (Jn 21:7)"¹⁰.

After the great *Eucharistic prayer* in the liturgical celebration, following the solemn "Amen" of the whole assembly, there is a series of gestures and prayers with which we prepare ourselves for the intensity of the moment of communion. The consecrated bread and wine on the altar are a sacramental sign of the Lord's presence: the link with the redemptive sacrifice remembered and made present by the action of the Spirit in the Eucharistic prayer ("*This is my Body, which will be given up for you... This is the cup of my blood... which will be poured out for you...*") and its orientation towards communion, the true purpose of such presence.

So too in adoration: we must always remember that consecrated bread comes from a Mass. It has been preserved to prolong the grace of the sacrifice: it is a permanent sacramental sign of the Lord who gives himself for us and waits to be received by those who wish to enter into communion of life with him. The meaning of Christ's real presence cannot be properly understood without considering it in the context of all aspects of the Eucharistic celebration¹¹.

¹⁰ P. TENA, "Pauta para la adoración eucarística", *Phase* 269 (2005) 333.

¹¹ Cf. *RCCE* 4.

The Eucharist is not exhausted in its liturgical celebration. Once the bread and wine have been consecrated, they remain as symbols of the real and living presence of the Lord among his people. In this way, the Eucharist is truly *a permanent sacrament*, because it is a sign that remains, a real presence that endures, *a constant offering and gift*, a memory of a saving gift for all time. God, who pitched his tent among men through the incarnation of his Son, wants this tent to remain through the Eucharist. And just as Christ remains in and through the Word beyond the Eucharistic celebration, so too does he remain through the bread once Mass is over: the table of the Word and the table of the Bread always remain as places where man can experience God's unconditional love, his unconditional offer of salvation, his insistent invitation and gratuitousness¹².

"Eucharistic adoration outside of Mass, in all its forms recognised by the Church, is framed between the full celebration of the mystery and the sacramental grace of the Eucharist that leads us to live in communion with Christ throughout the days. Adoration intensifies in a certain way the grateful memory of the celebration and sacramental grace, because it reminds us that this sacramental presence always comes from the Eucharist celebrated as its source and leads us back to Eucharistic communion as its culmination"¹³.

2.1. The celebration of the Eucharist, *source* of Eucharistic worship

"The celebration of the Eucharist in the sacrifice of the Mass is the origin and consummation of the worship shown to the Eucharist outside Mass. Not only are the sacred species which remain after Mass derived from the Mass, but they are preserved so that those of the faithful who cannot come to Mass may be united to Christ and His Sacrifice celebrated in the Mass, through sacramental Communion received with

¹² Cf. Second Vatican Council, Constitution *Dei Verbum* on Divine Revelation, no. 21.

¹³ J. CASTELLANO, "Teología y mistagogia de la adoración eucarística. Reflexiones y sugerencias", *Phase* 264 (2004) 490.

the right dispositions. Consequently, the Eucharistic sacrifice is the source and the summit of the whole of the Church's worship and of the Christian life"¹⁴.

The Mass, the ecclesial celebration of the Lord's Passover, is therefore the point of reference and *the key to understanding the worship of the Eucharist outside of it*. All Eucharistic worship is closely linked to the celebration of the Eucharist and must be lived in connection with and as an extension of the celebration itself. It will never be a substitute for the Eucharistic celebration; the sacrament prolongs the presence of the Lord and his sacrifice, arouses the desire for full sacramental communion, actualises and deepens the grace of participation in the liturgy. This leads us to affirm that "Eucharistic adoration is not an extra-celebratory moment, but rather a dimension of any approach to the Eucharistic mystery as such"¹⁵, starting from the celebratory moment itself.

"The adoration of the Eucharist, both in the East and in the West, was born in the celebration itself and is rooted in it, although, especially in the West, it has developed strongly outside of it.

The Eucharist present in the tabernacle is a testimony that the divine liturgy, the memorial of the Lord, has been celebrated there. This memorial will always remain at the centre of Christian worship; in it, Christ himself becomes our mediator and, through us, his body, expresses his filial adoration to the Father. The Church joins in this adoration of Christ at the very heart of the sacrificial liturgy.

All other acts, moments of adoration and contemplation, must be considered as a derivation of the central adoration in the sacrifice and as a preparation for it. For Eucharistic adoration, seen in its authentic line and perspective, is a putting into action of the spirituality that has its origin in the Eucharistic sacrifice"¹⁶.

¹⁴ EM 3e.

¹⁵ P. TENA, "La adoración eucarística. Teología y espiritualidad", *Phase* 135 (1983) 211.

¹⁶ C. GONZÁLEZ, *La adoración eucarística. Apuntes para una teología litúrgica*, (Colección Alba-Minor18"), Paulinas, Madrid 1990, 78-79.

This intrinsic relationship between celebration and worship was emphasised by Benedict XVI in his aforementioned Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist:

“One of the most moving moments of the Synod came when we gathered in Saint Peter's Basilica, together with a great number of the faithful, for eucharistic adoration. In this act of prayer, and not just in words, the assembly of Bishops wanted to point out the intrinsic relationship between eucharistic celebration and eucharistic adoration. A growing appreciation of this significant aspect of the Church's faith has been an important part of our experience in the years following the liturgical renewal desired by the Second Vatican Council. During the early phases of the reform, the inherent relationship between Mass and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was not always perceived with sufficient clarity. For example, an objection that was widespread at the time argued that the eucharistic bread was given to us not to be looked at, but to be eaten. In the light of the Church's experience of prayer, however, this was seen to be a false dichotomy. As Saint Augustine put it: *"nemo autem illam carnem manducat, nisi prius adoraverit; peccemus non adorando* – no one eats that flesh without first adoring it; we should sin were we not to adore it.”

“In the Eucharist, the Son of God comes to meet us and desires to become one with us; eucharistic adoration is simply the natural consequence of the eucharistic celebration, which is itself the Church's supreme act of adoration. (192) Receiving the Eucharist means adoring him whom we receive. Only in this way do we become one with him, and are given, as it were, a foretaste of the beauty of the heavenly liturgy. The act of adoration outside Mass prolongs and intensifies all that takes place during the liturgical celebration itself. Indeed, "only in adoration can a profound and genuine reception mature. And it 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.” (SCa 66).

Along the same lines, in his address to the participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments on 13 March 2009, Benedict XVI himself stated that he had welcomed "willingly accepted the proposal that the

Plenary Assembly should address the theme of Eucharistic adoration, trusting that a renewed collegial reflection on this process might help to make clear, within the limits of the Dicastery's competence, the liturgical and pastoral means with which the Church of our time can promote faith in the Real Presence of the Lord in the Holy Eucharist and guarantee the celebration of Holy Mass the full dimension of adoration"¹⁷. "Highlighting the importance of the *intrinsic relationship between the celebration of the Eucharist and adoration*", the Pope also underlined the need to move from the phase of renewal to that of deepening in the field of liturgy.

2.2. Communion, *the goal* of Eucharistic worship

The ultimate purpose of the Eucharist is neither the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine, nor the mere fact that the Church celebrates it by receiving sacramental communion. The goal is to assimilate the communion of life that Christ offers: *participation* in Christ, in his Life, in his Covenant, in his Paschal Sacrifice. Scholastic theologians made a clear distinction between the sign ("sacramentum") and what is signified ("res sacramenti"); in the Eucharist, this ultimate reality is the *union of those who participate with Christ and with their brothers and sisters*.

In the liturgy, *the full response to the gift of broken bread is communion*. Adoration, inspired by this value, must also be a "prolonged spiritual communion": a contemplation that keeps alive in us the perception of the invitation to live as the Lord's guests and to enter, increasingly, into the spirit of charity with which Jesus celebrated his Passover by giving his life¹⁸. Exposition creates a context in which these values can be better transmitted and assimilated: "The exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, for which either a monstrance or a ciborium

¹⁷ BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments*, 13 March 2009, at

http://www.vatican.va/holyfather/benedict_xvi/speeches/2009/march/documents.

¹⁸ Cf. *John* 13:1.

may be used, stimulates the faithful to an awareness of the marvellous presence of Christ and is an invitation to spiritual communion with Him. It is therefore an excellent encouragement to offer Him that worship in spirit and truth which is His due"¹⁹.

The attitude of adoration in prayer before the Eucharist is not limited to placing us generically in the attitude of worship due to God alone. It is Eucharistic adoration: therefore, the true depth of its specific meaning can only be grasped in reference to the sense of participation in the Eucharistic celebration, a fundamental response to Christ's gift. The first attitude of the believer before Christ's invitation, which is proposed in the convivial sign as food and drink for our life, is participation at his table through the acceptance of his gift in communion. "Adoration educates and leads to Eucharistic communion. (...) We must eat and drink the body and blood of Christ in the sacrament with bread and wine, an expression of interpersonal communion in the banquet of sacrifice with full participation in the sacrament. It is not enough to 'form a body' around the Eucharist: we must be 'the Body of Christ' through Eucharistic communion"²⁰.

Sacramental participation in the Eucharist, therefore, is participation at the table of the word and of the bread. Understanding the values, aspects and requirements of Eucharistic communion will also help us to understand the meaning of adoration, which is in the same spirit of response to Christ's gift.

Christ, who has made us participants in his saving Flesh in sacramental communion, invites us, with his continued presence, to a vital, existential communion that extends throughout the day: he asks for a personal response, not merely a ritual or occasional one. The moment of prayer before the Eucharist, if understood correctly, is in harmony with the moment of ritual action: it can be seen as a

¹⁹ *EM 60, RCCE 82.*

²⁰ J. CASTELLANO, "Teología y mistagogia de la adoración eucarística. Reflexiones y sugerencias", 502–503.

requirement for deepening and personalising the attitudes experienced during the celebration, for assimilating the gift received.

2.3. Witness, *the fruit* of Eucharistic worship

The natural response to the absolute priority of God's action is recognition itself, adoration, thanksgiving. Man worships, in the silence of solitude or in community; he listens; he recognises; he gives thanks. The most appropriate response is Christ's intrinsic thanksgiving in the offering of himself to the Father, together with the whole Church.

Communion and Eucharistic worship should prolong these typically celebratory attitudes in the life of the believer: "The union with Christ, to which the sacrament is directed, should be extended to the whole of Christian life. Thus, the faithful, constantly reflecting upon the gift they have received, should carry on their daily work with thanksgiving, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and should bring forth fruits of rich charity"²¹.

Addressing the members of the Spanish Night Adoration, John Paul II stated: "...you cannot limit yourselves to the contemplative attitude of adoration and prayer, because *your prayer would not be authentic if it were not accompanied by a commitment to Christian life and apostolic action*. Only in this way will you respond to Christ's call, which invites you to collaborate with Him in applying the fruits of His redemptive work to all humanity. Consider, then, as an important part of your association's apostolic endeavour, the *promotion of worship of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and of whatever may contribute to a greater experience of Eucharistic celebrations and sacramental communion* on the part of all.

In this way, you will be living witnesses that your occupation as worshippers is not only not sterile or useless for the ecclesial community but is a source of Christian dynamism. Therefore, be

²¹ RCCE 25; cf. EM 38.

faithful to your charism, bearing witness to the primacy of the vertical dimension in the religious life of man. Thus, by combining this witness with the double commitment to live Christianly and to help your brothers spiritually, you will be faithful to your identity as worshippers"²².

The Eucharist, the true heart of the liturgy, is the place par excellence where, based on the infinite oblation and sovereign will of Christ himself, celebration, adoration and life converge harmoniously and as a reference point. Because there is celebration of the Eucharist, there can be Eucharistic adoration and a *Eucharistic* life. Eucharistic celebration and adoration must lead Christians to a *Eucharistic* life, through which everything that has been celebrated and contemplated unfolds and is realised in concrete existence. "The encounter with Christ, constantly intensified and deepened in the Eucharist, issues in the Church and in every Christian *an urgent summons to testimony and evangelization*"²³.

Those who pray before the Eucharist not only recognise and welcome for themselves the gift of the Lord's presence in a moment of individual contemplation, but, feeling animated by the very love of Christ, are impelled to act for the good of others and to bear witness to their own faith before their brothers and sisters.

"Eucharistic worship that does not translate into love and service to others, to which the word of Jesus and the gesture of his self-giving for us constantly invite us, can degenerate into a devotionism that does not 'listen' to the word of the Eucharist, does not understand the message of presence that invites us to live the very life of Jesus in an offering of love to the Father and to our brothers and sisters. A service that is not constantly inspired by the Eucharistic dimension of love for Christ degenerates into philanthropy"²⁴.

²² Homily delivered by John Paul II in St. Peter's Basilica on 31 October 1983, during the extraordinary Vigil of the Spanish Nocturnal Adoration, commemorating the one held in Madrid a year earlier. Cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 2-3 November 1983, 7. (Emphasis added.)

²³ *MND* 24.

²⁴ J. CASTELLANO, " Teología y mistagogia de la adoración eucarística. Reflexiones y sugerencias", 503-504.

The Eucharist, being a transitory celebration, is a permanent reality in the sacramental species and in life. Thus, John Paul II can affirm that from a correct "understanding of Eucharistic worship springs the whole sacramental style of Christian life"²⁵, which thus converts his life into *a sacrament* for the Eucharist²⁶.

3. Conclusion

Theologically speaking to worship is to recognise the unique and transcendent greatness of God. Only God is worthy of worship. It is intrinsically impossible to worship something or someone who by nature depends on God's creative omnipotence, for *worship* is precisely the recognition of God's *unique greatness* and the omnipotence of the One who is worshipped; it implies man's total submission to Him.

Christ is a divine person, and therefore "worthy of worship". And since He is truly present in the Eucharist, He must be worshipped in it with latria.

Bending the knee before the Eucharist, worshipping the Lamb who allows us to celebrate Easter with Him, teaches us not to bow down before idols made by human hands and sustains us in obeying with fidelity, docility and veneration before the One we recognise as the only Lord of the Church and of the world.

The presence of Christ in the Eucharist under the Eucharistic species is a *sacramental presence*. He is present in a certain way: not as judge or teacher, light of the world or doctor of truth. Even though He is all of these things, He is present under the Eucharistic species as

²⁵ DC 7.

²⁶ Cf. *Christus, Lumen gentium. Eucharist and evangelisation*, Base Text XLV International Eucharistic Congress (Seville, 7-13 June 1993), Paulinas, Madrid 1992, n.26; also D. BOROBIO, *Eucaristía vivida: adoradores en espíritu y en verdad*, en ID., *Eucaristía y nueva Evangelización*, ("Biblioteca catecumenal"), Desclée de Brouwer, Bilbao 1992, 113-116.

life-giving food, *inviting us to communion*, to participation in His "sacrificium laudis".

The attitude of man, corresponding to this presence, is communion, full participation in Christ's sacrifice, in his praise of the Father. This fundamental attitude can be relived outside the Eucharistic celebration through prayer before the Eucharist, which is the continuation of sacramental communion: a continuation oriented towards a new sacramental participation.

Eucharistic adoration is a participation in the "sacrificium laudis", in the praise of thanksgiving that Christ pronounced and lived. From this follows the manner in which Eucharistic adoration should be lived: a certain nuance of gratuitousness that gives it its own personality, emphasising the selflessness and praise characteristic of prayer.

The fundamental attitude of *Eucharistic* adoration, with this nuance of gratuitousness, is that of "eucharistein," or participation in Christ's sacrifice of praise, "Eucharist in action". Other aspects derive from this fundamental attitude, such as: reparation, insofar as it is participation in Christ's expiatory sacrifice for the salvation of mankind, incorporation into his mystical Body, and cooperation in the salvation of the Church and the world.

It is important to insist on the *sacramentality of presence*: Christ makes himself present through signs, under the appearance of bread and wine; he presents himself to man in a special way, *which demands an appropriate response from the believer*. In this regard, F.X. Durrwell writes:

"To enter into communion and live in it is to pray. Since the Eucharist is the permanent efficacy of communion, it is also the great sacrament of the Church's prayer.

The Paschal Christ is the house of prayer of the New Testament; the Eucharist is his presence in this world. (...) To enjoy this grace of prayer permanently, the Church has appealed to her rights as spouse and has

decided to keep the Lord's body before her, even outside of Mass, in order to prolong prayerful communion.

When the faithful come to kneel before the Eucharistic presence, we speak of a 'visit to the Blessed Sacrament'. But in reality, it is not they who go to visit their Lord; it is Christ who, from the Father's house, from the end of history and without abandoning it, makes himself present to his community on earth. The Church *welcomes* this presence that visits her.

The faithful do not come so much to speak to their Lord as to listen to Him who, in His words, communicates with them in an inexhaustible radiance. The attitude of the believer is one of welcome; the bread is there to be eaten; the sacrament is celebrated in communion. The Eucharist, the centre of Christian prayer, testifies that to pray is to receive and to commune. (...) Every Eucharistic prayer is a communion, a response to the invitation: 'Take and eat'. Eat the presence. The praying church is a loving church.

(...) It is true that the liturgy is an action, but it consists fundamentally in welcoming, in recognition and in praise. Well then, in order to welcome better, it is asking for times of silence"²⁷.

Although adoration is not required by the very nature of Christ's presence in the gifts, the 'spiritual communion' that is to be sought in it, as vital communion with Christ, seems to be the appropriate response to this presence.

This way of understanding Eucharistic worship "extra Missam" emphasises the sacramental character and proper place of the Eucharistic bread in the whole Eucharistic mystery. In doing so, the hierarchy of values is maintained, and the danger of dissociating "celebration" and "adoration" is removed. For this reason, Eucharistic adoration will always enclose the real desire for sacramental participation in the Eucharistic celebration; it will always require a full response to Christ's invitation to effective participation in the Eucharist. Eucharistic adoration can never replace the celebration; on

²⁷ F.X. DURRWELL, *La Eucaristía, sacramento pascual*, Sígueme, Salamanca 1986, 115-117.

the contrary, it will "revive" it in personal or communal prayer and increase the desire for intense participation in the mystery. Remaining in prayer with the Lord Jesus, alive and true in the Holy Sacrament, matures our union with Him: it predisposes us to a fruitful celebration of the Eucharist and increases in us the attitudes of worship and existence that it itself inspires.

Eucharistic adoration is not just any form of prayer addressed to the Lord, but rather the attitude of prayer that best responds to the Lord's presence under the Eucharistic species. The permanence of this presence of Christ in his Church demands an equally permanent response from us. It is clear that this cannot be limited to exercises of piety, whatever they may be, or to a mere physical presence before the tabernacle. "The only response to the permanent Presence is *an attitude of life*"²⁸. If we want to speak of a spirituality of Eucharistic adoration, it can be none other than the spirituality of the Eucharistic mystery: the central event of our life, where the past, present and future of our salvation are celebrated as an eternal feast, which becomes our daily nourishment.

To the extent that every moment of extra-celebratory Eucharistic worship is inspired by this central event of Christian life, prolongs it and prepares for it, it will be found at the very heart of authentic Christian devotion.

Any reflection on Eucharistic worship, to be fruitful, must be a reflection on the mystery of the Eucharist itself; any practice of this worship, to be at the heart of Christian piety, must return to this mystery that began on the eve of Christ's passion.

The path travelled since the dawn of the Church's life, through its liturgy and expressions of Eucharistic worship, has always developed in a line of continuity. The veneration of the Kýrios, which began in the New Testament, continued during the celebration of Mass in the first millennium, and also extended to the Eucharistic bread

²⁸ MICHEL JEAN CH., *La Pâque du Christ et la nôtre: l'eucharistie*, Editions du Cerf, Paris 1981, 130.

preserved after Mass from the 13th century onwards throughout the second millennium, has come down to us – at the beginning of the third millennium – purified after Vatican II and showing signs of growing vitality. We should not hesitate to consider this entire journey as willed by the Holy Spirit, who, as in other areas of Christian life, gives us an ever deeper understanding of the mystery of Christ and the Church: 'the Spirit of truth will guide you to all truth' (Jn 16:13).

The Holy Spirit has exercised his mission as guide effectively, especially in the decades following Vatican II, when some considered Eucharistic adoration to be nearing its definitive decline. He has done so through the magisterium of the Church, which has continually clarified the nature of Eucharistic worship while exhorting the practice of Eucharistic adoration. The Holy Spirit has influenced the *sensus fidelium* of those who, despite adverse winds, have remained faithful to this ecclesial practice.

The acceptance of the message of the New Testament, the action of the Holy Spirit, and fidelity to the Magisterium will certainly ensure further developments in the worship of the Lord's real presence in his Sacrament.



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