



**49th INTERNATIONAL
EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS
QUEBEC CITY, CANADA 2008**

**THE INSTITUTION
OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST,
GIFT OF GOD**

**Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.**

**Archbishop
of Washington**

One of the most dramatic moments in the liturgical year takes place in Holy Week as we prepare to commemorate the events of our salvation. The Church sets aside this period of time so that we will remember not only what Jesus endured in his Passion and death but what he accomplished for us – our redemption – our salvation. At the beginning of the week, as we come together on Palm Sunday, we stand and listen to the entire Passion narrative from one of the three synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark or Luke. This powerful and dramatic reading is repeated again on Good Friday. This time we listen to John’s account of the suffering and death of Jesus.

Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.

Archbishop
of Washington

We are told by scholars that these chapters in all four Gospels are the very core of the early Church's story of Jesus. The Passion narrative is the central piece of the whole Gospel account that was passed on orally and then written down, lest it ever be forgotten or changed. While the teaching of Jesus was important and the recounting of his miracles and the selection of his disciples and Apostles and the preparation of his Church are all significant parts of the life and revelation of Christ recounted in the four Gospels, nothing has more significance than does the account of Jesus' offering of himself as the sacrificial lamb given in ransom for his people.

There is a sense in which everything else in the Scriptures, particularly in the Gospels, leads up to Calvary and then to the empty tomb in the Easter garden. There is also a real sense in which everything else flows from these sacred events that we have become so

**familiar with as we trace the Way of the Cross
- the Stations of the Cross.**

**Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.**

**Archbishop
of Washington**

When we look at the pages of the New Testament and see how much of it involves the many letters of Paul and those of Peter and John, we recognize that in great part the rest of the New Testament is an explanation, an application of the Passion narrative. Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, describes how in Christ we find, through his death and Resurrection, our liberation and justification. In his Letter to the Galatians as well as his Letter to the Ephesians and in his writings to the Philippians and Colossians, we find, in what is described as the Pauline corpus, a profound theological explanation of how we are to understand the death and Resurrection of Christ and how we ourselves are caught up in that drama so that we participate in the mystery of sin, death and new life in Christ.

I once had a spiritual director who was a great help to me in my high school years. He

would insist that each day I would read a verse or two from the Gospels. I remember him saying with great emphasis, “If you read nothing else but the account of Jesus’ death and Resurrection, you will realize who Jesus is and what Christ is all about.”

Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.

Archbishop
of Washington

Yet we do more than listen to and hear the account of Christ’s final hours. We actually become present, or rather the events are made present to us. It is for this reason that the narrative of the Passion and death of Jesus begins with the account of the institution of the Eucharist. In all four Gospels there is the reference to the Last Supper which is the context of the institution of the Eucharist. In Matthew, Mark and Luke’s Gospel, the relationship of the Last Supper to the events of our redemption is made explicit in the account of the institution of the Eucharist. “Do this in memory of me,” Jesus announces.

The night before he is to undergo his Passion and death, Jesus established a new memorial – a new way to recall and to remember what he was about to endure.

The three synoptic Gospels and Saint Paul have handed on to us the account of the institution of the Eucharist. Saint John for his part reports the words of Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum that prepare for the institution of the Eucharist: Christ calls himself the bread of life, come down from heaven (Jn 6).

**Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.**

**Archbishop
of Washington**

As Paul so beautifully describes the Last Supper in his First Letter to the Corinthians, we read: “For I have received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as

**often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’
For as often as you eat this bread and drink
the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord
until he comes” (1 Co 11:23-26).**

**The context of the new memorial -
instituted at the Last Supper - is the Jewish
Passover. This is the ritual meal established
at God’s command to help the Jewish people
remember the events of their deliverance
from Egypt and the gracious loving-kindness
of God, who is their deliverer.**

**Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.**

**Archbishop
of Washington**

**In an age before technology, where there
were no cameras, photographs, phone
cameras, or camcorders, the ways in which
events were remembered and passed on were
through the celebrations and ritualized
reminders that formed the history, frame of
reference and calendar for a people, in this
case, God’s people. This was the way people
recalled what happened to them in the past,
its significance for them in the present and**

why it is important to continue the memory in the future.

In the Book of Exodus we read how at God's instructions, Moses fashioned a memorial meal – a ritual presentation of the Passover events. The meal was thus integrally connected with the circumstances of the liberation. The symbols of nourishment taken in community and of eating in haste while prepared for flight captured in ritual what God was about to effect in history.

**Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.**

**Archbishop
of Washington**

Added to this was the Lord's special command to repeat these ceremonies in the future: "This day shall be a memorial feast for you, which all your generations shall celebrate with pilgrimage to the Lord, as a perpetual institution (...). Since it was on this very day that I brought your ranks out of the land of Egypt, you must celebrate this day throughout your generations as a perpetual institution" (Ex 12:14, 17).

Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.

Archbishop
of Washington

This whole series of saving events was richly preserved in the annual repetition of the Passover meal in what was called a “memorial feast.” As generation after generation shared the paschal lamb and the unleavened bread, fathers told their children of the wonders Yahweh had worked on behalf of His chosen people. In this “memorial feast” they understood and celebrated far more than a community festival. The Passover meal was not simply an opportunity to review past history. In this meal the people of God knew they were with their Lord, and they renewed the covenant He had made with them.

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches us: “In the sense of Sacred Scripture the memorial is not merely the recollection of past events but the proclamation of the mighty works wrought by God for men. In the liturgical celebration of these events, they become in a certain way present and real. This is how Israel understands its liberation from Egypt: every time Passover is

celebrated, the Exodus events are made present to the memory of believers so that they may conform their lives to them” (CCC 1363).

The interplay between ritual and history that took place in the Exodus was repeated at the New Pasch. Christ’s crucifixion and Resurrection, which are the sacrificial offering that frees us from sin, took place after the Last Supper, just as the flight from Egypt and the events of Sinai followed the first Passover meal. But Jesus’ command to repeat this as a “memorial” of Himself established the Last Supper as the ceremonial setting for the representation of the events of our salvation. In this memorial sacrifice the new covenant could and would be constantly renewed with every succeeding generation.

Unlike the Passover meal that was the context of the Last Supper and which was intended to remind the Jewish people of their formation as God’s people and therefore their

Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.

Archbishop
of Washington

Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.

Archbishop
of Washington

identity, the Eucharist was intended to be a memorial that would actually make the event it memorialized present – not as a memory but as a reality. In the New Testament, the memorial takes on new meaning. When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ’s Passover and it is made present: the sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the cross remains ever-present.

When we focus on the Eucharist we recognize its immediate connectedness to the Last Supper. The origins of the Eucharist are found in the Last Supper. The *Catechism* teaches us: “In order to leave them a pledge of this love, in order never to depart from his own and to make them sharers in his Passover, he instituted the Eucharist as a memorial of his death and Resurrection, and commanded his apostles to celebrate it until his return; ‘thereby he constituted them priests of the New Testament’ ” (1337).

Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.

Archbishop
of Washington

This Eucharistic Congress is intended to lift up for us once again the events of our salvation, but to do so in a way that we actually participate in those saving actions. The Church calls us not just to a commemoration of the events of two thousand years ago, as laudable as that might be, but also to enter the mystery itself today. We are not bystanders, but rather participants.

In his last encyclical on the Eucharist, the Servant of God Pope John Paul the Great reminds us of the ancient faith of the Church: “When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the memorial of her Lord’s death and resurrection, this central event of salvation becomes really present and ‘the work of our redemption is carried out’ ” (11).

As the Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy teaches: “At the Last Supper, on the night He was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic

Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.

Archbishop
of Washington

sacrifice of His Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until he should come again, and so to entrust to His beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is received, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future life is given to us” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 47).

Unlike any other form of remembrance or commemoration, the Mass, the Eucharistic Liturgy, thanks to God’s gracious gift, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, has the power to make present the very reality it symbolizes.

In the Eucharist, Jesus has instituted the sacrament in which his Passion, death and Resurrection would be made present again in our lives in a way that enables us to share in the benefits of the cross. We speak of our dying to sin and rising to new life because we participate in the mystery of Christ’s death

and Resurrection. The Church uses the word “re-present” to speak of what is happening in the Mass. The term “holy sacrifice” of the Mass is also exact because sacramentally, but really and truly, the death and Resurrection of Christ are once again made present.

**Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.**

**Archbishop
of Washington**

In the Last Supper, Jesus instituted a new memorial sacrifice. The true “Lamb of God” (Jn 1:29) was about to be slain. By his cross and Resurrection he was to free not just one nation from bondage but all humanity from the more bitter slavery of sin. He was about to create a new people of God by the rich gift of his Spirit.

It is true that there is only one sacrifice – the self-giving of Christ on the cross at Calvary. Once and for all Jesus, who was the victim for our sins, offered himself up for our redemption. “For this reason he is mediator of a new covenant: since a death has taken place for deliverance from transgressions under the first covenant, those who are called

may receive the promised eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15).

This one great sacrifice was accomplished by Jesus the priest and victim, who offered himself on the altar of the cross for our redemption. This sacrifice need not and cannot be repeated. But it can be re-presented so that we are able, sacramentally and spiritually, to enter it and draw spiritual nourishment from it.

Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.

Archbishop
of Washington

The haunting words and melody of the great American spiritual, “Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?” come to mind as we reflect on the Eucharist as sacrifice. The hymn catches the sense of longing to somehow be present at the foot of the cross and to receive the redemption won for us by the blood that flowed from Christ as he hung on the cross. While it is true that we cannot be physically present at Calvary, there is a real sacramental and spiritual sense in which we are present as we participate in the

Eucharist. The merit that came for us through the death of Jesus is applied to us in the very mystery that we call the Paschal Mystery – Passover from death to life.

All was to be new. But first Christ would have to die on the cross and rise to new life. As a perpetual memorial to his death and Resurrection, at the Passover meal with his Apostles, he took the bread and made it his body and took the cup and made it the cup of his blood and then challenged us to “do this in remembrance of me.”

**Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.**

**Archbishop
of Washington**

Like the Passover meal, this memorial sacrifice of the new lamb is both sacrifice and sacred meal. Both aspects remain inseparably a part of the same mystery. The Eucharist is an unbloody re-presentation of the sacrifice of the cross and an application of its saving power. The Lord is immolated in the Sacrifice of the Mass when, through the outpouring of the Spirit in the words of consecration, he begins to be present in the

sacramental form under the appearance of bread and wine to become the spiritual food of the faith. Jesus said to his Apostles and through them to us, “Do this in remembrance of me. Every time you do this I will be present, I will be with you, I will join you.”

**Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.**

**Archbishop
of Washington**

How do we become a member of this new people – this new family of God sealed in a new and eternal covenant? How do we enter this Kingdom and become a part of the new creation? How do we share in the mystery of the Eucharist? We do it through baptism.

Baptism is described as the gateway to life in the Spirit and as the door that gives access to the other sacraments. Hence baptism becomes the first of the sacraments of initiation into the new order — the new creation.

When the waters of baptism are poured over a person being initiated into the Church, the old order begins to pass away and new creation comes to be. The faith of the Church,

clearly expressed in the New Testament, is that Christ came to establish a kingdom of the Spirit. Through his death and Resurrection, Christ won for God a new people, a holy people, a people set apart marked with God's Spirit. We who are members of the Church are the new people and are the beginning of a whole new creation.

Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.

Archbishop
of Washington

As our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, teaches in *Sacramentum Caritatis*, "If the Eucharist is truly the source and summit of the Church's life and mission, it follows that the process of Christian Initiation must constantly be directed to the reception of the sacrament. It must never be forgotten that our reception of baptism and confirmation is ordered to the Eucharist. The sacrament of baptism by which we are conformed, incorporated into the Church and made children of God is the portal of all the sacraments" (17).

We are not simply bystanders at this memorial, at this Eucharist. We are participants in the new Passover. This new ritual instituted at the Last Supper transforms us into God's new people.

What do we bring to this Eucharistic banquet, to this paschal celebration? As guests who have been invited not only to witness the memorial of our redemption but actually participate in it, what do we bring? Certainly, we do not come empty-handed to the table of the Lord.

The first gift we bring as we approach this extraordinary memorial is our own lively faith. Like Peter, we can reply when Jesus asks us, "Who do you say that I am?" that "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

We can reply as Martha did when Jesus proclaimed that he was the resurrection and the life and asked her, "Do you believe this?" With her, we proclaim, "Yes, Lord, I have come to believe."

**Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.**

**Archbishop
of Washington**

When we come forward to receive the Eucharist and the host is presented with the declaration, “the Body of Christ,” we can reply with lively, animated faith, with confidence in the Lord’s word, with trust in Christ’s revelation, “Amen. I believe!”

Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.

Archbishop
of Washington

We also bring the gift of hope. Because we believe, because we see with the eyes of faith, because we place our trust in the words that Jesus has spoken to us, we can with confidence live out our faith. As Pope Benedict XVI reminds us in *Spe Salvi*, his encyclical on Christian hope, “The one who has hope lives differently; the one who has hope has been granted the gift of new life” (2).

We can also approach the altar with hearts filled with love. At that Last Supper Jesus taught us that since we were sharers of his Body and Blood we were members of the same family and brothers and sisters to each other.

**Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.**

**Archbishop
of Washington**

In the context of the institution of the Eucharist we see the dramatic scene of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. This was the work of the servant, not the master of the house. It was a sign and symbol of how we should love one another in a ministry of service and care. Jesus says to us if we are to be his new people and we are to walk in his footsteps, if we are to be transformed in his death and Resurrection into new life, then we must learn to see in each other brothers and sisters, friends and members of the same spiritual family.

Love that is translated into action is alive. The washing of the feet is a symbolic but real gesture of the love we must have for each other in imitation of the love Jesus has for us.

Our faith calls us to be willing to recognize Christ not only in the Eucharist but in one another and to do so in a way that manifests Christ's love now and until he comes in glory.

It is for this reason that our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical, *God is Love*, reminds us that “the Church’s deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of preaching the word of God, celebrating the sacraments, and exercising the ministry of charity” (25).

**Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.**

**Archbishop
of Washington**

When you and I read the Scriptures, we recall the events of another time and place. But in the Eucharist, the saving events of that other time and place are made present to us here and now. In his apostolic exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Pope Benedict XVI teaches us that it is in the Church “that Christ, the one savior through the Spirit, reaches our lives in all their particularity” (16).

When we look around at this Eucharistic Congress, we see an expression of God’s grace at work even though each one of us remains in our uniqueness in what the Holy Father calls our particularity.

Each one of us with our own heritage, tradition, ethnic and cultural background, speaks to a pluralism that is part of the human condition and yet in our faith, when we come forward, baptized in one Spirit to receive one Lord in the Eucharist, we are united in one faith in his one Church. We are, in fact, one people – his people.

**Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.**

**Archbishop
of Washington**

Because we see with the eyes of faith, we see in the Church and in her sacraments Christ continuing to be with us, to touch us, to change us, to transform us. The institution of the Eucharist was to ensure that each of us today, here in Quebec in June 2008, is able to enter the mystery of the cross and the Resurrection as if we actually were present, not as bystanders but as participants.

Flowing from the Eucharist is not just the remembrance of the death and Resurrection of Christ but the strength we derive from it to be a whole new creation, people alive with the Holy Spirit with the power to bring about

God's kingdom of truth, justice, compassion, kindness, peace and love.

Since we are constituted God's people, God's family, his Church, precisely in our participation in the Eucharist, we cannot grow into Christ's new Body as healthy and full members without sharing in the Eucharistic Liturgy.

**Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.**

**Archbishop
of Washington**

On each Sunday, the commemoration of Easter, the faithful come together, not only to profess the faith but also to renew the life of Christ within them. We gather not as individuals isolated from each other and related only to Christ, but precisely as God's family interrelated to each other and through the Church. We are made one in the Eucharist. For this reason, the Church calls upon believers to celebrate the great gift of God with us in the Eucharist every Sunday.

As he concludes his apostolic exhortation on the Eucharist, our Holy Father, calls us to reflect on how "the Eucharist makes us

Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.

Archbishop
of Washington

discover that Christ, risen from the dead, is our contemporary in the mystery of the Church, his body” (97). Here, three of the great mysteries of our faith are woven together. It is in the Eucharist that we not only encounter Christ, but are invited into his death and Resurrection, not as something beyond or outside us, but rather as members of his body in which Christ truly is present today: he is our contemporary.

The Church is the enduring presence of Christ in the world today. Through the celebration of the Eucharist in the Church this central event of salvation becomes truly present and the work of our redemption is carried out. The Lord of history and Savior of the world is at work among us now precisely in his Church and in the Eucharist.

At every Mass, the celebrant, after he consecrates the host and chalice of Precious Blood, recites the command of the Lord: “Do this in memory of me.” The priest genuflects

in adoration and then joins the people in one of several proclamations of the core of Christian faith. It is that faith that brings us to this Eucharistic Congress, that same faith that unites us, and that same faith that sees in the Eucharist the work of our redemption being carried out. Thus, we joyfully proclaim: “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.”

**Most Reverend
Donald W.
Wuerl, S.T.D.**

**Archbishop
of Washington**