

FRANCESCO BESCHI

BISHOP OF BERGAMO



WOMEN AND MEN
CAPABLE OF THE EUCHARIST

pastoral letter
2014 - 2015

They devoted themselves
to the teaching of
the apostles and to
the communal life, to
the breaking of the bread
and to the prayers.
Awe came upon everyone,
and many wonders and
signs were done through
the apostles.

(ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 2,42)



INTRODUCTION

I was ordained bishop eleven years ago: many things have changed in my life, even more so since the beginning of the service that I render in the Diocese of Bergamo. One of the most noticeable changes is the quantity and quality of liturgical celebrations that I have been called to preside. If I were to compare myself with many priests, I am certainly less committed than them; but if I were to refer to the years preceding the episcopal ordination, the liturgical dimension has assumed an amplitude and an importance that I had not experienced before. I want to start my letter with this personal familiarity, because I think it could be an expression of an inner condition marked by the new change that has been introduced in my priestly life and by the wonder that still dawns on me every time I live through a celebration.

I now will not recall the great passage marked by the Second Vatican Council, the richness and the difficulties of the liturgical reform and its gradual consolidation. I simply would like to share the belief that there is nothing more amazing in human history than what takes place in a liturgical celebration.

From the awareness of this surprise that I would like to continue with you on the journey indicated by the Diocesan Synod and its conclusions.

It is a line that I have tried to accompany with the letters written during these past years: "At home in the Church", the sense of alienation from the Church and on the possibility to overcome it; "Christian brotherhood" on one of the fundamental conditions that favors the formation of Pastoral Units; "Women and men capable of Gospel" on the figure of the adult believer and the need to revive the catechesis of adults.

During the year, I listened with great joy to the story of numerous and qualified experiences of proclamation and catechesis of adults proposed in our parishes and other ecclesial communities and I hope that these will continue, supported by the Diocesan Catechetical Office which is engaged in a particular way in the preparation of qualified catechists for the adult world, in accordance to the indications contained in the last letter.

The path last year led me to meeting with the liturgical leaders of our communities. Although this visit has not yet been completed, I would like to express deep gratitude to all those who render themselves to the service of the community in this field. Along with the gratitude I unite the spiritual joy of having gathered the testimony of the faith of those who carry out this ministry.

From this experience arose the desire to offer you a few thoughts and some possibilities of pastoral commitment starting from the relationship between liturgy and community life. It deals with a deep and vast bond that I will not cover in this writing: I would be happy to share with you some thoughts and ways related to the features that the Christian community takes on starting from the celebration of the Eucharist.

Last year we focused on the figure of the adult believer, and it is precisely from the reflection on the characteristics of this figure that emerges the awareness of the communitarian dimension of Christian life. Being a Christian demands being so with other Christians, requires a community. Faith in Jesus, the Lord, creates bonds that have as their source and their foundation Jesus himself, and the gift of his Spirit, which transforms a group of persons into a living organism: the Church.

This community assumes its appearance in the relationship with the Lord Jesus, in the listening to His Word, in the reception of his gifts and in celebrating the Eucharist in a decisive manner. The Eucharist generates and draws the inner and outer aspects of the Church. The Eucharist represents the DNA of the Church. Being men and women capable of the Eucharist means to be men and women capable of making the Church according to the Gospel. Therefore we shall focus on the community that celebrates the Eucharist, in order to recognize the results on the community of that celebration.



part one

THE ICON:

the story of the Acts of the Apostles

FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES (2,42-47)

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

It is a very well known page. It represents the first community of the disciples of the Lord, indicating the fundamental characteristics: listening to the apostles, fraternal communion, the breaking of bread and prayer.

These characteristics are not only ideal, but decisive. These are the features of the new community that is born: the insistence on perseverance in implementing them gives us this clear awareness.

The image of the "breaking of bread" reminds readers of all times of His gesture at the Last Supper before dying, of the gesture of the Eucharist that Jesus entrusted to his disciples, "Do this in remembrance of me."

In the letters of the Apostle Paul, will meet the existential and ecclesial implications of this gesture. Eating the unique broken bread which is the Body of Christ, we who are many and different become one body. The Holy Spirit transforms bread and wine, transforms our diversity and differences, our individual uniqueness and our personal originalities into an organic unity, alive, complex and multiple. In the Eucharist, the People of God journeying through history, takes on the form of the Body of Christ.



part two

THE PARABLE: the eyes of a child

Together with the biblical icon, I wish to entrust this memory, linked with the first few weeks after my ordination to the priesthood and accompanied by the sense of freshness that a child's glance is always capable of inspiring. A memory capable of evoking the ancient question that the book of Exodus entrusts to the youngest of the family, during the Passover meal. The answer to that question opens a narrative and while the old man narrates the past, what is narrated happens.

It was my first training camp with the catechists. I had just received my destination in a suburban parish. We were celebrating the Eucharist in the mountain hut that housed us, when a father with his little girl asked us to participate. We were gathered around a table. Precisely during the consecration, the little girl, silent and attentive until that moment, looked at her father and asked, "Dad, what are you doing? Why are you doing that?" The beauty of her eyes and the clarity of her voice have remained impressed in me as an emblem of a pure and innocent amazement, door wide

open to a response not able to satisfy it, but to nourish it. That little girl felt, in her ability to wonder, not only an exterior novelty, but also an involving event.

Many can relate about particularly evocative and exciting liturgical celebrations, but the questions of the child lead us beyond the strength of feelings and introduce us to a depth that would be unfair to dismiss as insignificant compared to the density of life.

This story also nurtures a desire: that our communities, gathered for the Eucharist, can evoke these questions not only from children, not only in the consciousness of those who occasionally participate in these gestures, but in themselves. Questions that are the result of awe. The community that gathers for the Eucharist takes shape from this bewilderment that never vanishes: women and men capable of wonder.

Boredom is one of the reasons why people, starting with the young, justify a dissociation from the Eucharist. Yawning seems to have become a liturgical gesture also. For this reason, we endeavor to "liven up" the celebration, continuously introducing new externals. It is a delicate choice: the liturgy provides interior and exterior creativity, neither excessive nor overwhelming. The exterior novelty, the more appreciable has a flavor of truth and fidelity to the indications of the Magisterium, it is an expression of the astonishment at the inexhaustible novelty of the mystery of faith that we celebrate. We are not the ones to make the Eucharistic celebration new, fascinating and meaningful, but it is the love of God manifested in the Easter gestures of Jesus that makes us new, humanity, history, the entire universe and also the gestures we do in the Liturgy.



part three

THE FEATURES:

lights and shadows of the Eucharistic assembly

The aspects of the Eucharist celebrated and that of the community that celebrates it is brightened by many lights.

I underline some of them: the care of the spaces of the celebration and preparation of the liturgical celebration, ones presence at the Eucharist from the very beginning, active participation now widespread and internalized, the attentive reception of the Word of God and the homily; knowledge and consciousness of the Eucharistic gestures, the numerically elevated participation of sacramental communion, the commitment to nourish the relationship between the Eucharist and personal life, family, community and society.

The same appearance also reveals some shadows.

We have witnessed a quantitative decrease in the participation and it seems that this reduction has not yet ended: particularly the younger generations seem extraneous to these gestures and their meanings. One reason for this diminution is the minor significance of the moral obligation of the Sunday Eucharist attendance. The "obligation" is often unknown, perceived as moralistic, exposed to a thousand

exceptions. The awareness of the moral gravity of the absence at the Sunday Eucharistic assembly is very uncertain. In fact, many attend from time to time and sometimes replace the festive celebration with the weekday. A certain reluctance to the ritual and its Communitarian dimension has spread, preference of concrete commitment inspired by Gospel values and the individual dimension of the relationship with God. The proposal the leaders of the community draws on positive motivations that strive to convey the meaning and value of the Sunday Eucharist, with encouraging outcomes for those who participate, but ineffective in retaining or bringing back those who have abandoned.

The concerned separation between Eucharistic participation and existential decline should not be underestimated. It seems that what is shared in the Eucharist, does not give shape to our singular and communitarian existence. It tends to highlight the need for a moral coherence in which the contents and above all the motivations do not arise from the "Grace" of the mystery being celebrated, but by a commitment which however, must be fulfilled by those who call themselves Christians. On the other hand it is not uncommon to find people who participate in the Eucharist who manifest a mentality and behavior completely extraneous if not opposed to the Eucharist itself.



part four

THE WAY: lines for a plan

Imagining our reflection as a route to be taken, I would like to share some lines that characterize the path. They are simple considerations, applicable to common experience that everyone can do.

THE LITURGICAL EXPERIENCE

The word “liturgy” is incomprehensible for many. For as many others it is something nauseating, useless, exterior. Yet the liturgies have always existed, existing in every place of the earth and constantly new ones are born. Many liturgies have to do with religions, but others belong to the world and to lives of everyone: religious liturgies and secular liturgies. Liturgy has to do with the world of symbols, of evocations, representations: it is a moment of synthesis and recommencements. The Liturgy is nourished by words, signs, gestures, rituals, music and songs, celebrants of different levels, special clothes. It takes place in dedicated places and at pre-established times. Although it presupposes personal involvement, it is something essentially communitarian. The liturgy is experienced as a place of recognition and visible belonging, as the possibility of entering into a relationship with the invisible. In religious experience, the vertical dimension of the encounter with God is joined with the horizontal encounter

between people who share the same faith in God. Liturgy therefore tends to nurture a belongingness that establishes bonds with other people: one is not simply one beside another, but feels united starting from "something" very profound and relevant.

The Eucharist, for Christians, is the most important event of the entire Liturgy. In it they recognize God's initiative and the decisive manifestation of His love that radically redeems humanity from sin, from uncertainties, from evil and death. The Eucharist is like an inexhaustible source of life, to which all those who have been baptized unite by sharing the same faith and the same hope. The Eucharistic bread broken, distributed and eaten together, acknowledged as the Body of Christ, transforms them into a single living body, not at all with regards to a corporation: the Christians themselves are transformed into the living Body of Christ.

The liturgy, therefore, and in particular, the Eucharist, has a communitarian dimension which cannot be left to the good will of a single person, but demands to be understood and implemented with conviction. At the same time, it cannot be taken for granted, in a context in which the individual dimension of life is strongly emphasized and the eventual religious experience is considered and pursued as something absolutely private.

THE CELEBRATING COMMUNITY

The Eucharist is a divine work. Jesus makes the Eucharist and Jesus gives it. He entrusts this work to the Christian community guided by the apostles. "Do this in memory of me." Without the apostle (Bishop and priests), the Eucharist is not possible since it essentially is a gift received, testament of the Teacher; never the less the apostle would not exist without the Church, which generated him and for which he renders service. It is the Church as a whole that celebrates the Eucharist, a Church inevitably apostolic.

For some Christians, the "Mass" is a "thing" of the priests, and they are simply the beneficiaries, recipients, even spectators; instead, there are others who make the "Mass" a kind of conquered land, where to exercise some power. These are distorted conceptions of the "Mass" starting from a vision that has privileged the individualistic dimension of the relationship with God.

The assembly that is formed during the Eucharist is not the outcome of our feelings, of our beliefs, of our good will, of the fulfillment of a law: it is rather the joyful response to the call of God of those who believe in Him and in the wonderful work that has been manifested in the death and resurrection of his Son. This act is able to make of our lives an offering pleasing to God and through the work of the Holy Spirit, to make of the people united to the living body of Christ in the history of mankind. The community that celebrates the mystery of faith becomes a powerful "image" of the Christian community in its existential dimension, a sign and testimony of radical hope inaugurated by the Lord, crucified and risen. The community while it celebrates takes on the shape and assumes the features of what is happening.

The meaning of my proposal is this: the Church takes on her existential form from the Eucharist that it celebrates. In general, personal repercussions of the Eucharistic celebrations have been favored: it is necessary to pay attention to the communitarian impact of the Mystery celebrated together.

ONE BODY AND ONE SPIRIT

The Eucharistic form of the Church is that of the body. In the second Eucharistic prayer, the presiding priest prays with these words: "all of us who share in the body and blood of Christ, the Holy Spirit brought us together in one body." The purpose of the Eucharist therefore is to transform that assembly into one body and one Spirit, the Body and the Spirit

of the Crucified and Risen Christ. The sacramental body of Christ, becomes an existential and historical Body. It is not difficult to imagine what this means, with respect to every form of individualism, of division, hostility, distrust, indifference in the Church and on the part of the Church.

The current Eucharist prayer is that for unity of the Church: it is not a functional unit of power, but the testimony of the love of God, manifested in Christ the Lord. It is a unit that does not mortify the different gifts, charismas and vocations, conditions of existence, spiritual experiences, rather it is enriched and lives of all of these. It is a union generated by love and living testimony of love, capable of reaching all men, as the love of Christ. The sin of every baptized person, somehow becomes the sin of the whole Church, a deformation of the body of Christ; the grace and the good of every baptized person is grace and goodness of the whole Church.

I have the impression that this organic unity, this communal existence does not touch the heart, it is perceived with a certain discomfort, sometimes even as an obstacle to the encounter with God; it is often misunderstood and ignored. We must acknowledge that the historical and social changes require new forms of community life, compared to those rooted in societies that are essentially static in time and space. The possibility to identify these new forms stems from an awareness that the Eucharist itself continually enlightens and renews: a celebration participated actively, consciously and inwardly generates the new forms of communities. I certainly imagine our parishes, but also the Pastoral Units, parish "elected", the Cathedral Church, the friendly hospitality offered to those who for reasons of work, care, study, or holiday participate in the celebrations of a parish other than that of their residence...

It is evident how all this has personal repercussions, relational and social which decidedly head for the opposite direction to the contemporary stubborn individualism. Individualism that is

suffering, mortally sick of solitude, yet still so ingrained and seductive, decisive in shaping what we stubbornly call society. The meeting, the possibility of real and definitive relationships are experienced as desire, hope and expectation; but frequently also as an obstacle, discomfort, limit. This condition is reflected in a dramatic way on those who cannot keep up with the pace: the number is huge. I think of the elderly and sick, and disabled, poor and abandoned, homeless and hungry, immigrants and refugees, prisoners and losers. Brutal or refined selectivity nurtures and expresses the "culture of waste" that Pope Francis denounces as characteristic of our way of thinking about life. The Eucharist is the principal active ingredient of a different culture, in which the relation is the most expressive of our humanity and the recognition of the other becomes the seed of widespread acceptance of family and social relationships that are horizon of hope, trust, security . The active participation in the Eucharist is the condition, inhabited by Grace, to nourish a responsible participation in a fraternal and convivial society.

THE DAYS OF THE EUCHARISTIC COMMUNITY

The day of the Eucharist is above all Sunday, with all the implications that have often been invoked in a context that continually requires rethinking of the implementation. The Eucharist articulates the time, months and year with the events of Jesus and of salvation; it is the culmination of the Easter Vigil, more numerically and consciously participated, heart of the faith and life of the Christian community. The Eucharist is the core of many feasts: family celebrations, community, social; traditional moments rooted in the history of the community. The Eucharist also marks daily life: the joys and sorrows, hopes and fears; being born and dying, loving and working, suffering and rejoicing. The Eucharist is accompanied by special days for the Church and society: to many people these seem to hinder and encumber the celebrations of the community. A more careful consideration

of these occasions and the provocations that they contain in relation to the life of the community would render them less extraneous or imposing on our parishes.

The moments of the Eucharistic community become those of family relationships, of the work that exists and that is lacking, of neighborly relations that we do not want to abandon to absolute anonymity, of the dedication and responsibility for the territory. The moments of these experiences can assume a Eucharistic value that is not only in personal terms, but also in terms of the Community. An example is represented by the definition of the calendars of the Christian community and the civil community, in accordance to criteria that recognize the reality that we have highlighted.

THE PLACES OF THE EUCHARISTIC COMMUNITY

Along with the moments I remember the places where the Eucharist shapes the life of the community: first of all, our churches. The care of these spaces both in their structural forms, both in the daily care of routine maintenance, the decor, the cleanliness, the ornament, the beauty of the details is extraordinary for generosity and for faith.

I also want to emphasize the importance of places and of the fundamental liturgical furnishings: the altar, the lectern, the seat, the tabernacle. Equally important is the layout of the assembly, the definition of the presbytery, the allotment of the spaces for the fulfillment of the various ministries. The universal and diocesan indications in this respect are plentiful and wise. The fact of constantly changing the arrangement and the decoration of the church based on a criteria not shared at a diocesan level creates a morally harmful disorientation. The offices dedicated to this field, will carry out their service, in such a way that it pursues an authentic and coherent liturgical and structural proposal.

The community that celebrates the Eucharist, draws inspiration for creating spaces and facilities for the meeting,

the education, the hospitality, the care, the assistance. To give an example: the creation and management of an oratorio draws from the Eucharistic community their ideal features, structural and organizational: The same can be done for public spaces, in a constructive comparison of visions and projects: I am thinking of our homes, of city or town planning, including schools, hospitals, homes for the elderly or for people with severe disabilities or of places of work. The realization of the structural facilities is an expression of cultural convictions that may or may not favor the dignity of the person, the importance of family and social relationships, integral development, safety and environmental care.

THE DYNAMICS OF THE EUCHARISTIC COMMUNITY

The Eucharistic celebration also gives form to the many dynamics of social and community life, starting precisely from those that characterize the Christian community, about which we will discuss later. We are faced with multiple memberships, exposed to the risk of insignificant and transient consumerism, but also to the wealth of possibilities, knowledge, meaningful bonds. Relating with the family, community and the society is often utilitarian; many engage in their social relations in terms of power. But we cannot forget the generous love that nourishes a multitude of family relationships, the wealth of the diverse skills that enrich the life of the community, the generosity that inspires the behavior of many, the diversity and unity that continuously interact in a constructive way, the movements of inclusion that characterize the daily relationships and social policies. It is a matter of dynamics that are never neutral, but are colored with our way of perceiving the human person, life, the world. Celebrating the Eucharist together is an experience that can give shape to these dynamics.



part five

THE EUCHARIST, the shape of the Christian community

I have tried to outline the relationship between the Eucharist and the Christian community, with the results that this relationship produces in the society as a whole. Now I wish to emphasize some characteristic dimensions of the Christian community which celebrates the Eucharist.

The basic dimensions, that St. John Paul II points out in his letter entitled *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* are those that we repeat in the Profession of Faith: "We believe in the Church one, holy, catholic and apostolic." We can say that the Church is so, because such is the Eucharist. I shall try to allow myself to be inspired by these essential dimensions, developing some considerations.

THE DIMENSION OF UNITY

It is the most beautiful fruit of the Eucharist. The entire Eucharist is an experience of unity, source and form of ecclesiastical unity: I shall try to describe it with no intentions of being exhaustive. It is a unity that is a gift and reflection of the same unity of God, an original union which does not "cover" diversity, but welcomes, recognizes and promotes them with joy; it is a unity that is nourished and characterized by love; a humble unity, always exposed to our weaknesses and divisions; a tender unity, that does not threaten and does

not pursue power and strength. It is a sign of hope for all men.

The unity should not be dear only to the Pope's heart, or to the bishop and the parish priest: it is a goodness, rather it is the goodness for all. In a context profoundly marked by individualism, unity is not always perceived as such. It is often perceived as a threat to the freedom of the individual, as a limit to one's self-realization, as a leveling of one's originality. Yet it is continuously evoked and promoted in a thousand ways. It is desired and pursued as a value in personal relationships, family, social and economic issues. The union that takes the form of the body, even that becomes the existential Body of Christ Jesus in the Christian community, requires a choral and shared testimony, inflamed by faith and willingness of each one.

Historically, this testimony is offered in a visible manner by religious communities which we encourage to continue to propose in a meaningful and attractive way. In recent decades we have seen the growth of diverse and vibrant community experiences formed by lay people and even by families. In the daily life of each one the choral testimony represented by the parish is still of great significance: a union in the variety of groups, initiatives, membership. It is a story of people characterized by shared existential moments, from the moments of the feasts, from the reality of the oratory and the voluntary sectors, the educational programs that encompass catechesis, sports, music, theater, summer activities, the formation of those who are at the service of the community. All this wealth cannot be separated from the Eucharist. It is there that we find the source, the regeneration, the shape of our way of being with and working together in the parish. Even the Pastoral Units, must draw their identity starting from a shared choral and responsible reflection and that springs forth from the Eucharistic celebration.

The unity of Christ's body is constantly exposed to the danger of separation, division even hostility. This has happened in a dramatic fashion in the historical divisions between Christians that still remain today. Blessed is the ecumenical movement, the steps marked by the Second Council and the subsequent ones, the great signs accomplished by the heads of the various churches, prophetic gestures of the pontiffs, convinced cultivation by those who, even in our Diocese, endeavor to foster the path of unity with the representatives and the Christians of other Churches.

We cannot believe that this is a problem of a few enthusiasts and specialists, especially in a historical moment in which the presence of people coming from many parts of the world, ask this question in very concrete terms.

The unit also reaches the political dimension of life. The political unity of Catholics has taken different forms over the course of history: is today still a time for a unity in this respect? We have experienced overcoming the need of, and the representation in a single party; we are in a period characterized by the multiplicity of memberships and the criterion of unity around the values inspired by the same vision of man. In fact, we are living in a situation that demands a rethinking and reformulation of political commitment on the part of Catholics, starting from the Christian communities in the area, starting from the knowledge and experiences that nurture a popular conscience, from a spirituality capable of nurturing an evangelical culture and political practice. The Eucharistic community is able to generate men and women who cultivate passion for and assume responsibilities in this respect, without the need for any special ecclesiastical coverage. It is a duty to express our acknowledgement of those who perform this service, inspiring their own motivations and choices with the evangelical criteria and the Eucharistic community in which they participate.

THE DIMENSION OF RECONCILIATION

In the horizon of the Eucharistic unity a dimension that deserves to be highlighted is that of reconciliation. The Eucharist is the vital principle of a humanity reconciled by God, with God and among men. Reconciliation means overcoming hostility, wars of all kinds, of divisive evil, glacial indifference, feelings of revenge, encouraged distances. Reconciliation is the overcoming of sin.

Jesus performs the work of reconciliation, as a gratuitous initiative of God. He declares the end of the inexorable logic of evil, of sin and death; He announces the mercy of God the Father and His forgiveness. This proclamation becomes life, starting from the supreme gift that penetrates the darkness of evil and triumphs over it with greater love. "We announce your death, we proclaim your resurrection, until you come in glory" this is how we sing in the heart of the Eucharist. It is the joy of acknowledging in the gesture and in the sacrifice of Christ the principle of the reconciliation of humanity.

The community celebrating the Eucharist, receives the gift of reconciliation and becomes a reconciled and reconciling community. The participation in the one Bread, exchange of Peace, the imploring request for forgiveness during the celebration, gather and express the gift. The strict word that requires us to be reconciled before presenting our gift at the altar, requires an authentic willingness to overcome hostilities, divisions and distances so as not to make ourselves impenetrable to God's work.

We must realize that the need for a reconciled and reconciling presence is seen as a benefit by many. Armed conflicts are a dramatic demonstration of the results of the divisions, injustices, of the will for power and domination, which fall on a multitude of innocent people. But there are also economic and financial warfare, which accumulate victims in an even more numerous and unforgiving way. I have evoked major conflicts, but let us not forget those within our reach. Social conflicts

apparently dormant, but ready to explode in forms of contempt, discrimination, rejection, hostility, of wars between the poor; church conflicts no longer ostentatious, but prowling in our communities: jealousies, misunderstandings, judgments, claims, exclusions, distances. I am not forgetting the so widespread and painful tensions and family divisions. It is as if we were resigned to the so called "divisive" prospects as they define these behaviors today.

The Eucharistic community shares these dynamics with all men, but at the same time introduces the gift of reconciliation that it has received. It introduces it by nourishing culture and concrete practices, sometimes prophetic, other times fragmented in everyday behavior. For many, all this appears as an illusion, an ingenuous and inevitably dangerous proposal. Reconciliation is not a tool like others: it requires a change of heart and becomes a way of life, a way of being. It is a matter of purifying a rancorous climate with the breath of mutual knowledge, understanding, of meeting and finally of forgiveness. I am thinking of the gestures of reconciliation and forgiveness in the life of married couples and in family relationships; of the courses offered in our counseling centers, of those characterized by a reconciliatory mediation in different spheres of social life, of the ways that bring victims and the guilty closer together. Let us pray that the Church can express the gift of reconciliation in a more effective and evangelical manner for Christians who at this time are impeded from receiving the Eucharistic bread because of their matrimonial circumstances. The truth of a Christian marriage cannot be separated from the truth of God's mercy, so intensely manifested in the work of reconciliation of Jesus, celebrated in the Eucharist.

THE DIMENSION OF THE FEAST

One of the characteristic features of the Gospel and of the celebration of the Eucharist is that of joy. The Gospel is the story of the joy brought by the experiences of Jesus and the

gift of His Spirit; the Eucharist is a celebration and communication of the joy of the Gospel. This aspect should be particularly emphasized, because if it is true that many celebrations are really a sign of joy and communication, expressed in song, with the joint participation of all, with gestures of welcome, with the vividness of prayer, it is equally true that the danger of boredom and sadness always lies in wait.

The deep personal and communal joy, the joy of the gift of God and the transforming encounter with Him and with our brothers and sisters in faith, the joy of life nourished by the Bread cannot be sensations of a moment. The emotional participation in the Eucharist is an aspect that should not be underestimated, talk about a real involvement, but it is necessary that it nurtures authentic evangelical sentiments that extend over time and become conditions of life.

Our lives are not connoted in a continuous way by situations of joy, of happiness, of simple serenity. Pain, suffering, disappointment, anguish accompany us. It is important that the Eucharistic assembly is recognized as a joyful community, but not an ingenuous one: a community that communicates joy, that fosters joys, that creates conditions for joy in the world in which one lives. It is the joy that Jesus sowed with his gestures and his words; it is the joy that the saints communicated and communicate, it is the joy that flourishes in the hearts of those who give it.

I want to emphasize the joy of the community as a whole, capable of contaminating children, adolescents and young adults, adults and elders: joy that becomes effortless, cheerful, festive, resistant to the destructiveness of pain. Pope Francis entitled his programmatic letter precisely this way: the joy of the Gospel. Let us not leave Him alone to bear witness to it, let us not encumber ourselves alone with the burden of communicating it, but let us share it with those who participate in the Eucharist. We will become precious signs in a society

that multiplies possibilities for entertainment and pleasure, but is no longer able to draw from the source of joy. In receiving this gift, the Christian community is capable of shared feasts open, simple, a smile for those who can no longer find any reason or opportunity to smile, where serene and supportive relations become more important than the organization, although necessary. I am thinking of our Sundays, feasts of our neighborhoods and towns, the recurring celebrations of the community. We take care not only of the organizational aspects and the economic returns, but above all of the quality of the festive proposals, expectations of the people. of the families, children, the weak, the poor. May the return to the weekdays be accompanied by what we have experienced during the feast, by an insight of the joy that once again the Christians have their source in the Eucharistic celebration.

THE DIMENSION OF THE MISSION

The Eucharist gives shape to a missionary community. It is the celebration of the fruits of the mission, but first of all it is the source of the mission, the model of the mission, the communication of the mission. An "out-going", Church departs from the Eucharist, that does not hold us back, that does not enclose us in resigned retreats, enraged or privileged. The Eucharist is the supreme act of God's mission, in His Son Jesus and in the gift of the Holy Spirit. Celebrating the Eucharist means entering this mission and in the "style" of God's mission, a style of the Eucharist. The mission, therefore, is nothing but a conquest or re-conquest of spaces and hearts. Responding to a dynamic attraction, as is the cross of Christ and how the Eucharist is. Therefore not something that is imposed, that prevails, but rather a proposal fueled by experience that we allow to shine individually and together.

We admire and thank our missionaries very much: those who leave our country and go far. The Eucharist constitutes us as a missionary community. Today singular and not even family

life is sufficient testimony; a choral testimony is necessary, neither exclusive nor snobbish, but capable of reaching the heart of everyone, especially that of young people, those who feel forgotten by God, of those who have not known the love of God.

The Word of God, fraternal sharing, patience, the gift and sacrifice of oneself, discreet and gratuitous support, the actual closeness in joy and in sorrow, courage in adversity and misunderstandings, passion for everything that is human beginning from justice, are all aspects that we experience in the Eucharistic celebration and characterize the missionary style of the Christian community.

In this context, I wish to share a little reflection on being a lay person. Along with the explicit announcement of the Gospel, the ability to tell and talk about faith; the courageous and nonconformist testimony to the heroism of those who are persecuted or discriminated against for being a Christian, cultural mediation of faith that is incarnated in history exists . It is this type of mediation that promotes being a lay Christian, capable of being in his time, of inhabiting places and culture, in cultivating skills and assuming responsibility for gaining from the Gospel and the Eucharist. Being a lay person means to take the things of the world seriously as God has done with the Incarnation of his Son. It means being with all men, recognizing the marvel of the evangelical signs present in life and in history and exerting the effort to make the Eucharistic bread, the bread of an authentic humanity.

THE DIMENSION OF CHARITY

It is absurd to separate Liturgy and life, the Eucharist and Charity, almost as if everything consists of an outward carefully prepared celebration or in "doing something good." The doing of something good is crucial, but to this determination God himself contributes in a wonderful unique, definitive manner. If the poor is like a sacrament of the

presence of Jesus, if the poor is an evangelical challenge for our lives, the Eucharist is the sacrament of our salvation, the real communication of God's love in the gift and sacrifice of Christ. This creates an inseparable unity between the Eucharist and Charity, between the Eucharistic celebration and acts of charity. The Eucharist once again gives shape to a community that carries out the love of Christ. We offer some brief reflections of the beautiful relationship collected by the monk of Bose Luciano Manicardi at the Annual Conference of the diocesan Caritas.

THE COLLECTION. THE ANCIENT PRACTICE OF THE COLLECTION, QUESTIONS US ABOUT THE ABILITY OF OUR MASSES TO BE AN EXPRESSION OF SHARING AND CONCRETE CHARITY. EVER SINCE ANCIENT TIMES, THE SUNDAY EUCHARIST HAS BEEN LINKED TO GESTURES OF SHARING WITH THE POOR ... SO, AT THE HEART OF THE EUCHARIST IS THE TRUE MANIFESTATION OF THE REAL AND TRUE TEACHING FOR THE ETHICAL BEHAVIOR OF THE CHRISTIAN, TEACHING THAT SPEAKS OF GIVING, OF SHARING, SOLIDARITY AND CHARITY.

THE RECEPTION AND HOSPITALITY. THE EXPERIENCE OF HOSPITALITY IS AT THE HEART OF THE EUCHARIST... THIS MEANS THAT THE CONCRETE EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATIONS MUST BECOME PLACES OF REAL EXPERIENCE OF RECEPTION: NO ONE SHOULD FEEL HOPELESS, JUDGED, OUTCASTED, DESPISED, LOOKED UPON WITH ARROGANT COMMISERATION ... THE EUCHARISTIC COMMUNITY IS A PLACE FOR OVERCOMING ELEVATED BARRIERS OF RACE, SEX AND SOCIAL PREJUDICES IN ORDER TO REDISCOVER THE ONLY VOCATION AND UNITY IN CHRIST OF THE MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY.

THE CONVIVIALITY. DO YOU WANT TO HONOR THE BODY OF CHRIST? WELL, DO NOT ALLOW HIM TO BE NAKED; AFTER HAVING HONORED HIM IN CHURCH WITH SILK FABRICS, DO NOT ALLOW HIM TO DIE OUTSIDE DUE TO THE COLD IN NAKEDNESS ... WHAT BENEFIT COULD CHRIST HAVE IF HIS ALTAR WERE ADORNED WITH GOLD WHILE HE HIMSELF DIES OF HUNGER IN THE POOR? BEGIN SATIATING HIM WHO IS HUNGRY AND AFTER IF YOU STILL HAVE MONEY LEFT DECORATE HIS ALTAR TOO... WHILE DECORATING THE CHURCH DO NOT DESPISE YOUR BROTHER WHO IS IN NEED: HE AS A MATTER OF FACT, IS A TEMPLE FAR MORE PRECIOUS THAN THE OTHER.

(ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM)

THE SERVICE. THE RELATIONSHIP OF EUCHARIST AND SERVICE ACTS FIRST OF ALL, IN THE SENSE THAT IT PLASMA THE SERVICES OF THE LORD, BEFORE AND BETTER THAN THE PERSONS WHO "RENDER THE SERVICES"... THE UNITY OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL BODY MUST THEREFORE BE SEEN AS UNITS OF MEN AND WOMEN UNITED BY THE UNIQUE DESIRE TO BE SERVANTS OF ONE ANOTHER FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE GIVEN THEM BY THE LORD.

THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CREATION. THE COSMIC AND CREATIONAL DIMENSION INHERENT IN THE EUCHARIST COULD HELP TODAY'S CHRISTIANS TO RECUPERATE THE COSMIC DIMENSION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AND TO ESTABLISH A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WORLD, INSPIRED TOWARDS COMMUNION AND RESPECT INSTEAD OF CONSUMPTION AND EXPLOITATION. THIS COULD HELP CHRISTIANS FIND A NEW VISION, COSMIC AND UNIVERSAL, EVANGELICAL ECOLOGY, FULL OF COMPASSION AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL CREATURES, ANIMATE AND INANIMATE.

THE DIMENSION OF THE FUTURE

I would like to conclude by pausing at the dimension of the future, so necessary for contemporary man, and especially to the younger generations. We are stubbornly focused on the consummation of the present and rely on the future only on the continuous possibility that technology gives us. We are increasingly incapable of dreams that do not prove to be fleeting and dramatic illusions. Fidelity to history means loyalty to all its periods: the past is necessary to understand ourselves, the present is necessary to incarnate the choices and responsibilities that we contend and finally to the future: the time that is beyond us, which makes the other dimensions relative, which embraces dreams, ideals, projects that characterize us as human beings, different from every other living being.

The Christian community celebrates the Eucharist rooted in time and projected into a future that goes beyond all boundaries. "While waiting for His coming."

The future that the Eucharistic celebration gives us is that of a definite encounter with the love of God, it is that in which all His work will be fulfilled completely, it is that which is now distributed in history and is realized in dialogue with human freedom. This dimension becomes capable of giving meaning to the most insignificant gesture and to make the most impressive relative. The future does not empty the Christian of responsibility, but nurtures him more by calling him to collaborate in the work begun by Christ Himself as the first fruit of the new humanity and of new heavens and earth.

This dimension appears as pilgrims of time and history, capable of taking on the load without being crushed, of going continuously beyond the limits of the lasting dogmas that stand like new idols capable finally of a project whose features are drawn from the Community encounter experienced in the celebration of the Eucharist.

The Eucharistic bread, the new manna, forms us as a people on a journey, towards that land which is the final realization of the work of Jesus, the Lord. All this makes us zealous for every man: participating in his story, bright and dark, we testify an irreducible hope, that does not separate us from the common way, but turns it into a tenacious and empowering exodus to the Promised Land. We do not resign ourselves to the present, we do not preach hopes that enchant and exhaust our freedom and responsibility, but we, with all the people participate in this journey whose point of arrival is not the final destruction, but the final encounter. And it is in this perspective that in the Eucharist echos the remembrance and prayer for our dead, who in the horizon of the future of God, are already with Him. The Eucharistic celebration calls us to be a community of testimonies of the essential in the flow of things, the temporariness of conquests, the precariousness of affections.



part six

THE JOURNEY:

proposals for the next pastoral year

I mentioned at the beginning of the letter that the commitment for adult catechesis continues and is enhanced by the prospect of preparing lay catechists for adults, with a methodology that launches the proposal and allows the cultivation of the relationship between the Word of God and the life of man. In this sense, I encourage the work of the Catechetical Office and the readiness of every parish to identify persons who could prepare themselves for this service.

I rely the considerations that I have shared with you on your judgment and your intelligent pastoral generosity. The relationship between the Eucharist and the life of the Christian community is inexhaustible. I repeated diffused beliefs; I hope I have offered reasons to renew and continue to pursue them with passion and sentiments for the Church.

In addition to the indications that I conveyed in the general reflections, are some commitments for our communities.

- Encourage the use of the Liturgical-Biblical-Catechesis courses that develop the themes of the Pastoral year in an accessible, articulated and profound manner.

- Promote the formation of liturgical-pastoral groups in each parish or pastoral units and retrace the chapter of the Constitutions of the Synod dedicated to the Liturgy.
- Renew the care of the style of the Eucharist celebration, highlighting the Community consequence of the Eucharistic celebration.
- Overcome the pastoral and community discomfort regarding the days proposed on global, national and diocesan level, by integrating them in the Eucharistic celebration intentions and proposals highlighting their effects on the Community.
- Promote the revision of the distribution of the Eucharistic celebrations and pastoral significance of this revision in the Pastoral Units, in the situations of more parishes with only one priest.
- Maintain open the question of the number of Mass celebrations, considering the sustainability and the pastoral sense in light of the fundamental guidelines
- After Christmas the final edition of the liturgical-pastoral Directory will be presented. It is the fruit of the Diocesan Synod, subjected to shared revision. The commitment in every parish is to know it, apply it, reviewing the consistency of parish liturgical practices with the instructions contained and sharing it with the whole community in particular with the liturgical animators.
- In the light of the indications of the Directory, it is important to provide for a revision of the liturgical ministries that are actually in effect in the parish, redefining the tasks of the people who carry them out today, in accordance to the manner indicated by the Directory itself.



part seven

THE GREAT EVENTS

I am approaching the end by recalling how our whole diocese intends to share with different methods the major events that mark the next year.

- The Holy Father has declared the Year of consecrated life: it is a demanding proposal that invests first of all those who have been called to respond to this vocation and at the same time involves the whole Church and all the communities. In our Diocese, more than in others, we are aware of and grateful for the wealth that consecrated persons have represented in history and in the present. We therefore have to organize ourselves to support those initiatives that will be proposed, but most of all to nurture the Church sensitivity regarding this vocation and those who embody it.
- On November of 2015 the conference of the Italian Church will be held in Florence marking this Pastoral decade illuminated by the Guidelines entitled "Educating the good life of the Gospel." Each diocese will form a delegation of participants, but all communities are invited to share: the preparatory course, the celebration and

above all the consequences of the Conference. Pope Francis wanted to give this event a particular value, especially in the perspective of radical and courageous testimonies of the Gospel on the part of the Italian Church. The theme of the conference is that of a Church capable of recognizing the Gospel present in human history, especially the weak and the poor, and together capable of embodying a humanity imbued with the Gospel that becomes hope for all men, especially the humble and humiliated.

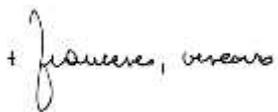
- The third event is represented by the two synods of bishops dedicated to matrimony and the family. The event has assumed great importance, both for the important issues that affect these decisive human experiences, both for the Pope's decision to extend to the whole Church the necessary consultation to prepare the realization of the synods. Every time the Pope meets the bride and groom and their families he insists that the celebration of synods be accompanied by prayer and attention of the whole Church, especially of the families themselves.



CONCLUSION

Dear sisters and brothers, I entrust the conclusion of this letter to the benevolent gaze of Pope John, who with great and inexhaustible joy we invoke as Saint. After the intense moment of his canonization, and the equally intense period of many initiatives in his name, we ask that he accompany us on the daily course of our Church, with his example, his friendship, his intercession. I wish that the memory of him, besides traditional forms of Christian piety in the spiritual charm offered by Sotto il Monte, in a sign of hope represented by the new hospital church dedicated to him, in the valuable work of knowledge carried out by the foundation in his name, in the extensive charity work carried out on the occasion of his canonization, be nourish in the annual celebration of his memory in all the parishes and communities of the Diocese, on 11 October, the anniversary of the opening of the Council.

May the bright look of his face, encourage us, pilgrims of time, women and men capable of the Eucharist.



BERGAMO, 26 AUGUST, 2014
ST. ALEXANDER, PATRON SAINT OF THE TOWN AND OF THE DIOCESE



ON THE COVER: *Carlo Tarantini, Church: between the new heavens and new earth, 2012*
(private collection)



ON THE COVER: *Carlo Tarantini, Church: between the new heavens and new earth, 2012*
(private collection)