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The Eucharistic Congress: The Eucharist helps us proclaim Christ

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In a little more than three months from now, we will celebrate our diocesan Eucharistic Congress.

The Eucharistic Congress is an opportunity for the entire diocese to come together each year to celebrate our faith and our love for the Eucharistic Lord. The Eucharist brings us together as one body in Christ. It is the source and the summit of our Christian life, as well as the heart of our Christian life.

Our first Eucharistic Congress was held in 2005 to celebrate the Year of the Eucharist. Since then, we have come together in joy each year to celebrate a Eucharistic Congress. The Eucharistic Congress to be held in Charlotte this fall — on Friday, Oct. 3 and Saturday, Oct. 4 — is our fourth annual congress. Everyone is invited to attend! I hope you have already reserved these dates on your calendar, and that you are planning to be present for this celebration of faith.

The theme for the congress

This year's congress occurs during the special holy year announced by Pope Benedict XVI to honor the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of St. Paul. The theme for the Eucharistic Congress is taken from St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians (1:28): "It is Christ Whom We Proclaim."

St. Paul's sole passion was to proclaim Christ. In our Eucharistic Congress, it is Christ whom we proclaim in our eucharistic procession through the streets of Charlotte, in our holy hour of exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, in the celebration of the Mass, in the talks by our speakers and in our sacred music concert.

The entire Eucharistic Congress from beginning to end is a proclamation of Christ. The theme we have chosen, therefore, not only honors St. Paul and his apostolic mission, but also appropriately expresses the spirit of the Eucharistic Congress — to proclaim Christ.

The Eucharist helps us proclaim Christ

How does the Eucharist help us proclaim Christ? In his apostolic exhortation, "Sacramentum Caritatis," Pope Benedict wrote that the Eucharist is not only a mystery to be believed and celebrated, but also a mystery to be lived and proclaimed in our daily lives (nn. 70-93).

The Eucharist transforms us. We are changed more and more into the image and likeness of Christ by our participation in the eucharistic celebration, and especially by receiving holy Communion.

Through our participation in the Mass, the life of Christ matures in us, so that our entire life becomes a proclamation of Christ.

The Holy Father wrote of how the Eucharist transforms us to become a living proclamation of Christ and his love: “By sharing in the sacrifice of the Cross, the Christian partakes of Christ’s self-giving love and is equipped and committed to live this same charity in all his thoughts and deeds” (n. 82).

“The love that we celebrate in the sacrament is not something we can keep to ourselves. By its very nature it demands to be shared with all. What the world needs is God’s love; it needs to encounter Christ and to believe in him We too must be able to tell our brothers and sisters with conviction: ‘That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us’” (1 Jn 1: 3).

“Truly, nothing is more beautiful than to know Christ and to make him known to others” (n. 84).

Christ, whose life is constantly nourished in us by the Eucharist, is proclaimed and made known to others by our Christian love.

Cardinal Christian Tumi of Cameroon spoke at the recent International Eucharistic Congress in Quebec about the radical love that the Eucharist makes us capable of living. The cardinal reminded us that the Eucharist must lead us to a greater love for our brothers and sisters, to give our lives along with all the risks that that entails.

In this way, the Eucharist is terribly dangerous: to have a passion for love is always dangerous. The eucharistic man is a dangerous man, burning with the fire of the Spirit, whose only concern is to spread the fire.

He is a man of daring and confrontation, a man of radicalism and the absolute. There is no question of compromise. He must commit himself to act for God and for man.

Many ways to proclaim Christ

Christ, whose presence is nourished in us through the Eucharist, can be made present to others in many different ways through our Christian living.

Pope Benedict wrote that “the first and fundamental mission that we receive from the sacred mysteries we celebrate is that of bearing witness by our lives We become witnesses when, through our actions, words and way of being, another makes himself present” (n. 85).

It is Christ the Lord who makes himself present through our daily witness. St. Anthony of Padua wrote of the diverse ways of proclaiming Christ by living the Christian virtues:

“The man who is filled with the Holy Spirit speaks in different languages. These different languages are different ways of witnessing to Christ, such as humility, poverty, patience

and obedience; we speak in those languages when we reveal in ourselves these virtues to others.

“Actions speak louder than words; let your words teach and your actions speak” (Sermon I, 226).

For us, everything we do is to be a proclamation of Christ.

To prepare for the Eucharistic Congress

We can prepare for the Eucharistic Congress by opening our hearts to Christ and by asking him to change us to become more like him. By our words and our actions, and by living Christ’s love and all the virtues, may we proclaim Christ to our brothers and sisters, so that they also may come to a greater love for the Lord.