

The Eucharist brings unity in charity for Catholics

By BISHOP PETER J. JUGIS

Bishop of Charlotte

As appeared in the Feb. 3, 2006 issue of The Catholic News & Herald

Thank you for your overwhelmingly positive response to our Eucharistic Congress last September. Because of the great interest you showed in such a gathering in our diocese, plans are underway for our second Eucharistic Congress, to be held Oct. 6 and 7 of this year. I hope you are already making plans to participate!

The Eucharistic Congress is truly diocesan-wide in its scope. It is the one time a year when the entire Catholic family of the Diocese of Charlotte has the opportunity to come together to celebrate our oneness in Christ through the sacrament of unity, the Holy Eucharist.

It is a gathering of the priests, both diocesan and religious; the deacons; the women religious; all the seminarians; all the parishes and missions; all the schools; and all the staff in the diocesan offices.

St. John writes in his Gospel that Our Lord prayed for this unity among his disciples during the Last Supper: "I pray ... that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me" (John 17: 20-21).

The prayer for unity, and the institution of the Holy Eucharist as the sacrament of unity, proceeded together from the heart of the Lord at the moment of the Last Supper.

The theme for the 2006 Eucharistic Congress is "The Love of Christ Impels Us," a line taken from St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor 5:14). The love of Christ that we celebrate in the Eucharistic Sacrifice transforms us interiorly. It becomes the force that impels us to live faithful Catholic lives.

We partake of the real body and blood of Christ, and we grow in love. Our union with Christ is renewed and strengthened. And in addition, our union with each other is renewed and strengthened.

Through our sharing in Christ's body and blood, Christ makes us one in Him. It is the Holy Eucharist that brings about this unity in charity.

The celebration of the Holy Eucharist stands at the center of the life of the parish. It is the most important activity of the parish, and it unifies all the other activities of the parish.

The love that Christ places in us through our participation in Mass flows out from the Mass to be lived in all the other activities of the parish: in faith formation classes, youth ministry programs, visitations to the sick, activities of our parish organizations and even in social gatherings. All of these ministries and activities ultimately draw their vitality from our worship.

The celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice gives life and meaning to all parish activities, imbuing those ministries and activities with Christ's love. The Holy Eucharist truly is the source of the life of the church. It is the engine that drives the entire life of the parish.

Our participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice also brings Christ's love into everything we do outside of the parish, in our everyday life in the home and in society, at school, at work in our professions and in our social involvements. The love of Christ we celebrate in the Eucharist ultimately transforms all these areas of our lives, because we ourselves have first been transformed by our participation in the Holy Sacrifice.

It is beautiful to realize how Christ animates everything in our everyday life, and how everything ultimately comes back to the Eucharist as its source. That is why the Second Vatican Council encouraged our full, conscious and active participation (SC 14) in the Eucharistic Sacrifice; so much depends on the Mass to give life to our effective witness to Christ's love.

It is in the Eucharistic Sacrifice where we meet Christ and come into deeper union with Him. Our union with Him is a union of love, which we bring with us into our parish activities and ministries, and into our life outside the parish.

Let us find through our active participation in the eucharistic celebration and in our eucharistic adoration outside of Mass, the love which impels us in our daily living for Christ. Let us begin to prepare now for the many blessings that are in store for us at our October Eucharistic Congress!