

[Your Excellency, my brother priests, dear brothers and sisters of the consecrated life, seminarians...]

My brothers and sisters in Christ, first let me thank Msgr. Simon and the *Archbishop's Committee for Eucharistic Adoration* for their invitation to speak with you today about the great Love of our Lord which comes to us in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the altar, a gift which builds up and embraces His Mystical Bride, the Church, bringing her into greater union with Him and fortifying her for the mission to bring all men and women into the Divine Communion of the Infinite Love in God.

In preparation for this address, it came to me that this spring will actually mark the 25th anniversary of my First Holy Communion. No doubt all of us here can recall that singular moment, when our Lord first came to us in the Holy Eucharist...whether as a child or later in life, recognizing that we are not all *cradle Catholics* here. For those of you who ran the *regular course*, so to speak, of growing up Catholic, you may recall the hustle-and-bustle of that day. With the whole event of First Holy Communion which it was for you and is even today in many of our parishes, the amount of attention given to proper preparation, proper clothes, proper procession, proper reception of the Eucharist, proper photos, proper videos, and...well, *the whole day's peculiar propriety*, has always made me appreciate all the more, the quiet, hidden and *undramatic* way in which the Lord came to me for the first time in Holy Communion. This does not mean to say that any attention was lacking on my part or on the part of the priest who prepared me, *nor* is this to deny any excitement of anticipation, which was quite present; but my First Holy Communion happened at the regular 11:30AM Sunday Mass at St. John the Baptist Parish in South City those many years ago, and I was probably seen by those around me as just another kid in line for Communion, rather than one whose journey to that moment had been quite *out of...shall we say... "proper" order*.

Although I had been baptized within a month of my birth, and while the existence of God and a certain sense of connection with Him was not completely foreign to me, it was not until Divine Providence would bring me from Texas to Saint Louis to live with my *die-hard* Irish, *in-your-face* South Saint Louis

grandmother who saw to it that I continued my education in a *Catholic* school, that the gift of faith revealed itself more fully and its profound truth of the personal God who desires with all His Being an intimacy with the human person. Admittedly, there were some awkward moments being so *sacramentally behind*, so to speak, in comparison to my 6th grade peers...not-so-much when I had to remain in the pew when my classmates went up to receive the Eucharist, as *when I served the Mass*...for while I had become an altar server shortly after I had begun attending the day school, it would be a few months before my First Confession, let alone Communion. You could only imagine the odd, bewildered look that came across the face of one of our priests, when I backed away when he offered the host...and you could only imagine what he was thinking at the moment...perhaps wondering what mortal sin I had committed...or, for crying out loud if it wasn't one thing to have girls serve, now the pastor had started to allow *Protestant* boys as servers...*I don't know*. But these awkward moments and humiliations, which are among many of those embarrassing-moments-of-childhood-turned-fond-memories now, were really small sacrifices compared to the gift which God was going to offer in the Holy Eucharist and in the one-on-one catechesis from a priest at our parish.

While not trying to diminish the great work and dedication of our religious and lay catechists, I will always consider it a significant gift from God to be instructed by one called by Him to offer absolution and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass *in the Person of Christ, Head and Shepherd of the flock*...and I would hope you would join me to exhort my brother-priests today to never underestimate the singular gift of love that God can give through them offering instruction to His children, especially in regards to the *mystery of faith* which builds and embraces His Church through His priesthood.¹ This was a singular gift, and surely all of us give thanks to Almighty God for those who were faithful in their own ministry or apostolate in teaching us the truths of the faith *by their word and deed*, for it was through these members of

¹ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *Directory for the Life and Ministry of Priests*, 47: "The priest, as a collaborator with the Bishop, has received the mandate and responsibility of encouraging, coordinating and directing the catechetical activity of the community with which he has been entrusted."

His Mystical Body that Jesus chose to touch our lives more deeply, opening before us the path of communion through Him to the Father. It is so easy in our day and age, when the prevailing mindset of the elite so strenuously holds that any relationship with God is something private, for us to look over the truth that *in reality* He has brought us into greater communion with Him *through others*.²

Even before our formal instruction, many of us already were learning through a *catechesis of reverence* by even the most subtle, the most simple, but sincere, attention and devotion of clergy, religious and lay faithful before the Presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. How many of us have been moved by the humble deference showed to Christ in the Eucharist by a priest prayerfully celebrating the Mass with attention and devotion, by the constancy of a religious sister or brother spending hours in Adoration regularly throughout the day, or even by the simplest gesture of a child waving to Jesus after his mom or dad has explained to him why people go down on one knee before the *golden box*...the child easily welcoming the truth of His Eucharistic Presence and immediately offering an unpretentious gesture of love to Jesus? Our Holy Father has stated, "...in the Church's most ancient tradition, the process of Christian formation always had an *experiential* character. While not neglecting the systematic understanding of the content of the faith, it centered on a vital and convincing encounter with Christ, as proclaimed by *authentic witnesses*."³ It is so important, my brothers and sisters, that as we open our hearts and minds this day and focus upon the mystery of love that comes to us in the Holy Eucharist, that we give thanks and praise to Almighty God for all of those Christians, who throughout the centuries and unto this day have evangelized us through their authentic witness to the truth of the Gospel, some even at the cost of their lives, proclaiming boldly what they have seen and what they have heard, so that we may have fellowship with them, that fellowship which is a true communion with

² Rom 10: 17. "Thus faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ."

³ BENEDICTUS XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, 64. Emphasis mine.

the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ, which alone can fulfill the longings of the human heart.⁴

Sometimes, we may forget the tremendous sacrifices which have been made just so that we can live our faith in truth and in freedom...the supreme, being the Sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ upon the Holy Cross. And sometimes, we forget that the mystery of faith in which we share, “is not simply the *result* of our searching for God,” as if our limited and often mistaken minds could work hard enough under their own power to reach or totally absorb the infinite depths of the beauty of the God who “comes in Person to speak to us and to show us the way to Himself” in Christ Jesus.⁵ Our faith is not the result of *our search* for God, but it is rather the gift of the *God who searches for us!* One can easily see this truth of the God who goes in search for communion with man depicted within the famous scene among the many frescoes of the Sistine Chapel, where God the Father is stretching with all His power towards Adam, whom He has created and in whom He breathed into the Spirit of life, and in that scene; the Father has opened the heavens and appears before Adam with angels present, while the first man is reposing at ease within the Garden of Eden with his hand lightly resting upon his knee. It would seem that the scene also suggests that Adam has to extend himself only a very little in order to embrace the God who has already closed the space of eternity between them by His Love.

In Jesus Christ, *God comes in Person...*the Word was made flesh! God not only touches humanity, but embraces fully our nature. God became man! It is vital, my brothers and sisters, to never allow the pervasive tendency in our society to not only treat religion as a private opinion, but even God Himself as merely “a nice idea,” both of which easily keep Him at a distance from our lives, dulling any sensitivity within our

⁴ 1 Jn 1: 1-4: “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands concerns the Word of life – for the life was made visible; we have seen it and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was made visible to us – what we have seen and heard we proclaim now to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; for our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” N.B. Unless quoted from another source, biblical quotes are from the NAB.

⁵ IOANNES PAULUS II, *Homily*, St. Louis 27 January 1999. Emphasis mine.

souls to His real desire to enter into communion with us through His Son. God became man! Jesus was not some unfortunate, ancient ‘hippie’ who got in trouble with the Roman authorities for teaching everybody to be ‘cool’ with one another. He was and is God made man! He was not the worldly revolutionary that some have thought Him to be, but He was and is the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity united to our human nature!

Now, some may say that I am ‘preaching to the choir,’ but even the best choir needs some good instruction now and again to stay in tune...if not also some offer support to keep the noise of the tempter from intimidating ‘the choir’ into silence!

Jesus *is* God...He *is* the Word spoken by the Father from all eternity who was active in the Creation of the whole universe. He is the Son who from all eternity gives glory to the Father, who glorifies His Son, both sharing an infinite Love between them who is the Spirit. While in the Old Testament, the title *son of God* might have been given to angels, the Chosen People of Israel and their kings, showing in a particular way their close bond with the Lord, in the Person of Jesus Christ, He is revealed as the Son of God by *His nature*.⁶ Recall how in Matthew 16, as Jesus was walking with His disciples, after the second miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, and the healing of a blind man in Bethsaida, He asks them, “‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter said in reply, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus said to him in reply, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.’”⁷ *Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, Simon, but my heavenly Father...* Simon was not using the title *son of God* as it had been for centuries, but he saw with eyes of faith that Jesus is THE Christ, THE SON of the living God. He did not learn this through some clever deductions nor did any pundit

⁶ CCC 441.

⁷ Mt 16: 13b-17.

from a cable-news program break the news to Simon and ask for his opinion. It was a gift of *spiritual grace* from the Father, which Simon accepted within his heart and proclaimed with his voice! Before him was not just another prophet, nor just another king or child of Israel, not a militant revolutionary...not even a 'hippie' ...but THE SON of God...the Son of God made man...the *God who comes in person*.⁸ “*In Jesus Christ, God not only speaks to man but also seeks him out. The Incarnation of the Son of God attests that God goes in search of man.*”⁹ God is *upon* the earth and *in* our world *in* Jesus, united to our human nature...born of the Virgin Mary into a human family with Joseph as His guardian...growing in age and wisdom and into manhood to fulfill His Father’s Will.¹⁰ But why does the Father send His Son? Does He need us? Is He lacking something that we only have?

In his homily to us in 1999, the Venerable – and soon to be Blessed – John Paul II said, “The Incarnation [the mystery of God uniting Himself to our human nature]...reveals the truth about man. In Jesus Christ, the Father has spoken the definitive word about our true destiny and the meaning of human history.”¹¹ Well, what is that truth? The truth is that we are made in the image and likeness of God. What is that definitive word about our destiny and meaning of our history? That sin and death do not have to have the last word on our destiny nor be the end of our history...that the evil of division between us and God, amongst ourselves, and even within our souls CAN be healed...and in Jesus, God is again straining with an outreached hand to bring us to new life through reconciliation and communion with Him...but this act of straining to reach man is not just a metaphor or symbol used in a brilliant fresco or painting...God stretches out His hands literally to us in His Son, Jesus Christ...the Hands which bring mercy, as we hear in the prophet Isaiah: “Sing out, O heavens, and rejoice, O earth, break forth into song, you mountains. For the

⁸ CCC 442.

⁹ IOANNES PAULUS II, *Tertio millenio adveniente*, 7.

¹⁰ Lk 2.

¹¹ CCC 442. IOANNES PAULUS II, *Tertio millenio adveniente*, 5: “This is expressed in a concise and powerful way by the Letter to the Hebrews: ‘In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; *but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son*’ (1:1-2).”

LORD comforts His people and shows mercy to His afflicted. But Zion said, ‘The LORD has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.’ Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you. See, upon the palms of my hands I have written your name.”¹² God has not left humanity alone in its sin, but He has stretched out His Hands of mercy and comfort to humanity in Jesus Christ from a love even beyond that which a mother may have for a child from her own womb! And how did our names come to be written in the palms of those Sacred Hands, but through His loving embrace of those nails which held him to the Cross, uniting our destiny and history to His divine life...our names are permanently etched within those Hands even now at the right Hand of the Father.

Jesus is the “*God who comes in Person to speak to us and to show us the way to Himself!*”¹³ As we heard in the readings at Mass from the First Sunday of Lent last week, we know that God seeks man, “because man has turned away from Him, hiding himself as Adam did among the trees of the Garden of Eden. *Man allowed himself to be led astray by the enemy of God.*”¹⁴ Do you remember that reading from Genesis? “The serpent asked the woman, ‘Did God really tell you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?’ The woman answered the serpent: ‘We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, *You shall not eat it or even touch it, lest you die.* But the serpent said to the woman: ‘You certainly will not die! No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is bad.’”¹⁵ Tempted to be like gods, humanity chose to rebel against the embrace of God it had enjoyed at the beginning, and by so doing, rejected the life that He had given them, and by our free choice, came to

¹² Is 49: 13-16a.

¹³ IOANNES PAULUS II, *Homily*, St. Louis 27 January 1999.

¹⁴ IOANNES PAULUS II, *Tertio millenio adveniente*, 7.

¹⁵ Gen 3: 1b-5.

know *not only* the good, *but evil* and its tragic consequences...and *we did come to die, to fear death* and learned all too well *how to deal death to our neighbor*.

“Going in search of man through His Son, God wishes to persuade man to abandon the paths of evil...making man understand that he is taking the wrong path.”¹⁶ So God’s search for man is “not because He has any need of our service, but because He wants to give us salvation.”¹⁷ ...*Salvation* from the very death which we welcomed into the world and even into our very hearts through sin ...*Salvation* from being the enemies of God to entering not only into a new friendship with Him, but an even deeper communion than enjoyed by Adam in the Beginning. But why does this God who is infinitely blessed and fulfilled within Himself seek to save us, to bring us into a particular covenant with Him, to write *our name in the palm of His hands*? It is not because of who we are as much as Who He is...and who is God? “God is love.”¹⁸ *Even should a mother forget her infant and be without tenderness for the child of her womb, I will never forget you.* God is love; He is the God who pours Himself out into humanity in order to offer us the eternal embrace of His infinite goodness through His Son, Jesus Christ.¹⁹

Jesus is the fulfillment of the hope of humanity which was born through the mercy of God even as soon as man had sinned for the first time against the Lord. “After the Fall, (God) buoyed [Adam and Eve] up with the hope of salvation, by promising redemption; and He has never ceased to show His solicitude for the human race, for He wishes to give eternal life to all those who seek salvation by patience in well-doing.”²⁰ Recall how before expelling Adam and Eve from the Garden, God cursed the serpent who tempted His special creation into sin, and promised: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your

¹⁶ IOANNES PAULUS II, *Tertio millenio adveniente*, 7.

¹⁷ IRENAEUS, *Against Heresies*, 4, 25. English translation from W. Wigan Harvey, *S. Irenaei V libri adversus haereses*, vol. 2, Cambridge 1887, 184.

¹⁸ 1 Jn 4:16.

¹⁹ This phrase is a humble attempt to incorporate in one sentence the teaching of Benedict XVI regarding the Infinite Love in God which is both *eros* and *agape*, or possessing-love and oblation-love (BENEDICTUS XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 9).

²⁰ DV 3.

offspring and hers; He will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel.”²¹ Love would not permit the abyss left by the sin of man to remain without challenge, and *immediately* this Love was so moved to reveal a glimpse of the salvation which He had prepared for man even *so soon* after humanity had chosen to break its communion with God. Who is this woman but the Blessed Virgin, immaculate and kept at ‘enmity’ with the devil, and who is the child, but Jesus who crushes the power of Satan...destroying his power over a humanity that put itself under his influence by yielding to his temptation? What profound truth of the love of God do we find in those words of the 4th Eucharistic Prayer: “Even when he disobeyed you and lost your friendship, You did not abandon him to the power of death...Again and again, you offered a covenant to man.”²²

Throughout salvation history, we see God’s merciful love revealing Himself more and entering ever more profoundly within the life of man, from Noah to Abraham to Moses, preparing us for the definitive Word of our destiny.²³ The covenant with Noah sees God reaching out to the various communities of humanity divided through sin to purify us and limit our pride which fools us into thinking that we can forge a *utopia* without Him.²⁴ The covenant made with Abraham shows a God who has chosen to make from this *father of all who believe* a Chosen People prepared to be the trustees of a promise that God would gather all His children into one.²⁵ “After the patriarchs, God formed Israel as *His People* by freeing them from slavery in Egypt. He established with them the covenant of Mount Sinai and, through Moses, gave them His Law so that they would recognize Him and serve Him as the one living and true God.”²⁶ “In the course of its history, Israel was able to discover that God had only one reason to reveal Himself to them, a single motive

²¹ Gen 3: 15.

²² Eucharistic Prayer IV.

²³ CCC 53.

²⁴ CCC 56-58. The CCC refers to the Tower of Babel.

²⁵ CCC 59-61, 145.

²⁶ CCC 62. Emphasis mine.

for choosing them from among all peoples as His special possession: His sheer gratuitous love.”²⁷

Recall the words of the prophet Moses to the people of Israel: “For you are a people sacred to the LORD, your God; He has chosen you from all the nations on the face of the earth to be a people peculiarly His own. It was not because you are the largest of all nations that the LORD set His Heart on you and chose you, for you are really the smallest of all nations. It was because the LORD loved you and because of His fidelity to the oath He had sworn to your fathers, that He brought you out with His strong hand from the place of slavery, and ransomed you from the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Understand, then, that the LORD, your God, is God indeed, the faithful God who keeps His merciful covenant down to the thousandth generation toward those who love Him and keep His commandments.”²⁸ From His faithful Love, God intervenes in the world and fulfills His oath made “to our father Abraham: to set us free from the hands of our enemies, free to worship without fear, holy and righteous in His sight, all the days of our life.”²⁹ By His special intervention in the world, He removed the foreign power which had enslaved His People obstructing their freedom to worship Him as He willed and to enter the Land that He had promised.³⁰ Yet even when the Israelites had returned home in freedom, God’s was not yet finished with us, nor was He finished revealing more of Himself. “God communicates Himself to man gradually. He prepares mankind to welcome by stages the supernatural Revelation that is to culminate in the person and mission of the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ.”³¹

We, my brothers and sisters, have received that revelation of the Son of God and have been made heirs to the Kingdom through the new and everlasting covenant sealed by His Blood. Like the Israelites, we have been chosen by the Lord our God...NOT because we have something He lacks...NOT because we have done the

²⁷ CCC 218.

²⁸ Dt 7: 6-9. From the reading at the Mass on 27 January 1999.

²⁹ Lk 1: 71-75. The *Benedictus* or Canticle of Zechariah.

³⁰ See J. RATZINGER, *Spirit of the Liturgy*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2000, 15-23.

³¹ CCC 53.

greatest deeds in all of history...BUT because He has embraced us as His own...because *He loved us* and fulfilled *the promise* He made from the very beginning to free us from the slavery which we had brought upon ourselves by bowing to the temptation of Satan. “In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an expiation for our sins.”³²

Before the Great Jubilee of 2000, the Venerable John Paul II taught: “If God goes in search of man, created in His own image and likeness, He does so because He loves him eternally in the Word, and wishes to raise him in Christ to the dignity of an adoptive son. God therefore goes in search of man who *is His special possession* in a way unlike any other creature. Man is God’s possession by virtue of a choice made in love: God seeks man out, moved by His fatherly heart.”³³ Do we not hear from the inspired Word of God, *In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent His only Son into the world so that we might have life through Him?*³⁴ “In Jesus Christ, it is God Himself who goes in search of...a suffering and lost humanity. When Jesus speaks in His parables of the shepherd who goes after the lost sheep, of the woman who looks for the lost coin, of the father who goes to meet and embrace his prodigal son, these are no mere words: they constitute an explanation of [our Lord’s] very being and activity.”³⁵ He is the *beloved Son* of God *with whom the Father is well pleased*, who proclaimed the Gospel not only by His words and deeds, but also gave it life through His death upon the Holy Cross.³⁶

“The religion which originates in the mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation is the religion of ‘*dwelling in the heart of God*,’ of sharing in God’s very life.”³⁷ And how do we enter the *life* of God...the *heart of God*...but through the pierced Side of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world upon the altar of the Cross? Our Lord’s “death on the Cross is the culmination [of God satisfying His justice

³² 1 Jn 4: 10.

³³ IOANNES PAULUS II, *Tertio millennio adveniente*, 7.

³⁴ 1 Jn 4:9.

³⁵ BENEDICTUS XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 12.

³⁶ Mt 17: 5. Gospel reading for 2nd Sunday of Lent (20 March 2011).

³⁷ IOANNES PAULUS II, *Tertio millennio adveniente*, 8.

through the Son's sacrifice of mercy]...in which He gives Himself in order to raise man up and save him.”³⁸ The Cross is the means by which God has willed that the child born of a woman at enmity with the devil should crush the head of that serpent and destroy his tyranny over humanity. God has never stood aside or forgot His children. God has pursued man throughout the centuries from his Creation and even after his rebellion. The Cross is the means by which God has willed to ultimately fulfill all of the covenants and promises which He had made to man, preparing us for this moment of the Triumph of His Love and Mercy. “No one has greater love than this, than to lay down his life for his friends.”³⁹ And what friendship has the Son of God shown us by this beautiful act of oblation, this act of self-offering as Priest and Victim upon the Holy Cross?

While the mystery of salvation through the Cross remains present to us throughout our days, perhaps it is during the season of Lent when it particularly presses upon us as we give ourselves over to penitential practices. Our Holy Father wrote in his papal message for this 2011 season: “...the Lenten journey, in which we are invited to contemplate the Mystery of the Cross, is meant to reproduce within us ‘the pattern of His Death,’ so as to effect a deep *conversion* in our lives; that we may be transformed by the action of the Holy Spirit...that we may firmly orient our existence according to the Will of God; that we may be freed of our egoism, overcoming the instinct to dominate others and opening us to the love of Christ.”⁴⁰ What does it mean to enter reproduce within us this ‘pattern of His Death’ than to enter that very same Love God has opened for us in His Son? And in what better way to enter that torrent of Love that has flowed for all eternity than to enter that very same Sacrifice of Christ in the celebration of the Holy Mass? In what better way in this life could a deeper conversion be effected within our souls by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit than receiving our Lord worthily in Holy Communion? In what better way could our very existence be oriented to follow the

³⁸ BENEDICTUS XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 12.

³⁹ Jn 15: 13.

⁴⁰ BENEDICTUS XVI, “Message for Lent 2011” in *L'Osservatore Romano—English edition* 9 (2 March 2011), 7.

current of the Infinite Love of God than to adore the abiding Presence of our Lord in the Holy Eucharist? In our Holy Father's reflection on the God who is Love, he says of the Sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross: "Jesus gave this act of oblation an enduring presence through His institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. He anticipated His Death and Resurrection by giving His disciples...His very self, His Body and Blood as the new manna...The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' act of self-oblation...we enter into the very dynamic of His self-giving."⁴¹

"The Eucharist reveals the loving plan that guides all of salvation history. There the Triune God, who is essentially Love, becomes fully a part of our human condition. In the [Blessed Sacrament] under whose appearances Christ gives Himself to us in the Paschal [feast], God's whole life encounters us and is sacramentally shared with us. God is a perfect communion of love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. At Creation itself, man was called to have some share in God's breath of life. But it is in Christ, dead and risen, and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, given without measure, that we become sharers of God's inmost life. Jesus Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God," makes us, in the gift of the Eucharist, sharers in God's own life...The Church receives, celebrates and adores this gift in faithful obedience."⁴²

You see, my brothers and sisters, what a gift it is that Christ has instituted the Holy Eucharist so that we could enter into that act of offering of the SON of God to the Father? That we could be one with His offering at Mass? St. Paul writes to the Colossians: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in Him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is the Head of the body, the Church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He Himself might be preeminent. For in Him all the

⁴¹ BENEDICTUS XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 13.

⁴² BENEDICTUS XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 8.

fullness was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile all things for Him, making peace by the Blood of His Cross...And you who once were alienated and hostile in mind because of evil deeds He has now reconciled in His fleshly Body through His Death, to present you holy, without blemish, and irreproachable before Him, provided that you persevere in the faith, firmly grounded, stable, and not shifting from the hope of the Gospel that you heard.”⁴³ Yes, through sin and death, we were once alienated, and no doubt before a true conversion to the Lord, we were hostile in mind...but God’s mercy would stretch His Sacred Hands out to fallen humanity and embrace the Holy Cross so that *from the peace made by His Blood and from the reconciliation brought by His Body, His Mystical Bride, we, His Church* would be built up into a holy and unblemished offering to the glory of the Father and strengthened in the faith to bring the hope of the Gospel to all men and women, bringing us all into the Divine Communion of Infinite Love who is God.

How blessed are we to be invited to enter such a mystery? How blessed are we to grow in union with such a mystery through adoration of the Eucharistic Lord? How loved are we by God to receive and adore Him? When we recognize the great things that have come to pass throughout the centuries so that we can simply be alone with our Lord in this tremendous and mysterious way, let alone receive Him into our very bodies and souls, we could never doubt in the power of His Love, nor doubt His constancy.

Nor can we doubt the greatness of the love that we are to share. United to Christ, we “learn to look [upon others] not simply with [our] eyes and [our] feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ. His friend is my friend...Seeing with the eyes of Christ, [we] can give to them much more than their outward necessities; [we] can [offer them the love of God] which they crave.”⁴⁴ While well-meaning in their deeds, those who only see to the material needs of those in dire straits are blind so many times to the despair within the poor soul which has actually led to their

⁴³ Col 1: 15-23a.

⁴⁴ BENEDICTUS XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 18.

poverty, and rather than healing them with the love of God, they only superficially dress a wound that goes so much deeper than any worldly good could ever mend. Yet the faithful, having entered into the Life of God, are drawn to allow His grace to purify their lives ever more, such that His Light brilliantly shines through them upon those suffering in the darkness of sin or those seeking some glimmer of hope for relief as the weight of a broken world lays heavy upon them...one has only to think upon the life of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta as an example of this. By the mystery of the Holy Eucharist, through which we enter into the Infinite Love of God, our own hearts are conformed to the Sacred Heart of Christ which eagerly pursues those hearts which do not yet know Him or have become tepid in their faith and therefore are drawn like the Venerable John Paul II to engage in the *new evangelization* and bring the fullness of the Gospel to those in such need of conversion and the mercy of the Father, and like the Prodigal Son run into His arms to share in that communion of Love. Do not despair, for we know that God never desists to knock upon the hearts of souls who have shut Him out or grown deaf to Him...be comforted by the constancy of His Love shown in the Eucharist.

Truly, my brothers and sisters, as our beloved John Paul II told us in 1999, “In the Mass and in Eucharistic Adoration, we meet the merciful love of God that passes through the Heart of Jesus Christ.”⁴⁵ And we trust that having received that grace, He may use our own lives to touch others through our reverence and devotion to Him, so that all may come to know and believe in the Love He has for us.

[Your Excellency, my brother priests, dear brothers and sisters of the consecrated life, seminarians...]

You may never know until you are *before the Face of God*, but your love of the Eucharist offers that authentic witness which opens hearts and minds to the Lord...just as many years ago, a child from Texas who was *sacramentally behind*, had come to know and believe in the God who is Love through the priests, religious and lay faithful of St. John the Baptist parish...and his die-hard *Irish*

⁴⁵ IOANNES PAULUS II, *Homily*, St. Louis 27 January 1999.

grandmother...and having embraced this God, found his vocation to serve in the priesthood of Jesus Christ in our great Archdiocese.

As I conclude my presentation, my brothers and sisters, please pray for your priests that they may know the Love of God for them, for it is through their ministry that He comes to us in His Body and Blood, and it is through their ministry that we can offer ourselves in that perfect offering to the Father at each Mass, and it is through their hands that our Lord may embrace us all the more during our time of Adoration. Pray for your seminarians and all those young men who are called to share in this ministry of Love, that they may be ever more conformed to our Lord so that they may truly be shepherds after His own Heart.

May the intercession of our Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, the Husband of Mary, be with you and all your families.

Thank you and God bless.