

THE EUCHARIST: SIGN AND NOURISHMENT FOR UNCONDITIONAL CONJUGAL LOVE (John 6:53-58)

The sacraments of Christian initiation - baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist - lay the foundations of every Christian life. The sharing in the divine nature, given to people through the grace of Christ, bears a certain likeness to the origin, development, and nourishing of natural life. The faithful are born anew by baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life. By means of these sacraments of Christian initiation, they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of the divine life and advance toward the perfection of charity.

The Sunday Eucharist, which every week gathers Christians together as God's family round the table of the Word and the Bread of Life, is also the most natural antidote to dispersion. It is the privileged place where communion is ceaselessly proclaimed and nurtured. Precisely through sharing in the Eucharist, the Lord's Day also becomes the Day of the Church.

The Christian family's sanctifying role is grounded in baptism and has its highest expression in the Eucharist, to which Christian marriage is intimately connected. The Eucharist is the very source of Christian marriage. The eucharistic sacrifice, in fact, represents Christ's covenant of love with the Church, sealed with his blood on the cross (cf. John 19:34). In this sacrifice of the new and eternal covenant, Christian spouses encounter the source from which their own marriage covenant flows, is interiorly structured and continuously renewed. As a representation of Christ's sacrifice of love for the Church, the Eucharist is a fountain of charity. In the eucharistic gift of charity, the Christian family finds the foundation and soul of its "communion" and its "mission": by partaking in the eucharistic bread, the different members of the Christian family become one body, which reveals and shares in the wider unity of the Church. Their sharing in the Body of Christ that is "given up" and in his Blood that is "shed" becomes a never-ending source of missionary and apostolic dynamism for the Christian family.

The Eucharist is truly a wondrous sacrament. In it, Christ has given us himself as food and drink, as a source of saving power. He has left himself to us that we might have life and have it in abundance (cf. John 10:10): the life which is in him and which he has shared with us by the gift of the Spirit in rising from the dead on the third day. The life that comes from Christ is a life for us. Christ is close to you. He is Emmanuel, God with us, in an even greater way whenever you approach the table of the Eucharist. It can happen, as it did at Emmaus, that he is recognized only in "the breaking of the bread" (cf. Luke 24:35). It may well be that he has been knocking at the door for a long time, waiting for it to be opened so that he can enter and eat with us (cf. Revelation 3:20).

The Last Supper and the words he spoke there contain all the power and wisdom of the sacrifice of the cross. No other power and wisdom exist by which we can be saved and through which we can help to save others. There is no other power and no other wisdom by which you, parents, can educate both your children and yourselves. The educational

power of the Eucharist has been proved down the generations and centuries.

--The Pontifical Council for the Family