



THE DIOCESE OF KALAMAZOO

Jesus said to his disciples: *“unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day”* (Jn 6:53-54).

June 27, 2021
Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Summer is finally here. Arriving just as the year-and-a-half of disruptions to our normal social and faith lives, caused by the pandemic, come to an end, summertime and new beginnings could not be more welcome! I am profoundly grateful for all the heroic efforts of those on the front lines of protecting us during the pandemic: healthcare workers, educators, all essential workers, public safety personnel, as well as all our clergy and all of you. Individually and collectively, we sacrificed greatly during these last many months, and adopted many new practices and skills, as we protected the physical, and spiritual, well-being of ourselves and others.

In that spirit of joy, I extend a heartfelt welcome to all of you, and encourage you to resume, or begin anew, the full practice of your Faith, starting with participating in the Sunday Eucharist. Our Family of Faith has missed you; I, your pastors and fellow parishioners are eager to share with you the Joy that only comes from our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gives us the Gift of His Body and Blood as our Spiritual Food in this great Sacrament of Love – the source and summit of our lives as Catholics.

The Eucharist is the amazing Gift Jesus gives to us of Himself to be our Spiritual Food that will nourish our lives both to renew us as the Body of Christ, and to reignite the “Flame of Faith” within us to bring the Love of Jesus Christ to all. Following this unprecedented time of being separated from one another at every level of our lives, we need to come together as a Family of Faith to sing God’s praises and to give thanks for all God’s blessings now more than ever.

There are, however, growing concerns about the understanding our own Catholic people have of what the Eucharist truly is, and how essential it is to us on our journey of Faith. You may be aware of findings by a recent survey*, that revealed that close to 70 percent of Catholics do **not** believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and instead believe the bread and wine remain only symbols of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Just 30 percent of Catholics in the U.S. believe the central mystery of our Catholic Faith – that the bread and wine really become the Body and Blood of Jesus during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. This is truly a cause for great concern.

As Bishop of our beloved Diocese of Kalamazoo, it is my privilege and responsibility to make every effort to ensure that the teachings of the Church are made known to our Catholic community; this is most especially true regarding the teaching on the Eucharist. It is this sacred responsibility, shared by all Bishops, that is the impetus for a proposed pastoral document on the Eucharist to be issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). At the recent Spring Assembly virtual meeting last week, the Bishops’ Committee on Doctrine provided a tentative title, *“The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church: Why it matters”*, with a skeletal proposed outline: Part I, “The Eucharist, A Mystery to be Believed”; Part II, “The Eucharist, a Mystery to be Celebrated”; Part III, “The Eucharist: A

Mystery to be Lived". The primary focus is to address the alarmingly increased amount of the Faithful who do not understand, or choose not to believe, the Real Presence of Jesus alive in the Eucharist. The pastoral document is also to include positive ways to encourage all Catholics to return to the Sunday Eucharist. The purpose of the proposed document ***is to teach about living the Mission of the Eucharist***. Contrary to what some of the media reported, the document is not intended to target any individual or focus on only a single issue. [For additional clarification on the Bishops' Meeting I encourage you to view my video message released last week and you may read my full statement on our website.]

I am convinced that we all need to do what the Bishops' Conference proposed document states in the three-part outline: we must help our fellow sisters and brothers to *believe* in the Mystery of the Eucharist; we must *celebrate* this central Mystery of our Faith with devotion, respect and absolute belief; and we must *live* this Mystery by *being Eucharistic* for one another---by giving of ourselves in loving service to all. And we must begin to do this **immediately**.

My dear sisters and brothers, we need to realize that whether as a Bishop, priests, deacons, or lay faithful we are all called to first see **Who** the Eucharist is. We must come to the Eucharist and realize Jesus has made Himself present...Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity... on our altars in in every tabernacle. We must realize that with each reception of the Eucharist, we are entering into the most intimate relationship possible with God, as we consume Him, and He, in turn, makes us more intensely part of His divine life. It should amaze us every time we come before the Eucharist, how God desires so much to be intimate with us, He becomes our Bread to eat. When we realize that profound belief, we must allow the reception of the Eucharist to change us to act more like Jesus Christ. As we consume Jesus and are in communion with Him, as we become one with Him, we can then live out our mission as the Body of Christ. Our hands become His Hands on Earth; our Feet, His Feet. We then are able to be transformed, as members of His Body, to *be the Eucharist* we have consumed. We must take seriously this charge: "to take and eat," and we are all called to allow this intimacy to change us to live out the mission of the Eucharist.

One of the most powerful moments in the life of our Diocese in recent years was the Eucharistic Congress held in October 2019, just months before the pandemic began. At that wonderful event, attended by more than 1,000 witnesses to our Eucharistic Faith, and moved by the Holy Spirit, I declared the "Year of the Eucharist", and we concluded that grace-filled event with a Eucharistic procession through the streets of Kalamazoo. We now need to recapture this life-transforming energy about our Faith and pass it along to others. As we approach our 50th Jubilee Anniversary (July 21, 2021) as the Body of Christ in the Diocese of Kalamazoo it is my hope that we become driven to share the Good News of Jesus, Present in the Eucharist.

In this regard I warmly invite everyone to do the following: come back to Sunday Mass; embrace the teachings on the Eucharist; be inspired by the Love of the Eucharist to live out the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy [for additional ideas and resources, visit www.diokzoo.org/eucharist]

May the Eucharist be the Gift that brings us together, strengthens our faith, deepens our hope, and inspires us to love Jesus and one another as we move into our next 50 years.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Paul J. Bradley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Reverend Paul J. Bradley
Bishop of Kalamazoo