

10 JESUS CHRIST, YESTERDAY, TODAY AND FOREVER

Archbishop Weakland spoke to 7,500 Catholics from around the archdiocese at the Eucharistic Congress, the primary celebration of Jubilee 2000 for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. He delivered this keynote address for the two-day congress on October 28, 2000.

*Eucharist Without Walls
is without boundaries,
without the walls of
time, without the walls
of space, without the
walls of specific persons,
races or nations.*

Thank you for coming out today. I want to begin by greeting Bishop Sklba and Bishop Grullón from the Dominican Republic. A greeting to all of you who minister in the Church of Milwaukee and to those from other dioceses. We're talking about Eucharist Without Walls, and you are most welcome. I want to greet all of you who work in our parishes, and particularly the priests, the deacons, the parish directors, all the people involved in the schools and religious education, all of you on pastoral councils and in all kinds of leadership positions. I am proud of the fact that this is the leadership of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. You applauded me, but you do all the work, so thank you so very much, and peace to all of you.

Without knowing it, the people who planned this morning's liturgy picked my theme in the first song, "Jesus Christ, yesterday, today and forever." In thinking about what I would say about Eucharist Without Walls, I got the feeling it was "déjà vu all over again," as Yogi Berra said. You've heard all of this many, many times. You've read it. I've said it. So what more can we talk about?

I want to look at Eucharist Without Walls today in a little different way, and I hope it becomes clear as we move ahead. My theme is that Eucharist sums up all the ways Christ has been present, is present and will be present in and to this world. Eucharist Without Walls is without boundaries, without the walls of time, without the walls of space, without the walls of specific persons, races or nations. Eucharist Without Walls means Jesus was present, is present, will be present to the Church until the end of time, and we've got to probe what that means.

BEING AWARE OF CHRIST'S PRESENCE

In this jubilee year we are celebrating the two thousandth anniversary of Christ's birth, so it's only proper that we emphasize Christ and the ways in which Christ is present to us and was present and will be present. This demands of us a certain awareness of presence. It's easy to talk theologically about how Christ is present, but it's something else to be truly *aware* of someone's presence. I often experience this distinction. People react to me one way in a situation, and then suddenly when they find out I'm the Archbishop they give me a clean spoon! What I'm getting at is that we have to be not only present but also *aware* of presence.

The spirituality I grew up on as a Benedictine monk was focused on Jesus Christ, but I only became aware of that much later when I was the Abbot and had to talk about the rule of St. Benedict to the monks. That's when I found out that the Benedictine way of life is without doubt Christocentric. The Benedictine way has Christ as the center of the monk's life. And the monk has to see Christ, the icon of Christ, in the superior. Oh, that was hard! That took faith.

*It's easy to talk
theologically about
how Christ is present,
but it's something else
to be truly aware of
someone's presence.*

It was easier, as Benedict said, to see the icon of Christ in the guests. At the time of Benedict guests were very vulnerable. When you'd go to somebody's house, they could feed you anything, they could even stab you with the knife. To be that vulnerable could leave a person very shaky, and yet it's so important that the guest be seen and accepted as Christ. It also is important in the monastery that the sick be seen as Christ. They were the broken ones physically, and one had to see Christ in them. Mother Teresa of Calcutta did not invent that. It came from the rule of St. Benedict. In fact, I remember my novice master saying, "If we didn't have the sick in the monastery, we'd have to invent them."

There's one passage in the rule that was always very meaningful for me. Benedict was talking about the cellarer, the man in charge of the tools for the monastery — the grounds, the money, everything. He said, "The cellarer should treat the tools of the monastery as if they were extensions of the vessels of the altar." This means that the altar and what happens at the altar has to radiate out and sacramentalize the whole life of the monk. That's a beautiful phrase, and it gives one a sense that the whole of life then becomes Eucharistic.

Jesus promised before he died that he would be with us to the end of time. That's a great promise. It's probably the promise that keeps us all going. There is no one else in history who could make that kind of promise, because no one else in history was both human and divine. People want to live on. You can build any memorial you want to yourself, but it doesn't last. It's not quite the same thing as Jesus is promising.

When my mother died, my sisters gave me a little gold pen and pencil of hers. They knew I always admired these little gold gifts my father had given her at their wedding. I keep this pen and pencil in my drawer, and every so often I take them out and look at them and write with them, and I remember my mother. For me, it's a kind of sacrament of my mother, but it doesn't make her present. She's there only in my mind and in my memory.

I didn't know my father very well. He died when I was five, but I have a wonderful memory of him because I see pictures of him when he was stationed in the Dominican Republic. My dad was stationed, holding his sword, at the tomb of Columbus in Santo Domingo. We kept his sword in the attic, and on rainy days my mother would let us go up and play with it; the sword was so dull by then she didn't worry. I would take the sword out and put it on me like my father had worn it standing before the tomb of Christopher Columbus. My mother also kept his razor, and I would pretend I was shaving when I wore dad's sword. It made no sense, but these were all symbols of my father and they brought back to me who my father was and what he must have been like. But that doesn't mean he lived on in anything more than through those symbols and memory.

Jesus promised before he died that he would be with us to the end of time. That's a great promise. It's probably the promise that keeps us all going.

CHRIST'S ETERNAL PRESENCE

Jesus promised he would live on, and that is what makes him different from anyone else who has ever lived in history. On Easter Sunday, when the Greeks say, "Christ is alive! Christ is risen!" to one another, they *really* mean it. This is not just because we all have some memory of Christ in our pocket, but rather he is truly present among us. What a powerful thing it is to be one Christian to another.

In 1990 when I was visiting Russia, I had flown from Novosibirsk in Siberia to Tashkent through the night. We had been in the air for a couple hours, and about 2:00 a.m., I noticed the plane was coming down. The two priests with me were sound asleep, but I can't sleep on planes. I bumped them and said, "We're coming down. We're landing." They said, "Oh it can't be; we were only up two hours. It's a five hour flight." But, indeed, we landed. We were given no information and after a couple hours we boarded the plane again and went on to Tashkent. When we arrived, we learned a plane had been kidnapped and was on the tarmac in Tashkent, and they wanted to get it out before other planes could land.

We were hours and hours late, and a little Christian community in Tashkent that had three or four Catholics and about 20 catechumens was going to meet us at the airport. When we finally arrived, it was still a bit dark. We got all our bags and came out in front of this airplane hanger and stood there. Nobody was there; we saw no one until suddenly a high, squeaky voice said, "Laudetur Jesus Christus"

(May Jesus Christ be praised). Boy, did I shout back, “in saecula saeculorum” (forever and ever) Amen!” This was like resurrection morning for me because somebody was saying, “Yes, Christ is present here among us. Welcome. You’re welcome to be with us.”

I want to probe what Jesus Christ’s presence means, how it all comes together in Eucharist. The connecting link through all of these presences is the power of the Holy Spirit. Without that power of the Holy Spirit you couldn’t talk about Christ’s presence. The power of the Holy Spirit was present hovering over Mary when Jesus was conceived. That Holy Spirit was present when Jesus began his public life and was led into the desert. Jesus said, “I was anointed by the Spirit,” to his own people in Nazareth. That Holy Spirit was present throughout his life and especially at his death and resurrection. We forget how important that can be. And then comes Pentecost. The force underneath all of these presences is the power of the Holy Spirit, and I just want to make that clear.

JESUS CHRIST IN THE CHURCH

*Jesus Christ has to be
found in that Church,
and that Church has
to make Christ present
to us.*

How is Jesus Christ present to us today? I want to begin with a quote from St. Cyprian, and you might not like it. St. Cyprian said, “One cannot have God for a father who does not have the Church for a mother.” That’s a powerful statement. In many ways it challenges all of us today. One can’t have God for a father who does not have the Church for a mother. Christ lives on in the Church. The way in which Henri de Lubac expressed this has become classic for all of us today. He said that if we see Christ as the sacrament of God (by sacrament he means that which reveals and makes God really present to us), the Church is the sacrament of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has to be found in that Church, and that Church has to make Christ present to us.

In this way the Church is not just a group of people who think alike. Wouldn’t that be dull? It’s not a group of people who have all the answers. It’s a group of people on pilgrimage. Christ joins us as Church on pilgrimage. If you think of Christ’s presence statically you’ve missed the point, because just as God walked with people in the Old Testament, Christ walks with us in the New.

This is important in understanding Christianity. It may have been difficult in the early Church, especially for those who had come from Judaism where blood was the way in which you were united with people. Now we’re united with people not by blood, not by race, not by creed, not by gender, as Paul says, but by that life of Christ within us. Therefore we have to get a new perspective of what it means to belong to the family of Jesus Christ, the Church. We become then, as Paul put it, the Body of Christ. We have to see the Church as the Body of Christ.

It's easier to believe in God. It's easier to believe in Jesus Christ than it is to believe in the Church. Yet every time we say the creed, we profess our belief in that Church. I was glad to see that de Lubac said it doesn't have to be the same kind of belief. He makes some distinctions which are powerful because so often you and I fail to see truly the presence of Christ in that Church. Yet Jesus Christ identifies with the whole Church and with each individual.

Do you remember in the Acts of the Apostles when Paul was knocked to the ground and Jesus said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting."? Jesus had already identified himself with that early Christian community and each one in it. That makes it clear that Jesus is identified with each one of us and with the whole. How is that possible? That's possible because of the action of the Holy Spirit. We are pilgrim people and Jesus walks with us.

What is the purpose of all of that? I think we have to begin to see the Church more as a principle of unity, of oneness in Christ, than a group of people fighting over ideas. What's important is that when we worship together, that presence of Christ becomes stronger in our hearts and in our minds. "One Body," that's what it says. Do you remember that in the canon of the Mass? We become One Body in Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit.

I think we have to begin to see the Church more as a principle of unity, of oneness in Christ, than a group of people fighting over ideas.

CHORUS CHRISTI

St. Augustine used a special phrase to describe the Christian Community. He called it the Chorus, the Choir, the Chorus Christi. I looked out at all of you as you were singing and I said, "This is the Chorus Christi." That's why we need to have the whole congregation sing, because it must be the whole chorus singing, even badly. You didn't know that God has a deaf ear. I learned that a long, long time ago. What really counts is not the perfection. What really counts is that the chorus, *everybody*, sings.

I think this is difficult for us because you and I are so aware of the weakness of the Church, the sinfulness of the members of the Church, and at times I'd have to say the sinfulness of the structures of the Church. People don't like to say that, but such sinfulness exists and sometimes it weighs heavy on us. When it weighs heavy on me, I say, "Well, thank God I didn't live in the tenth century." It was horrible! One Pope after another and what they did! Or I say, "I'm glad I didn't live in the Church in the sixteenth century or even in the fifteenth century." You know, we're rather lucky. We live in a Church that's not as bad as it has been in history. You have to look at the brighter side of this. Yet, it is true that the Church always has to be reformed, and that's because it is created of human beings. In spite of our weakness and maybe because of it at times, Christ shines though. It couldn't work otherwise. It would fall flat on its face. We

believe the Church, like Jesus Christ, has both its divine and its human element. In a way, the Church can be the instrument of Christ's presence among us because it's the way in which divine and human meet, and we see humanity with all its warts, with all its needs, with all its sinfulness, and we say, "Lord, heal us."

If it weren't that way we would all become Donatists, like the group St. Augustine was fighting all the time. The Donatists had noticed that many people, including bishops, had caved in during the persecutions of Diocletian in 303-305. After that they said anyone who gave into the Diocletian Proconsul had to be expurgated from the Church. They would not stand any kind of weakness within the Church. They tried to create an absolutely pure, unstained, perfect group of people in the Church. That doesn't exist. The Church is for sinners, the Church is for everybody, and we have to see Christ shining through that human weakness because he alone can cure it and heal it.

You may ask how the Church can really be that presence of Christ among us. I think it's only because of the way in which the Sacraments penetrate the life of the Church. The Sacraments are the Church's great treasure. Our understanding of that is what really gives us our Catholic identity. The way in which we understand that we meet Christ and encounter the events of his life, death and resurrection, the paschal mystery, in every Sacrament gives us a very special identity.

*In spite of our weakness
and maybe because of
it at times, Christ
shines though.*

I put it in three ways. The Sacraments make real our union with Christ in Baptism. The Sacraments renew our union with Christ in Penance. The Sacraments strengthen our union with Christ in Confirmation and Eucharist. We're always in one way or another in that union with Christ at every Sacrament. And believe it or not, marriage is a participation in the mystery of Christ dying and rising again, and most young people forget about the dying. They forget about entering into that mystery which is a mystery of how Christ is present in our own dying and rising. I don't want to slight this; I want to say even more strongly that the Sacraments make real not only our union with Jesus Christ but our union with the Church.

Jesus Christ as he is present to us now, after his death and resurrection, can never be separated from his disciples. The Body of Christ contains *all of us*. That's the way it is. No one can be excluded. Thus, every time we get closer to Jesus Christ we come closer one to another. All the mystics of the Church knew that. St. Theresa of the Little Flower became a missionary at home because the closer she came to Jesus Christ, the closer she came to everyone else. That belief is specific to the way in which we are Catholic. When we talk about the presence of Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord with us, it's that

whole awful Church that's with us — every one of them because it's always going to be both the divine and the human.

CHRIST IN THE SACRAMENTS

Baptism means first of all putting on Christ, but it also means insertion into the Church. These two go together and cannot be separated. It is in Baptism that you and I put on Jesus Christ for the first time; we become truly one with Christ. I love the way in which Paul wrote this epistle to the Romans that we read every year on Holy Saturday: "When we are baptized we put on Christ."

Where are you going to look for Christ? First in yourself. You put on Christ and that is where Christ is, but you couldn't have this if it hadn't come from the waters of Baptism that the Church possesses. That's what makes you one with the entire Church.

You may ask how the Church can really be that presence of Christ among us. I think it's only because of the way in which the Sacraments penetrate the life of the Church. The Sacraments are the Church's great treasure.

I want to give you two images here. As I look upon Baptism, I had to find some images that helped me and helped younger people. First I want to use the image of a pilot light. Somehow the divine pilot light gets into my heart, my being, through Baptism. Whatever happens later on, you know that pilot light never goes out. It can always be refreshed. It can always be re-lit and the flame, the Spirit, can catch again. That's what Baptism is to me. But that pilot light is attached to a gas pump somewhere, that's my Holy Spirit uniting all the Church. I don't think you have a gas light without gas.

The other image is one I like very much. When I was in Vietnam back in 1968 after the Tet offensive, one of our monasteries had been burnt to the ground and a couple of the monks had been buried alive. It was a horrible situation. I went there and had Mass with the monks and was present to support them after this ordeal. As a gift they gave me a chalice; it was actually a wooden vase and paten. When I received them, I thought they were black lacquerware. The more I used them, the more I touched them and the human hands' oil got on them, however, the more I was able to see that underneath were beautiful iridescent goldfish. It is like the presence of Jesus Christ within us. We don't put it there. It's just looking to come out, and when we act Christlike, beautiful goldfish come forward. It's not something we do; we just get the obstacles out of the way so that Christ can truly shine and witness in and through us. That's Christ's personal presence.

Even at Confirmation you'll see in that powerful prayer the Bishop says over the Confirmands before the actual anointing, "Send down the Holy Spirit upon these candidates so that they will become more Christlike." That's to renew the life of Christ within them, to give them all those graces and gifts they need so they can

scrub away all that impedes Christ from coming forward, all the awful kinds of dross that keep us from being Christlike.

THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN THE EUCHARIST

And then comes the Eucharist. The Bishops at Vatican Council II talked about the different ways in which Christ is present at the Eucharist. My theme for today came from Pope Paul VI who took those presences of the Eucharist and broadened them to all different kinds of presences. Christ is truly present, *really* present (par excellence was the word he used) in the sacred species. We call this the Real Presence because Christ is really and truly present — body, blood, soul and divinity. But Pope Paul, citing the texts of Vatican Council II, noted that Christ is present in other ways, too — in the assembly, in the Word of God proclaimed, in the celebrant. Nevertheless, the Eucharist is the Real Presence par excellence.

We also know from St. Paul that the Eucharist makes us into one people. The early Fathers stated that the Eucharist makes the Church and the Church makes the Eucharist.

When I read most books about Christ's presence in the Eucharist and how that makes the Church one, the focus is almost always about receiving Communion. This is how St. Augustine talked about it. St. Paul's image is one loaf; we all receive from the one loaf and therefore we all become one in Christ. But that's not quite the way in which the Mass presents the Eucharist.

The Eucharistic prayer is a prayer being offered to God the Father, and Christ is really the principal celebrant. I can honestly say that for myself, every time I offer Mass and the narration of the last supper shifts from "He took bread..." to "This is My Body," suddenly the fact that Christ is the principal celebrant becomes evident. That Sacrifice of the Mass is the sacrifice on Calvary that Jesus offered once and for all to his Father; we now have the chance to join him in offering. That is the powerful part about the Mass.

We've had a wonderful renewal of the Liturgy of the Word, but we haven't yet had a renewal of the wonders of the Eucharistic prayer, because somehow we got into a routine. We don't listen and we don't really feel that presence of Christ there in our midst. The priest is truly at that time the Alter Christus. However, Christ is the principal celebrant. When he says, "This is My Body; this is My Blood," it's personal. Through the action of the Holy Spirit, Christ, who is both Priest and Victim at Calvary, becomes present.

We also talk about the Second Epiclesis — that the Holy Spirit in that act of offering makes us one. We are one as a people of God offering with Christ again that sacrifice of Calvary and Christ's res-

*Christ is truly present
with us in that offering
of the sacrifice, and that
sacrifice is consummated
in the reception of
Communion.*

urrection. We're doing this in a way that makes us one people united by the one Spirit. That unity of the one people in Christ is confirmed by the reception of Communion, but it has taken place in the one offering. I think sometimes we sit and wait for Communion as if nothing happens until then. Something else has happened that we tend to forget, and that's the action of the Holy Spirit making us into one Christ. To me that question of being united in the one sacrifice at Mass is so important, even before we talk about sealing it in the reception of Communion.

It was St. Augustine who said that when the priest says to you, "Body of Christ," you affirm your "yes" to being one with Christ in his offering and "yes" to being one with the Church. That's a lot of yes but an important yes. The reception of Communion is the final consummation of what has happened, but it's all progressive up to that point. It's difficult for us today to imagine our Church becoming just a Church of receiving Communion because that's like taking the dessert and missing the meat. It's separating out what really belongs to the whole. We become the people of God. We become one with Christ. Christ is truly present with us in that offering of the sacrifice, and that sacrifice is consummated in the reception of Communion.

*Eucharist unites us with
the Christ who walked
this earth.*

That's why you and I live in a world that will be unhappy until we have total unity. Ecumenism is so important because we see people that we're one with in Baptism and we say, "Why aren't we one in Eucharist?" That's what really counts and we haven't arrived there yet, but we will. We will.

I'll never forget an evening when I was in Crete a couple weeks ago for a meeting with the Orthodox. The Bishop of the Diocese came; he's 89 years old, a tiny person. He had been Bishop of the Diocese back when he was in his 50s and was driven out by the government because he didn't support the Nationalist Movement. He then went to Germany, acted as pastor there for 10 years, and after that the government of Crete tried to appoint a new bishop. The people stood up to the government and to the Church and said, "We will not receive a new Bishop. We have a Bishop. We want him back." Thus, they had to bring him back.

So this little guy, a wonderful person, stood up at the banquet honoring us, and he took his glass of red wine and he said, "It's not over yet. We will not really be able to call ourselves Christian until we can all drink of that one chalice." It was a symbol I'll never forget, this old man realizing — and making us all realize — that unity can only come when we offer that sacrifice together.

Eucharist unites us with the Christ who walked this earth. That's why the Liturgy of the Word is so important, where we get a chance to meditate on all of this. It unites us with the sacrifice. It

unites us with one another and makes all of that in the Paschal Mystery present to us.

BEING CHRIST TO OTHERS

I read the Prophet Isaiah and the Prophet Joel and I say to myself, “Is God pleased with that offering we make? Is He going to say to us what Isaiah was saying to his people — ‘this rather is the fasting that I wish, releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke, setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke, sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless, clothing the naked when you see them and not turning your back on your own.’” You see a lot of kids running around with bands saying, “What would Jesus do?” What *would* Jesus do? If we come to Mass and we are so full of that presence of Jesus Christ and that Sacrament lives on in us, then we have to ask, “What happens next?”

If we come to Mass and we are so full of that presence of Jesus Christ and that Sacrament lives on in us, then we have to ask, what happens next?

Vatican II talks about the Church as the Sacrament of the World, “Sacramentum mundi.” The Church then has to be a Sacrament, a presence of Christ, bringing that presence of Christ to the world. I’m totally convinced of this, but I fear there are Catholics today who don’t believe that the Church is always expansive, outward looking and never inward looking. The Church is not a sect; it has no closed doors. The Church is never isolationist.

There is a new Donatist movement among us that frightens me. It’s almost like saying, “Everybody else get out but us perfect ones.” Recently there was an interview in the *New York Times* with a chaplain who said, “Even if the Catholics in the United States go from 70,000,000 down to 15,000 and they are really good, genuine, authentic Catholics, that’s okay.”

That’s *not* okay because if you have 15,000, they’re going to start fighting about who’s more perfect and you’ll end up with 5,000. Then they’ll fight about who’s more perfect and you’ll end up with 1,000. That’s not what the Church is about. The Church by its very nature is a missionary Church; the Church is a Church for others. That’s what it’s about. The Church is not for itself.

If you wanted to get out into outer space, wouldn’t you build a shuttle that would take you there? Think about which comes first — the shuttle or the outer space or the trip. Well, they go together. You build the shuttle in a certain way so it can resist the heat coming in and can reach out beyond this globe. It’s the same thing with the Church. The Church has to be so constructed. We have to understand Christ’s presence in the Church in such a way that we say to ourselves, “We are shuttles; we are not cottages along the lake.” It’s a serious difference. We are shuttles and whether we like it or not, we

have to risk being sent into outer space. As Church, we are outward looking, never inward looking.

As Church we are truly to bring Christ's presence. We have received that presence in the Church and are to bring that to the world. There are many, many ways we do this and all kinds of tasks that we can perform, but as Pope John Paul says so often, we must do so in solidarity with everybody on this globe. We are in solidarity with everybody; we're not isolated from anybody. The beauty of Vatican Council II is that Christ is out ahead of us in so many ways, and we've got to get out there and be with him. So that we don't become Pelagian and think that we're going to do this all ourselves, we have to say we're on pilgrimage. We're not static and Christ is propelling us through the power of the Spirit as we move beyond the wall of our Church. That is truly Eucharist Without Walls.

EUCCHARIST WITHOUT WALLS

Christ wants to use us as instruments to bring his presence to the world. We do that, first of all, through the witness of our lives. I was with some Buddhists years ago and they said, "Oh, you Catholics. You presuppose that most of us have never heard about Jesus Christ. We've all learned about Jesus Christ, but what we want is a witness of what it means to believe in Jesus Christ." We must bring that presence — a presence of love, a presence of peace and a presence of charity — to others. And don't forget the love of God and the love of neighbor is one command. You can't separate the two. To be a member of the Church is to be a member of the Church "out there," moving out into the world.

Christ wants to use us as instruments to bring his presence to the world.

This part of Eucharist Without Walls has two points. We act first with charity. When you see somebody in need, you stop to help. Mother Teresa was such a great witness for us. You don't need to form a committee or found a society, which is a very American response. You can simply help. It's important to think about that as direct service; we call it charity and it will always be needed. However, true charity is giving without strings attached. I get nervous about people who add qualifiers when they give to others. I get nervous because charity should come from the abundance of the heart and not have strings attached. That's more important than you might think because we Catholics for a long time engaged in "rice Christianity." The first missionaries who went to China stipulated that if you joined them, you got rice. This is not the right way to do it.

I think of the story of a priest who was traveling on the highway when he came upon an accident, with car after car banged up. He rushed out of his car over to the first banged up car and said, "Are there any Catholics here?" Then he went to the next car: "Any Catholics here?" Third car: "Any Catholics here?" And one guy

responded, “No, I’m Protestant, but I hurt just as much.” Isn’t that what it’s all about? We must reach out.

The second way in which we have to reach out is through being a Church of justice, a proclaimer of justice. That’s also a part of Eucharist Without Walls, and it’s much harder than charity. You get a good feeling out of charity, but being a Church for justice and bringing to the world Christ’s love of those who are oppressed is much harder. Yet we will not be truly a Catholic Church, we will not be the Church of Jesus Christ; his presence will not be fully within us until we are out there fighting for justice for everybody to this world. That’s what it’s about.

THE COSMIC CHRIST

There’s one aspect of Jesus Christ we don’t talk about and it has many names: call it the Cosmic Christ; call it the Eschatological Christ; call it the End-of-Times Christ. Call it all those things that St. Paul talks about — how the whole of creation is yearning for that presence of Christ within it and how all of this will be handed over to the Father at the end of time. This is another dimension to Eucharist which is forward-looking. It is beyond Milwaukee, beyond the present moment into that future, so that what Christ is doing is somehow gathering together all of us and all the things of this world to present it back to the Father at the end of time. The person who could say that in ways I marvel at was Teilhard de Chardin. He had that ability to say all of this. You didn’t know if it was poetry or reality, but it didn’t matter because it stimulated your thinking as to the Cosmic Christ.

St. Thomas said every time we celebrate Eucharist, “This is a pledge of eternal life.” The future element is always built into Eucharist. In Chapter 6 of St. John’s Gospel, when Jesus talked about Eucharist, he talked about it as the bread of eternal life, of something more than just uniting us here. It’s something also that unites us at the very end.

St. Ambrose had a brother who went on a very dangerous trip by boat. If you think it’s dangerous to travel now by boat in Greece, it was much, much more dangerous to travel by boat in the fourth century. Shipwrecks were common, so Ambrose’s brother took some consecrated hosts with him. That might strike us as strange, but it was customary then for people being put into very dangerous circumstances to take hosts with them. This was in case they were to pass from life to death, they would be able to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord. On this very dangerous journey, Ambrose’s brother shared his Eucharist with everybody Christian on the boat.

*Yet we will not be truly
a Catholic Church, we
will not be the Church of
Jesus Christ; his presence
will not be fully within
us until we are out there
fighting for justice for
everybody to this world.*

I think this story gives us an important message, especially for all of you who are teaching. The anointing of the sick is the Sacrament of the sick. But Eucharist is the Sacrament of the dying. Just as Christ's presence has been with us all our lives from Baptism on, that presence becomes real when we go through our own death and resurrection. When we go through our own personal death-experience, we do so with Christ. That's why they talk about Eucharist as being the Sacrament of the dying. And if people tell you that the Real Presence was invented in the eighth century by Berengarius or whomever, don't believe them. Ambrose and his fourth-century companions wouldn't have taken hosts with them on that trip if they hadn't believed that Christ was really present there after the Mass. Christians always saw it as part of the Mass.

I want to proclaim to all of you today that when you meet death — even if you cannot receive the Eucharist at that moment — all the times you've received Eucharist and offered up that sacrifice of Christ's dying and rising, all of those times you participated in Mass will make sense at the moment of your death and will come to total fruition. I want to say that and I'm proud of that belief. It will all make sense for us together at the last judgment when what it means to be a Eucharistic people will suddenly become clear to us. That is a lot to look forward to. Each Eucharist becomes then a pledge of Christ's presence at the most crucial moment for each one of us — our personal dying and rising.

*Just as Christ's presence
has been with us all our
lives from Baptism on,
that presence becomes
real when we go through
our own death and
resurrection.*

CONCLUSION

How is Christ present to us? There's so much more I could say. I could talk, for example, of Christ's presence in the world, his presence in the minister, in the assembly, in all the ways Pope Paul spoke of. I could talk about Christ's presence in each person who is hurting. I could talk about Christ's presence in all kinds of things. But more than anything else, if I ask you to do one thing it would be to *be aware* of Christ's presence. If you're not aware of it, you're missing what it's all about. It just will pass over your head. It's full of mystery. I have no doubt about it — Christ is present among us. It's full of mystery and wonder and awe, and we'll never fathom totally that Christ walks with us. And the wonderful thing about it is the best is yet to come!

10 JESUS CHRIST, YESTERDAY, TODAY AND FOREVER