



*The Eucharist:
An Inexhaustible Source
of Peace and Reconciliation*

A Catechetical Teaching by

His Eminence Gérald Cyprien Cardinal Lacroix
Archbishop of Québec
Primate of Canada

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Peace be with you!

Please allow me to express my joy to be with you, today, sharing this beautiful moment of meditation and prayer. What a blessing to finally be together to celebrate this long awaited International Eucharistic Congress here in Budapest. Special thanks to Cardinal Péter Erdó, his colleagues and the very many volunteers who have worked so hard in preparing this Congress and have persevered in these difficult times due to the pandemic. We are very happy to be with you!

We are gathered to deepen our faith in Jesus and to savor the grace he bestows upon us as he lives with us in the Eucharist. It is Jesus himself who is the one and true subject of the Eucharist. It is appropriate to say "**Who is the Eucharist?**", rather than "what is the Eucharist?", and then reflect on its power to act as an educator and the source of peace and reconciliation in our lives and in our world.

So, I suggest we place Jesus at the center of our meditation and to designate him as "**Christ the Eucharist**". In this view, we are able to designate ourselves, as brothers and sisters in Him, as Saint Paul himself teaches to the Galatians: "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*¹."

When speaking of the Eucharist, we often refer to the grace it bestows as a source, because it is like water that springs from the depths of the earth that quenches thirst and is pure and free. What a beautiful image that of a source to designate the benefits provided by the Eucharist! Jesus offers his own Body and Blood as food that gives life because it springs from the depths of his own divine heart and from the infinite and merciful love of God our Father. It is inexhaustible, endless, everlasting and it is offered free of charge to anyone who hungers and thirsts for peace. "*By nature, the Eucharist is the sacrament of peace.*" Such is a fundamental truth recalled to us by Pope Benedict XVI². The encounter with Christ in the Eucharist is a source of peace since it enables us to "*learn to experience the Eucharist as a great school of peace*³." Our communion with Christ in His Word, in the Eucharistic bread, enlivens the love needed to heal the breaches with our brothers and sisters. It also triggers the energy to undertake the mission and to build a world of peace.

It is particularly interesting to point out that the city of Budapest, where we are now gathered for this Eucharistic Congress, is probably the only capital city in the world where caves are hidden under its streets and are dug mainly by springs. Let us therefore pray that all the paths of our own lives may be built on the sources of living water, "*all my springs are in you*"⁴, as proclaims the psalmist, that fertilize them with meaning, grace, peace and reconciliation. May we leave Budapest abundantly renewed, energised and eager to bring to the world the joy of knowing that peace is possible, that it is offered to every person of good will, and that we witness its implementation in any effort of reconciliation within our reach. In other words, if a Christian sees the Eucharist as merely a sight to behold rather than a call to love to be lived out, the fruits

¹ Galatians 3:28

² Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*

³ Pope John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, N° 27)

⁴ Psalm 87:7

of Christ's paschal mystery will not reach the larger global community. The precious peace that Jesus offers is to be shared generously.

"Peace be with you!"⁵ These are the very words of Jesus after his resurrection. They are now pronounced by the bishop at the beginning of every mass. I suggest we recall the context in which they were first pronounced and consider the effect they produced on the disciples, and how this greeting is challenging for us now.

Barely emerging from the confinement of his tomb, Jesus joins his disciples, who are locked behind the doors of a place kept secret. In a greeting uttered with great sweetness, sensing the emotion that his sudden appearance may cause, Jesus gently offers them his peace. His voice is well recognizable, and it frees the disciples from their gloom and inertia. It revives the joyful enthusiasm of the Master's first call, as on the day when, hearing him announce the arrival of a new era, they left everything behind to follow him. On the new day following his resurrection, the doors of his Kingdom are unlocked. Jesus presents himself in his glorified body and shows them the wounds on his hands and his side, to prove that he is neither a ghost nor the effect of an illusion. The experience of touching him to be sure they are witnessing without any confusion a real body of flesh is offered to Thomas. His disbelief passes through this requirement. Jesus generously accepts his request since it leads to Thomas' expression of faith. This fact is of utmost importance for us when we receive the Eucharist, the living body of Christ!

Fear had caused the disciples to lock themselves in the face of threats from outside political and religious powers. When the peace of the Risen One crosses the wall of this fear, it spreads a favourable climate of security. Peace invades the abyss had caused by the disappearance of the Master and fills the hearts of the disciples with the joy of being comforted with his living presence. Peace revives the memory of all the words of love, compassion, mercy, and healing that Jesus sowed in them and in the lives of countless people they encountered as they walked together through towns and cities. The peace of the Lord ignites the disciples with the fire of the Holy Spirit to go out and spread the warmth of grace throughout the world. They have seen the Lord with their own eyes, they have heard his voice. They have even touched and eaten with

⁵ Luke 24:36

him, and their faith is now unalterable. Saint John affirms in his first Letter: ***“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 Christ⁶.”***

A short glance at the life of Jesus allows us to comprehend how much he understood the deep expectations and needs of all human beings. Throughout his life, he touched, listened, consoled, nurtured, healed and reconciled those he encountered. He shared their meals, nurtured friendships, and admired the beauties of nature; he mourned grief and betrayal. He understood how gestures expressing affection, proximity and fidelity were essential to us men and woman who experience all realities through our senses and our intellectual and emotional faculties.

How can we be surprised, then, that he would choose sensitive signs so close to what we love in life, namely bread and wine, shared in the fraternity of brothers and sisters around a meal, to manifest his presence forever in the Eucharist? The Church gratefully attests to this gift, which seals a new covenant, as expressed, so beautifully in the fourth Eucharistic Prayer: *“To accomplish your plan, he gave himself up to death, and, rising from the dead, he destroyed death and restored life.”*

It may seem utopian, even candid, to speak of peace and reconciliation at a time when we are witnessing the break-up of societies and communities that have until now defined themselves as inseparable. For a long time, they were regarded as unwavering models of union and cohesion. Even a brief look at our planet and the world around us risks making us doubt the possibility of achieving such a high goal.

How is peace possible in our world torn by countless upheavals?

I don't have to extrapolate very long to convince you that the situation in the world is anything but simple. On many fronts we see struggles, injustice, forced displacements, refugees, corruption, war. I don't wish to blacken the world situation to demonstrate that peace and reconciliation may seem utopian. But I love to note that beyond all doubts, there are many who strive to achieve peace and reconciliation. They are pursuing an aspiration deeply inscribed in the human heart and mind. One of the contemporary prophets who believed that this endeavor is possible was pastor Martin Luther King Jr., who paid with his life for his dream of racial equality and the respect of

⁶ 1 John 1:3

rights for all the people of his country. His famous speech, the main theme of which is summed up in the phrase *"I have a dream"*, calls for the establishment of universal justice and equality among all citizens in a society scandalously divided by apartheid.

The kind of peace offered by the Eucharist isn't simply an absence of conflict, but rather an active process, one that works towards the reconciliation and healing of persons, families and communities.

It allows us to believe that aspiring to peace is not as absurd as it seems. The cries of such beacons as Martin Luther King, Madeleine Delbr el and so many others, were reverberated by an eminent prophet of our time, Saint Pope Paul VI, who at the Assembly of representatives of the nations of the world, the United Nations, said: *"Humanity will have to put an end to the war or it is the war that will put an end to Humanity (...) never again war, never again war!"*⁷

By the resurrection of Christ, which testifies to the fulfillment of the promise of salvation, and by the outpouring of the Spirit of Pentecost, Our Lord is therefore *"the living stone rejected by men, but chosen and precious before God"*⁸. The inspiration that animates the lives of Christians of all times comes directly from the person of Jesus Christ. The spiritual structure of which we are *living stones*⁹ is based on the formal promise *"that he is with us, forever, until the end of the world"*¹⁰.

A better world in which peace and reconciliation of all the differences that divide individuals and nations among themselves is no utopia. Christ has made the dream come true by continuing his mission of salvation in the Eucharist, the sacrament of peace and reconciliation.

*"This 'sacrament of peace' bestows God's peace to the Church, which, in turn, commissions all Christians to embody this peace in works of mercy and initiatives of justice. Through this, we see the social and missional implications for a community centered on the Eucharistic table"*¹¹.

⁵ Pope Paul VI, Address to the United Nations, 4 October 1965

⁸ 1 Peter 2:4

⁹ *Ibid.*, 5

¹⁰ Matthew 28:20

¹¹ John A Monaco, *Sacramentum Pacis : The Eucharist as the Sacrament of Peace*, Boston College of Theology and Ministry, 2017

I often begin my homilies, my letters and my remarks by the wonderful greeting in the words of the Risen Lord Jesus: ***“Peace be with you”***. These words are not reserved only for bishops but available for all to share. These words remind us that our mission is to not only pray for peace but also to be active instruments of peace. The Eucharist is a source of peace which engages us on that path.

Each time I preside the Eucharist, I admire the many ways we participate, at moments in a very personal manner, in silent prayer, and at other moments in a very expressive way in song, responses and with gestures with our bodies.

Have you noticed how our hands participate actively in the celebration of the Eucharist? We begin by tracing the sign of the Cross on ourselves with one hand: *In the name of the Father, the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. Then during the Penitential Rite, we do not hesitate to implore the Lord’s mercy striking our breasts with our hand, recognizing publicly that we are sinners: *I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned...* This is not an act of self pity but an act that opens our heart to God, to his love and mercy. We are publicly expressing our desire to allow God to renew our life.

Then as Mass continues, something beautiful happens, the power of the Word of God and the gift of the Eucharist enables us to turn to God and recognize him not only as our Creator, as the Eternal and Ever Living God, but as our Father. And those same hands that were turned towards ourselves open up and are lifted to God as we pray together with all those around us: *Our Father, who art in heaven hallowed be thy name...*

Do you see the pedagogy in the Eucharist, slowly opening our lives and our whole being to God. And it’s not over yet. There are three more important steps before the end of Mass. After praying the *Our Father* and before receiving communion, we are invited to share God’s peace with those close to us. And that is so important, I would even say essential. Living our faith in communion with God is the foundation to a healthy Christian life. But learning to live in communion with our brothers and sisters is unavoidable, indispensable, and let’s face it, quite a challenge! Participating in the Eucharist is not only to meet the Lord, to be with Him, it is also a school where we learn to love others, to be open to them. Without that, there is no true Christianity.

I know some people find it tedious when the priest invites them to share the sign of peace: *“Oh no, not that again. Why doesn't he just leave me alone with God? I am fine as is! Don't interrupt me with this 'social distraction' moment.”* Have you ever heard that?

In fact, let's not forget, in a few moments we will be going up the aisle to receive communion, the body of Christ. Those around you are part of His body. We are all part of God's family, brothers and sisters of God's family. The exchange of the sign of peace is a reminder and an opportunity to prepare ourselves to receive holy communion, receiving the Lord Jesus, but also to enter into a deeper communion with our brothers and sisters. Jesus in our lives builds communion, unity, **community**.

So, in a first instance we open our hands to share the peace of Christ with others and then open them again to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. How precious is that! Very meaningful. Jesus in my hands... He gives himself to me, he feeds me and invites me to a greater communion.

Through Him, with Him and in Him, we encounter peace and reconciliation. Christ not only renews our heart and fills it with peace, but also our capacity to love, to reconcile and continue our journey in life as his disciples.

And then comes the final blessing and the dismissal, where once again we turn to God to receive his help, his assistance and the promise of his grace to go forth and live the Gospel and bear abundant fruit. We receive God's blessing so we can be a blessing in the midst of the world, immersed in all the realities of life. The liturgy does not simply come to an end. Those assembled are sent forth to bring the fruits of the Eucharist to the world. The bishop, priest or deacon will chose with one of these three phrases: *Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord, Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life, or Go in peace.*

Having nourished us with His peace, the Lord sends us to be instruments of peace. Such is the Eucharist, an inexhaustible source of peace and reconciliation. ***“All my springs are in you”***¹²

¹² Psalm 87:7

Brothers and sisters, the Eucharist prepares us for the mission we are called to carry out. In Him, Jesus in the Eucharist, Jesus the Eucharist, we drink from the sources of life, of abundant life.

I was a missionary in Colombia, South America for nine years, a time of many blessings in my life. It was also a moment of profound trials and tribulations in Colombia: a beautiful country with wonderful people, but tortured by an ongoing internal conflict, drug wars, injustice and a great deal of violence. I was a pastor of a parish in the Andes mountains composed of many small villages, a very remote region of the Archdiocese of Popayán where violence was omnipresent. The parish where I was assigned had been without a priest for five years.

Many times in the first years of my ministry I felt overwhelmed by the situation and wondered how I could live in the midst of so much stress and tension. The first year I was pastor, 35 parishioners were murdered in the main village of 1700 people. It was quite challenging to say the least. It was in the celebration of daily Mass that I found the inner peace and strength to continue to serve and love the faithful entrusted to me. Praying with the faithful, listening together to the Word of God, receiving holy communion renewed me, renewed us every day and gave us the strength and courage to continue with our journey. Without a personal and community relationship with Jesus, I could not have survived and would most probably have given up and ran away. I remember many days coming to the Eucharist overwhelmed and powerless, not knowing how to pursue my ministry and coming out renewed and filled with the strength that can only come from the Lord. **All MY springs are in Him!** The presence of the Lord in our midst is what we rely on to live and witness to the Gospel and to face the challenges that life presents us.

There are many ways of expressing the peace of God as there are a multitude of people who are thirsty to hear this Good News resonate in their lives. The Spirit of Jesus doesn't fall on us as in the commotion of a gust of wind. Instead, he chooses to discreetly inhabit our hearts and delicately invites himself into our world. As we unfold the story of our lives, we can all recognize him in many of those moments when he silently played the leading role. Thanks to him, inspiring people have crossed our paths, serious problems have been solved, priorities have been reassessed, new avenues have led to

more joy and love, serenity has come to nestle where anxieties were rife. That is the discreet but effective work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The greatest prize of recognition that we could confer upon Christ in the Eucharist for the warmth of his presence and the perseverance of his support is to let him guide us in all the regions where we expect and need his peace, in our personal areas of life and up to the peripheries of the environments we know. When he offers his peace to the disciples, Jesus adds: *Just as the Father sent me, I too send you*¹³. We can therefore pronounce words of peace, and constantly act with, and in His peace.

And there are many ways we can proceed. Here are just a few examples, as I am sure you could easily find many more.

To whoever says that God is **silent**... by the strength of Christ in the Eucharist I will lend my voice to say words of love to children and victims of abuse, to elderly people in hospices, to the lonely prisoners that I will visit, to all those who have been injured by abusive and unjust words that I will share words of consolation.

To whoever says that God is **blind**... with the grace of Christ in the Eucharist I will lend my eyes to highlight the wonders of his creation in the world, so that we may all admire his goodness in mutual aid, in acts of generosity that people have one for another.

To whoever will say that God is **deaf**... with the wisdom of Christ in the Eucharist I will lend my ears so that all those I meet hear the voice of his tenderness and the promise of the peace and happiness that he offers, here on earth and for eternal life.

To whoever proclaims the **death** of God... with the conviction given by Christ in the Eucharist I will attest in all I do his real living presence with those who suffer and the poor to whom he is so close.

To whoever says that **believing in God is out-dated**... by the power of Christ in the Eucharist I will lend my faith, as enlightened as possible, to witness how much he gives meaning to my life.

¹³ John 17:18

To whoever will say that God is **cruel**... I will multiply the gestures of tenderness, of listening and compassion to reveal that beyond all appearances, in Christ the Eucharist *"it is when I am weak that I am strong"*¹⁴.

To whoever will say that God **does not keep his promises**... I will remain faithful in all my commitments, both personal and social, to attest that peace and reconciliation in my life are achievable in the imitation of the words of Peace of Christ in the Eucharist.

To those who say that God is **absent**... by the warmth of Christ in the Eucharist I will open the doors of my heart and if possible, my home to refugees fleeing the horrors and the violence of war and the evils of natural disasters. I will cease being prejudiced against racial, social, sexual and even political differences that poison my life towards all the diversities that the Creator has sown in his world.

The global pandemic has for months deprived countless people and communities of Eucharistic Bread and the fraternity of gatherings in places of worship. This Eucharistic fasting was felt most harshly by the ones who had never before experienced such a situation and couldn't forecast its length. Sorrowful spirits could have evoked Moses' admonitions to his wandering people: *"He therefore let you be afflicted with hunger, and then fed you with manna, [...] so you might know that it is not by bread alone that people live, but by all that comes forth from the mouth of the Lord"*¹⁵. But this wasn't the case in all countries, particularly in my archdiocese of Québec, where I can witness of what the pandemic is helping us understand the overwhelming power and the infallible presence of the Holy Spirit.

Yes, my brothers and sisters, the Word of God resounds with reassuring force in this time of trials. The Spirit of the risen Christ dwells and acts unceasingly with us, through us and in us. He nourishes us with his grace as he guides our steps, suggests new ways of gathering his people into the Church. He supports us when we recognize his presence in the poor, the needy and the isolated, in which he dwells. In our Archdiocese of Quebec, during the pandemic, two hundred new small groups of six to ten persons were organized where people gather to share weekly the Gospel. Often

¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 12:10

¹⁵ Deuteronomy 8:3

times on Zoom, Teams or Facetime because of the restrictions and now we are beginning to slowly meet in our homes.

The Holy Spirit enlightens us when he gives rise to treasures of resourcefulness through the use of various media to convey his Word, so that it may find a home in the life of the world and so that it nourishes the contemplation, the prayer and the praise of the community of believers.

When Christians gather, by any means whatsoever, to proclaim the Word of God and to share the Bread of Life that feeds them, they never shut the door to the world they are called to evangelize and serve. On the contrary, coming to Christ in the Eucharist opens our lives and our communities to a greater commitment to an active participation in the building of a better world. We acknowledge with pride and gratitude the faithfulness of Christ to accomplish the miracle of his active presence with the words of St. Paul: *"I can therefore glorify myself in Christ Jesus with regard to the work of God¹⁶."*

To give us strength and courage on the path of our life, the Lord has left us the sacrament of his Eucharist. Whenever we celebrate our unity in the consecration of bread and wine in memory of Him, we proclaim his death and resurrection until he comes again. Nourished with this divine food and driven by the breath of the Spirit, we are sent towards all our brothers and sisters, in all the regions where they are to be found. In the deserts of their indifference or their despair; in the oasis of their happiness, their beauty and good deeds; in overcrowded cities or in peaceful villages; wherever lays the heart of a human person in whom Jesus dwells, it is our turn, each and every one of us, to feed those who are hungry for any food that relieves the body and comforts the soul.

The Eucharist is not simply reconciliation between God and humanity, but also extends on a horizontal plane as it effects reconciliation between persons with one another. Gathered around the Eucharistic table, the rich and the poor, the young and the elders, the healthy and the sick, the mighty and the weak ones among us, all are nourished and transformed by Christ's Body and Blood. In the act of gathering around the Eucharistic table, reconciliation takes place.

¹⁶ Romans 15:17

For when we pray to our Father to forgive us our mistakes as we forgive those who have offended us, we proclaim our will to follow Christ on the road towards reconciliation. The sharing of the Bread of Life engages sharing the very mission of Christ since "*If someone wants to be the first, he will be the last and the servant of all*¹⁷". The peace of Christ and his commandment to reconcile with one another are like twin sisters who participate in the same thought of the Lord. The Eucharist is not fully fulfilled without reconciliation that ensures the active presence of the peace of the Lord.

It is good to note that John is the only one among the four evangelists not to mention the account of the institution of the Eucharist. Instead, he describes how during this last meal with his disciples the Lord performed an unusual gesture: he rose from the table, put on an apron, and like a servant, began to wash the feet of his disciples. Despite their protests, especially Peter's surprising attitude, Jesus insists and explains the meaning of this gesture. Communion with his Body and Blood accomplished in the sharing of the Last Supper implies a total identification with his person and his mission. "*I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do*¹⁸."

Therefore, Christ is the master and the indisputable model of service, of the total gift of oneself, of charity and mercy towards all. Pope Francis reminds us that "*the works of love toward neighbor are the most perfect outward manifestation of the inner grace of the Spirit*¹⁹."

It is in the face of these values of peace and reconciliation that we can measure the path that we are called to develop so that our participation in the Eucharist may be the peak, the true summit where we encounter Christ in accordance with his will to be in a peaceful and reconciled relationship with others. With our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ and by the grace of the Spirit, we are invited to make sure that the peace of God flourishes abundantly in our lives as in our world.

As a closing statement, I can find no better words to illustrate our reflection on how the Eucharist is an inexhaustible source of peace and reconciliation than those of

¹⁷ Mark 9:35

¹⁸ John 13:15

¹⁹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, N° 37.

the late Father Pedro Arrupe, who was Superior general of the Society of Jesus and a great champion for peace and justice initiatives: *“In the Eucharist... we receive not only Christ, the Head of the Body, but [the Body’s] members as well... Wherever there is suffering in the Body, wherever members of it are in want or oppressed, we, because we have received the same Body and are part of it, must be directly involved. We cannot properly receive the Bread of Life without sharing bread for life with those in want²⁰.”*

To give us strength and courage on the roads of our lives, the Lord has given us the great gift of his Eucharist. Whenever we celebrate our unity in the consecration of the Bread and the Wine in memory of Him, we proclaim his death and resurrection until he comes again. We can then sing hymns, such as the one that was created by a priest of my diocese, Father Robert Lebel, for the International Eucharistic Congress that was held in Québec City, in June 2008. I invite you to share these words of comfort and joy as they relate to the beauty and greatness of the Eucharist. They also resonate as a challenge as we are sent to spread God’s gift of peace and reconciliation throughout the world! And as Pope Francis asks us to do: *“Go out, go out and offer to all the life of Jesus Christ... Give them yourselves to eat²¹”*.²²

O God source of Life, we thank you for the gift ;

this bread and wine for the life of the world.

United in praise, we come to the feast

to take in our hands God’s gift for life.

*For this we praise you, Lord. For this we praise you Lord.*²³

May you all go in the Peace of Christ the Eucharist! You can continue to count on Him, He is an inexhaustible source of peace and reconciliation.

²⁰ Pedro Arrupe, 1980, in John A Monaco, op cit.

²¹ Mark 6:37

²² Evangelii Gaudium, N° 49

²³ *Don de Dieu*, Theme song of the 49th International Eucharistic Congress in Québec, Robert Lebel/Mario Jacques, Quebec 2008