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| **Reflection on *Sacramentum Caritatis*** |
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| ***Allow the Eucharist to enter life and change it***The title of the Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* already points to the mystery that constitutes the heart of the Sacrament of the Eucharist: charity.Let us remember first of all that we recognize charity — *agape* — as the root of this Sacrament. Indeed, it is the memorial of the death and Resurrection of Christ. It is the constant implementation of the mystery in which God in his love not only wished to become like us but also to give himself to us in a form that would extend his loving presence in every epoch, until it reached us today and every corner of the earth."The Eucharist reveals the loving plan that guides all of salvation history (cf. Eph 1:10; 3:8-11). There the *Deus Trinitas*, who is essentially love (cf. I Jn 4:7-8), becomes fully a part of our human condition. In the bread and wine, under whose appearances Christ gives himself to us in the Paschal Meal (cf. Lk 22:14-20; I Cor 11:23-26), the entire divine 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 (cf. Gn 2:7). But it is in Christ, dead and risen, and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, given without measure (cf. Jn 3:34), that we have become sharers of God's inmost life" (n. 8).It is therefore in the Trinitarian life that we must seek the origins of the Eucharist, the sacrament of charity, hence, of all charity. We have a true reflection of it in the gift which Christ made of himself for the world's salvation.The charity which the Church spreads throughout the world is not rooted in human good will, neither is it a form of heroism or merely the result of commitment.It cannot be understood outside of divine revelation.In Christ on the Cross, the abyss of divine charity which reveals and teaches us the true meaning of love is opened to us.In the celebration of this Sacrament, the believer is enabled to give himself to his neighbour so that the moral life of the faithful is extended. Much depends on our readiness to be open to signs.It is necessary first of all to learn to exercise in the celebration the whole of our humanity, including the senses which God has given us, hearing and sight.**Real encounter with God's Love**The Eucharist is not a rite to be celebrated but rather a place where God truly manifests himself in signs which our sensibility, together with our intelligence and our will, is called to accept.Indeed, even "physical" communion is brought about in it, the real meeting with his love that is given.Precisely in this regard I remember the prayer that the priest would say after Communion in its original form: "*Quod ore sumpsimus, mente capiamus*": the mystery celebrated becomes part of life and changes it.And this communion is extended in turn to all the brothers and sisters, to the Body of the Church. This is what the Holy Father wrote in his *Encyclical Deus Caritas Est*:"In sacramental Communion I become one with the Lord, like all the other communicants. As St. Paul says, 'Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread' (I Cor 10:17). Union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself" (n. 14).It is from this intense participation in Christ that brotherly love flows.Once again, in the words of the Encyclical: "Communion draws me out of myself towards him, and thus also towards unity with all Christians. We become 'one body', completely joined in a single existence. Love of God and love of neighbour are now truly united: God incarnate draws us all to himself."We can thus understand how *agape* also became a term for the Eucharist: there God's own *agape* comes to us bodily in order to continue his work in us and through us. Only by keeping in mind this Christological and sacramental basis can we correctly understand Jesus' teaching on love."The transition which he makes from the Law and the Prophets to the twofold commandment of love of God and of neighbour, and his grounding the whole life of faith. on this central precept, is not simply a matter of morality — something that could exist apart from and alongside faith in Christ and its sacramental re-actualization."Faith, worship and *ethos* are interwoven as a single reality which takes shape in our encounter with God's *agape*. Here the usual contraposition between worship and ethics simply falls apart."'Worship' itself, Eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented."Conversely, as we shall have to consider in greater detail below, the 'commandment' of love is only possible because it is more than a requirement. Love can be 'commanded' because it has first been given" (*ibid*.).**True charity rooted in *agape***It is impossible to ' understand or to establish the charitable activity of the Church's members outside personal participation in God's *agape*.All this can then be summed up in the recognition that charity is the experience of love received from God, which qualifies Christians for a life of love.In other words, the Eucharist generates in an individual member of the faithful the power to give life in the measure of Christ whom we receive in the Sacrament. In this way every faithful person, nourished by Christ's charity, like the Son of God becomes a gift for others. And it is precisely this existential implication which in turn witnesses to the authenticity of the life of faith and its liturgical celebration.However, it is in turn its condition, since the Sacrament is effective to the extent that the human heart is willing to allow the mystery to be brought about within it.This personal dynamic was unfolded in the course of the Church's history and produced an untold number of works that are an expression of divine charity.Motivated by this same dynamic, a vast number of lay people, missionaries, priests and founders of orders and congregations expressed in practical initiatives the love of God, his closeness to men and women, his mystery of communion which calls all people to unity.This is the mission of the Church which she has exercised for the poor and for the lowliest, perhaps as no other, impressing the indelible mark of charity upon human civilization.The Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramenturn Caritatis* takes up these points: "'The bread I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world' (Jn 6:51). In these words the Lord reveals the true meaning of the gift of his life for all people. These words also reveal his deep compassion for every man and woman. The Gospels frequently speak of Jesus' feelings towards others, especially the suffering and sinners (cf. Mt 20:34; Mk 6:34; Lk 19:41)."Through a profoundly human sensibility he expresses God's saving will for all people — that each may have true life. Each celebration of the Eucharist makes sacramentally present the gift that Jesus made of his life on the Cross, for us and for the whole world".At the same time, "in the Eucharist Jesus also makes us witnesses of God's compassion towards all our brothers and sisters. The Eucharistic mystery thus gives rise to a service of charity towards neighbour" (cf. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, n. 88).The reality of the sacrament induces the .real gift. Without the Eucharist, there is no ecclesial*communio* and without the Eucharist there is likewise no ecclesial charity.*Sacramentum Caritatis* presents to the faithful a journey of the rediscovery of the roots of our commitment to human beings.We are grateful to the Holy Father who has thus desired to point out further to all those who work with great merit in the sector of charity that the Eucharist is a continuous source of vitality for our work on behalf of humankind. |
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