Eucharistic Congress Homily – Pentecost Sunday

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June 8, 2025

Last year, four National Eucharistic Pilgrimages journeyed from "Sea to Shining Sea" before converging in Indianapolis in mid-July, where some 50,000 members of the faithful gathered to celebrate a memorable National Eucharistic Congress.

In recent days, two Diocesan Eucharistic Pilgrimages processed across Long Island. Traveling from the west and the east through Nassau and Suffolk Counties, they witnessed to the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, before converging here at St. Anthony's High School, where we have gathered to celebrate our Diocesan Eucharistic Congress in this Jubilee Year of Hope.

After a day of Eucharistic Adoration and catechesis, Reconciliation and fellowship, we have now entered into Mass, the culmination of our Congress, to worship Almighty God and encounter anew the gift of the Lord's Body and Blood.

It is good that we are here!

We gather on the Solemnity of Pentecost. This powerful feast of the Holy Spirit brings us back to the Upper Room, the Cenacle, where the Apostles waited with the Blessed Virgin Mary in expectation of the promised Paraclete.

It is the very room where the Lord Jesus, on the night before he died, said, "Do this in memory of me." The Upper Room is where the Eucharist was given to the Church, and today, on Pentecost, it is where the Spirit descends, vivifies, and sends her forth.

The Upper Room connects the Eucharist and Pentecost, but of course, these mysteries are linked by more than the place where they occurred. They are inexhaustibly interwoven. In fact, Pope Benedict XVI called the Eucharist "a 'perpetual Pentecost' since every time we celebrate Mass we receive the Holy Spirit." (*Message for World Youth Day* 2008)

Indeed, at every Mass, the Holy Spirit descends at the "Epiclesis" in the Eucharistic Prayer. At that moment, the Spirit is poured forth upon the gifts of bread and wine,

which will become the Body and Blood of Christ. How powerful to ponder the "perpetual Pentecost" each Mass is and remember, once more, that the Spirit is alive and present in the Church.

We live in an era of "epochal change" - the emerging dominance of Artificial Intelligence shows that well. It's a time at once exciting and yet unnerving, especially as God's vision for life and love are often so quickly forgotten before the glitter of possibility.

On this Pentecost Sunday, we remember the Holy Spirit's presence. Sent by the Father and the Son, he is here: our Advocate, our Helper, our Comforter.

The tongues of flame and the driving wind of the Holy Spirit are still at work (Acts 2:1-11). They enkindle "different kinds of spiritual gifts and forms of service" (1 Cor. 12:4-6) and open locked doors with the power, presence, and peace of the Risen Christ (John 20:19-23). They open new 21st Century horizons of worldwide Catholic evangelization.

As you know, Pentecost concludes the Easter season. With the passing of Pope Francis on Easter Monday and his subsequent Funeral, followed so closely by the Conclave, the Election of Pope Leo XIV, and the beginning of his ministry, this Easter was an extraordinary moment in the life of the Church.

Throughout the fifty days, we have been focused on Rome and captivated by the sacred Office given to Saint Peter. By grace, we have been overwhelmed by the beauty of our Catholic Faith and the goodness of God in providing his Church with a new shepherd.

From that place of filial affection, which has been deepened in these weeks, let me turn to our recent Holy Fathers - Pope Saint John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis – for words of encouragement for our ongoing Eucharistic Revival.

In his encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Pope Saint John Paul II urged us to "rekindle our Eucharistic amazement" (6).

Today we look at our personal histories with the Eucharist to see when we have experienced a Eucharistic amazement that deepened our love for the Blessed Sacrament and changed our lives.

I remember serving as a deacon in 1989 at the first Mass of a newly ordained priest in the Crypt of the National Shrine in Washington DC. The new priest's father at the time was the U.S. Secretary of Energy. John Cardinal O'Connor was the homilist and began by addressing the Secretary of Energy, who was a longtime friend from their days in the Navy. He said: "Mr. Secretary of Energy, if you could harness the spiritual energy that your newly ordained Roman Catholic priest son harnesses in a single Mass, you would have enough energy to light the world for eternity." Those words never fail to rekindle my Eucharistic amazement and gratitude for the grace of being called to serve as a Roman Catholic priest and bishop.

What are some experiences of Eucharistic amazement in your life?

Certainly, this Eucharistic Congress is a new moment of Eucharistic amazement for each of us, and one we will not soon forget!

As the Congress draws to a close, let's take to heart these words of Pope Saint John Paul II and rekindle every day our Eucharistic amazement: astonishment at the fact the Lord Jesus gives us his Body and Blood so we can gaze upon him, consume him, and become ever more like him.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his document on the Eucharist, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, taught us that every great reform and purification of the Church in history is ignited by a rediscovery of belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist (6).

In a fallen world, the Catholic Church, the universal sacrament of salvation, is constantly in a state of reform and purification.

Pope Benedict simply reminds us that great periods of Church reform and effective evangelization are sparked and sustained by the Lord Jesus - not by our clever thoughts or grand plans but by Christ, whom we meet at Mass and in Eucharistic Adoration.

Pope Benedict too reminds us that to be passionately biblical is to be passionately eucharistic; to be passionately eucharistic is to be passionately biblical.

Our encounter with Jesus Christ in the reverent celebration of the liturgy and in quiet prayer before the Blessed Sacrament are the source of all renewal and evangelization efforts.

Isn't this the whole logic of our ongoing National and Diocesan Eucharistic Revivals?

They have led us to Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament to rediscover his Real Presence once more, so that enlivened by him we can go forth as humble missionary disciples.

Jesus Christ is really and truly present to us every day! After this Congress, let us recommit to be present to him - sacrifice to be with him - at Mass and in Adoration.

Pope St. John Paul II spoke of rekindling and Pope Benedict of rediscovery. Pope Francis pointed us to the power of reverence for the Lord's Body and Blood.

In *Amoris Laetitia*, he showed us that reverence for the Holy Eucharist deepens and refines our reverence for marriage and the family, and for the sanctity of human life itself (21).

Moving through the Gospels in that document, Pope Francis highlighted how Jesus was present to families in all circumstances. From his miracle at the Wedding Feast of Cana turning water into wine, to his parable about family alienation and parental heartbreak in the Prodigal Son, to his weeping with Martha and Mary at the death of his friend Lazarus, Pope Francis showed that Jesus entered family life and brought peace.

In the Eucharist, we remember Jesus is present to our families at every moment and in every season. Indeed, he is the Eucharistic *Alpha and Omega* of every marriage and family.

Pope Francis understood the challenges facing marriage and family life today, and so he stressed the importance of the Eucharist, especially the Sunday Mass, for anchoring a family, the fundamental cell of society and the Church.

He reminded us that "Jesus knocks on the door of families, to share with them the Eucharistic supper (cf. Rev 3:20)" because "the food of the Eucharist offers…the strength and incentive needed to live…each day as a 'domestic church.'" (*Amoris Laetitia* 318)

With Pope Francis, we pray today for all families that they may recognize the great gift that is before them in the Eucharist, reverence that gift, and respond generously to the Lord's invitation, most especially when the busyness of life pulls at them.

Our gaze towards Rome in recent weeks was probably no more intense than on May 8th, as word spread of *white smoke*. How blessed we have been since then to know Pope Leo XIV and hear his first words to the Church and the world.

What does he say to us today?

At the Mass for the Beginning of his Pontificate in St. Peter's Square only three weeks ago, he said: "Brothers and sisters, I would like that our first great desire be for *a united Church, a sign of unity and communion, which becomes a leaven for a reconciled world…*a missionary Church that opens its arms to the world."

At this Mass, let us immerse ourselves in that "great desire" of Pope Leo and remember every day that our unity and power to witness comes through the Eucharist.

With this Mass, we conclude our 2025 Eucharistic Congress but, of course, our 21st Century Eucharistic mission on Long Island and throughout the Universal Church has just begun.

Together, let's keep casting the nets of Eucharistic charity and compassion grounded in the liberating truths of our Catholic Faith and in our call to build "the Art and Architecture of peace" in the world!

God bless you all!