



ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

# Year of the Eucharist 2017-2018

Commemorating The Diocese of Rochester's Sesquicentennial Celebration



## A PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE MOST REVEREND SALVATORE R. MATANO, BISHOP OF ROCHESTER

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

We are quickly advancing toward the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our Diocese on March 3, 2018, with solemn observances to begin in the Fall of this year, 2017. It is my prayer and firm conviction that we make the Most Holy Eucharist, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the heart and center of our Sesquicentennial Celebration. Indeed, this august Sacrament, the Real Presence of Christ among us, has sustained us over these many years and has been the driving force for our Diocese's pastoral, apostolic and charitable works, ever mindful of the motto of Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid, our first Bishop: "*Salus Animarum, Lex Suprema*" ("*The Salvation of Souls is the Supreme Law*").

Therefore, with gratitude to God and in conjunction with our 150th anniversary, I am declaring the observance of a *Year of the Eucharist* to commence on Sunday, June 18, 2017, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, Corpus Christi, and to conclude on Sunday, June 3, 2018, on this same Solemnity.

Among the principal duties of the Dioc-

esan Bishop, there is the mandate to sanctify and to teach the faithful. In the instruction from the *Rite of an Ordination of a Bishop*, the newly chosen bishop is reminded: "In the Church entrusted to you, be a faithful steward, moderator, and guardian of the mysteries of Christ." This is truly an awesome responsibility, but one greatly aided by the Church's Magisterium, the guidance of the successors to Saint Peter and, above all, the wisdom and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Fulfilling this episcopal duty, and mindful of our Sesquicentennial, I wish to share with you some reflections upon the greatest treasure we have, the gift of the Most Holy Eucharist and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. I pray that my words may be an occasion for a renewed love of Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament and that those not regularly participating in the life of the Church will return home to the Father's House. Let us all take to heart and believe these beautiful



words offered to God in solemn prayer:

"For at the Last Supper with His Apostles, establishing for the ages to come the saving memorial of the Cross, [Jesus] offered Himself to you as the unblemished Lamb, the acceptable gift of perfect praise. Nourishing your faithful by this sacred mystery, you make them holy so that the human race, bounded by one world, may be enlightened by one faith and united by one bond of charity." (Preface II of the Most Holy Eucharist).

In our Catholic faith, the Most Holy Eucharist is our greatest blessing from Jesus Himself. This Sacrament is "the source and summit of the Christian life." (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 11). "The other Sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ Himself." (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 5)." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1324).



CNS photo by Paul Haring

Pope Francis raises the chalice of the Precious Blood at the Cathedral Basilica of SS. Peter and Paul in Philadelphia.

## RENEWAL THROUGH THE LITURGY

With this profound reality before our minds, we readily can understand the concern and desire of Saint John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and now Pope Francis, each in communion with his predecessors, that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass be celebrated with the greatest reverence reflecting our understanding of this sublime encounter with our Savior, Jesus Christ. The month after his election, Benedict XVI delivered a homily to conclude the 24<sup>th</sup> Italian National Eucharistic Congress on the Congress' theme, "*Without Sunday, We Cannot Live*," saying: "The Sunday precept is not, therefore, an externally imposed duty, a burden on our shoulders. On the contrary, taking part in the Mass, being nourished by the Eucharist and experiencing the communion of our brothers and sisters in Christ is a need for Christians, it is a joy; Christians can replenish the energy they need to continue on the journey we must make each week." (Pope Benedict XVI, *Homily*, May 29, 2005).

With the same deep Eucharistic faith, Pope Francis instructs us: "The Eucharist is Jesus Himself who gives Himself entirely to us. *Nourishing ourselves* of Him and *abiding* in Him through Eucharistic Communion, if we do so with faith, *transforms our life*, transforms it into a gift to God and to our brothers and sisters. Nourishing ourselves of that Bread of Life means entering into harmony with the heart of Christ, assimilating His choices, His thoughts, His behaviors. It means entering into a dynamism of love and becoming people of peace, people of forgiveness, of reconciliation, of sharing in solidarity. The very things that Jesus did." (Pope Francis, *Angelus Message*, August 16, 2015).

When we approach the Eucharistic celebration, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we enter into an encounter with the Lord, like no other, and it demands our very best in prayer and in participation. Among our people there is a deep appreciation for, and desire to renew a sense of the transcendent and awesome

nature of the Most Holy Eucharist. The liturgical prayers of the Mass proclaim the doctrine, the truths of the creed which are the very foundation of our Catholic faith. We do not create the Mass or own the Sacraments; the Eucharist, the Sacraments, are Jesus' gift to His Church. Jesus is the One Who instituted the Eucharist and now in time has shared this gift of Himself with us. Saint John Chrysostom confirms this teaching: "It is not man that causes the things offered to become the Body and Blood of Christ, but He who was crucified for us, Christ Himself. The priest, in the role of Christ, pronounces these words, but their power and grace are God's. This is my body, he says. This word transforms the things offered." (Saint John Chrysostom, *prod. Jud. 1:6*, as presented in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1375).

Swiss theologian and Catholic priest Hans Urs von Balthasar in a 1978 article in *Communio*, emphasizes this very same premise of liturgical celebration when he writes: "No liturgy designed by men could be 'worthy' of the subject of their homage, of God at whose throne the heavenly choirs prostrate themselves with covered faces, having cast off their crowns and ornaments before offering adoration. The attempt to return to Him who 'created all according to His will' the honour that all creatures received must *a priori* compel to its knees an earthly community of sinners. *Domine, non sum dignus!* ('Lord, I am not worthy!')." (Robert Cardinal Sarah, *The Power of Silence*, p. 122).

Thus, we draw near to the Eucharist with the utmost reverence to render worship, adoration, thanksgiving and prayers of supplication to the One who alone is Lord! "The mode of Christ's presence under the Eucharistic species is unique. It raises the Eucharist above the Sacraments as 'the perfection of the spiritual life and the end to which all the Sacraments tend.'" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1374). In view of this transcendent truth, we come to understand that it is an extraordinary privilege for us to participate in the Eucharistic sacrifice, the resplendent manifestation and heart of our redemption in Christ.

When we come to the celebration of Holy Mass or any of the Sacraments with a true spirit of humility and gratitude, it essentially forms our attitude toward the sacramental nature of the Church and, in particular, our reception of the Lord in Holy Communion. Realizing that in the Sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, Jesus becomes one with us, we then approach Him not first asking what is in it for me, but how can I possibly thank the omnipotent God Who has chosen to make His home within me! The Sacraments, the Most Holy Eucharist, belong to God who graciously invites us to participate in His life through these personal meetings with Him. It is truly proper then that the prayers of the Mass authentically, prayerfully and solemnly reflect the divine reality which they signify.

Knowing the great love you have for the Mass, a love which I have experienced in my many pastoral visits throughout our Diocese, I know of and appreciate your cooperation with your parish priests and pastoral administrators in this endeavor of faith, which is Christ's salvific work being actualized through His Church. (Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1187). This Eucharistic devotion is essential as we constantly seek to nurture, to understand more deeply and to reverence the Real Presence of Christ truly and substantially existing under the appearances of bread and wine.



## 150 YEARS SUSTAINED BY OUR GREATEST TREASURE

Our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration provides the ideal opportunity to renew our participation in and fidelity to the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice as a community and as individual participants. Both the 2011 revised *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* and the previous *Instruction, Redemptionis Sacramentum* (“*The Sacrament of Redemption*”), issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments on March 25, 2004, echo the Second Vatican Council’s *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 10), and repeat the constant teaching of the Catholic Church, namely that:

“The Most Holy Eucharist is the most august Sacrament, in which Christ the Lord Himself is contained, offered and received, and by which the Church constantly lives and grows. The Eucharistic Sacrifice, the memorial of the death and resurrection of the Lord, in which the sacrifice of the cross is perpetuated over the centuries, is the summit and source of all Christian worship and life; it signifies and effects the unity of the people of God and achieves the building up of the Body of Christ.” (*Code of Canon Law*, canon 897).

When Saint John Paul II declared *The Year of the Most Holy Eucharist* for the Universal Church with his Apostolic Letter, *Mane Nobiscum Domine* (“*Stay with us, Lord*”), of October 7, 2004, he did so realizing that it was very necessary to recapture the transcendent and sublime nature of the Most Holy Eucharist and to reemphasize the sacrificial and sacramental bond between Christ and His Church. (Cf. Ephesians 5:25-27). The essential union needed between the Bridegroom and the Bride is well stated by Cardinal Robert Sarah, Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments: “The Church is the people of God that becomes the Body of Christ. She is born from the opened side of Christ, for our salvation. Christ is the Alpha and the Omega of the Church.



*Christ and the Eucharist, Artist Unknown*

Without God, the Church is nothing but a storm-tossed boat. History shows that the crisis of the Church can never be separated from a crisis of God. Without God, she is eclipsed, like a body separated from the light that illuminates it. Today, there is a serious problem because we are no longer aware of the supernatural bond that exists between Christ and his Church.” (Robert Cardinal Sarah, *God or Nothing*, p. 107).

The sad and continuing decline of those faithfully attending Mass each week gives evidence that a significant number of Catholics do not understand or have not been taught the reality of the union of Christ and the Church and of Christ’s Real Presence at every celebration of the Eucharist. We continue to struggle to address this very disturbing reality. In fact, recent polls, while perhaps questionable, are no less disconcerting when they indicate the high percentage of Catholics who do not grasp the theology of the Real Presence or simply do not believe that Christ is truly present when bread and wine become His very body, blood, soul and divinity at the

consecration of the Mass. Yet the Church has taught clearly and consistently that: “In the *institution narrative*, the power of the words and the action of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit, make sacramentally present under the species of bread and wine Christ’s body and blood, his sacrifice offered on the cross once for all.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1353). “The holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called this transubstantiation.” (Council of Trent, Session XIII, *Decretum de ss. Eucharistia*, Chapter 4, DS 1642; Cf. also Saint John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 39).

In the practice of religion today, it appears the horizontal dimension of human relationships has been so emphasized that it has often overshadowed the vertical dimension in our relationship with God. “We live now in an era that is intensely seeking what is sacred; but because of a sort of dictatorship of subjectivism, man would like to confine the sacred to the realm of the profane.” (Robert Cardinal Sarah, *God or Nothing*, p. 125). Any renewal that comes to us through the liturgy must begin with an understanding of the divine and supernatural nature of the Most Holy Eucharist. When we come together for Holy Mass, we do not gather simply to form a community, but rather, as a community, to profess our faith in Jesus Christ and as the Church instructs us to “offer the sacrifice of praise in thanksgiving to the Father for all that God has made good, beautiful, and just in creation and in humanity.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1359).





*Jesus and the Centurion* by Paolo Veronese

Simple acts of reverence such as genuflecting to the Eucharistic Lord in the tabernacle and kneeling as liturgically prescribed by the Church (while pastorally appreciating health concerns which do not always make this possible) have been overlooked or ignored at times, perhaps reflecting a certain unconscious hesitation to assume a posture of humility before God and mistakenly believing that humanity has become God's equal.

If the Apostle Paul tells us "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth," (Philippians 2: 10), how much more so must we bend the knee in His very presence in the Most Blessed Sacrament. In the earliest biblical times, kneeling was a profound act of worship (Cf. Daniel 6:10; 1Kings 8:54; Ezra 9:5; 2Chronicles 6:13), flowing from the person's attentiveness and humility before the Lord. This practice is even more evident throughout the New Testament: the rich young man approached Jesus and knelt, seeking Eternal Life (Mark 10:17); Saint Stephen prayed on his knees for his persecutors to be forgiven (Acts 7:60); Saint Peter knelt and prayed when he acknowledged his sinfulness (Luke 5:8), and when he prayed at Tabitha's deathbed (Acts 9:40); Saint Paul knelt and prayed with the Church in Ephesus (Acts 20:36) and the entire Pauline community in Tyre knelt together in prayer (Acts 21:5). Yet, more poignant than all these examples is Jesus Christ, who prayed on bended knee to His Father, His body united to his mind and soul, seeking to know and fulfill the Father's will. (Luke 22:41).

As a prescribed act of reverence during and continuing after this *Year of the Eucharist*, I am asking that, *where possible* (according to existing accommodations for sitting and kneeling), we renew and observe the prescription stated in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, which reads: "In the Dioceses of the United States of America [the faithful] should kneel after the singing or recitation of the *Sanctus* ("*Holy, Holy, Holy*") until

after the *Amen* of the Eucharistic Prayer..." and that "The faithful kneel after the *Agnus Dei* ("*Lamb of God*")..." (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 43). This normative practice of kneeling truly is a humble manifestation of our reverence before the One whom we are soon to receive. This solemn time of prayer prepares us interiorly to receive the Christ of the Eucharist as Saint John the Baptist's proclamation, "Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who takes away the sins of the world..." (John 1:29), unites with the Centurion's ardent profession of faith, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed." (Matthew 8:8).

## AGE MEETS AGE

In celebrating the Most Holy Eucharist, we unite ourselves to those who have gone before us reaching back to apostolic times. "If from the beginning Christians have celebrated the Eucharist and in a form whose substance has not changed despite the great diversity of times and liturgies, it is because we know ourselves to be bound by the command the Lord gave on the eve of His passion: 'Do this in remembrance of me.'" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1356). The Eucharist indeed belongs to Christ who graciously shares His presence with us through His bride, the Church. The Eucharist is not a mere cultural phenomenon restricted by certain geographies, historical periods or philosophies, but rather it transcends all space, time and all political and social ideologies; it finds its origin in Christ. "Christians have the ardent obligation to be open to an act that is so mysterious that they will never be able to perform it by themselves: the sacrifice of Christ. In the thought of the Council Fathers (at Vatican II), the Liturgy is a divine action, an *actio Christi*. In the presence of it, we are overcome with the silence of admiration and reverence." (Robert Cardinal Sarah, *The Power of Silence*, p. 131).

As early as the second century we have the witness of Saint Justin Martyr who outlines the order of the Eucharistic celebration. Recorded in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Saint Justin Martyr explains to the pagan emperor Antoninus Pius around the year 155 A.D. what Christians did “on the day we call the day of the sun.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1345). Here one finds outlined the essential elements of the Mass that we still celebrate in our own time.

In this regard, the Second Vatican Council’s *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (no. 21) clearly notes that the Church herself has no power over those things which were established by Christ Himself and which constitute an essential and unchangeable part of the Liturgy. In more recent times this point is underlined in *Redemptionis Sacramentum*:

“The observance of the norms published by the authority of the Church requires conformity of thought and of word, of external action and application of the heart. A merely external observation of norms would obviously be contrary to the nature of the Sacred Liturgy, in which Christ Himself wishes to gather His Church, so that together with Himself she will be ‘one body and one spirit’ (1 Corinthians 12: 12-13; Ephesians 4:4). For this reason, external action must be illuminated by faith and charity, which unite us with Christ and with one another and engender love for the poor and the abandoned. The liturgical words and rites, moreover, are a faithful expression, matured over the centuries, of the understanding of Christ, and they teach us to think as He Himself does (cf. Philippians 2:5); by conforming our minds to these words, we raise our hearts to the Lord.” (*Redemptionis Sacramentum*, no. 5). Additionally, “For the Sacred Liturgy is quite intimately connected with the principles of doctrine (Pope Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*, no. 20), so that the use of unapproved texts and Rites necessarily leads either to the attenuation or the disappearance of that necessary link between the *lex orandi* and the *lex credendi*.” (“the law of prayer is the law of faith: the Church believes as she prays”). (*Redemptionis Sacramentum*, no. 10; Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1124).

In this regard, the Church reminds us that: “It is the right of all Christ’s faithful that the Liturgy, and in particular the celebration of Holy Mass, should truly be as the Church wishes, according to her stipulations as prescribed in the liturgical books and in other laws and norms...it is the community’s right that the celebration of the Most Holy Eucharist should be carried out in such a manner that it truly stands out as a Sacrament of unity, to the exclusion of all blemishes and actions that might engender divisions and factions in the Church.” (*Redemptionis Sacramentum*, no. 12).

These themes present a very thoughtful and serious exhortation to all who have the privilege of preparing for liturgical celebrations. In parishes, in cooperation with and under the guidance and direction of the pastor, parochial vicar, and parish administrators, liturgical committees are primarily centers for catechesis and evangelization in which the members work to assure that the sacramental celebrations, culminating in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, are celebrated with solemnity, devotion, reverence and a true spirit of unity, which unites the local Church to the Church Universal and teaches the faith of the Church. “Every celebration of the Eucharist is performed in union not only with the proper Bishop, but also with the Pope, with the episcopal order, with all



*The Communion of the Apostles by Joos van Wassenhove*

the clergy, and with the entire people. Every valid celebration of the Eucharist expresses this universal communion with Peter and with the whole Church...” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 39).

The quality of sacred music, properly chosen and theologically sound, which appreciates the Church’s rich musical heritage over the centuries, a veritable “treasure of inestimable value” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 112), not restricted by only one period; the décor of the Church which identifies it as a holy place, a consecrated place set apart as the House of God “worthy, becoming and beautiful, signs and symbols of things supernatural” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 122); the tabernacle, clearly visible and prominently located where Christ resides among His people; and the careful preparation of deacons, readers, servers at the altar and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, all these very important elements enhance the richness of the Church’s liturgies and inspire the faithful. Above all, we priests who act *in persona Christi*, in the very person of Christ, have the solemn obligation to celebrate the Sacraments and the Eucharist with the greatest reverence and devotion, calling to mind again and again what an extraordinary privilege and gift we have been given by Christ the Eternal High Priest and how truly unworthy we are of so great a privilege.

Indeed, our life, our hope, our strength are derived from the celebration of the Most Holy Eucharist in union with the whole Church. Acknowledging this most essential reality of faith, we must all work together to foster constantly and everywhere devotion to Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. We are called to be evangelizers in our homes, parishes and communities, gently inviting others to the House of the Lord! Every Catholic parish and institution must find its heart, its *raison d’être*, in the Most Holy Eucharist and, with Saint Thomas, repeat again and again the words of the Apostle, “My Lord and My God!” For “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not have life within you.” (John 6:53).



2017 Catholic Schools Week Mass at Sacred Heart Cathedral.

Catholic Courier file photo by Jeff Witherow

## OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Our belief in the Real Presence of Christ, body, blood, soul and divinity, the very One Whom we receive in Holy Communion is, therefore, what truly identifies us as Catholics, Christians firmly believing in Christ, uniting us with our ancestors in the faith who first celebrated the Eucharist in the very shadow of Christ's earthly ministry. This rich inheritance of faith and Eucharistic identification with Christ places upon us certain demands and responsibilities. What then are these responsibilities entrusted to the Catholic community in its worship of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament?

First and foremost, it means **faithfully attending Holy Mass every weekend**: Jesus personally desires and asks for our presence not just twice, three times a month, or on special occasions, but every weekend; not only when religious education classes are conducted during the academic year, but throughout the entire year. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* clearly instructs us: "The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor. (Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, canon 1245). Those who deliberately fail this obligation commit a grave sin." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2181). Why would we ever ignore the personal invitation of Jesus to become one with Him, to unite our very person with His person in Holy Communion? If we can say "no" to Jesus, how easy it becomes to say "no" to any person or institution and to break or dishonor any commitment.

All that we do as Catholics stems from our attachment to, and is directed back toward, the Eucharist. That one so easily misses Holy Mass reflects a lack of understanding of the Eucharistic sacrifice established by Christ Himself by His death upon the Cross. However, we cannot be critical of those who have not been taught or instructed about the Eucharist, or have not been given the best possible example of fidelity to the Eucharist. This is a moment for all of us to examine our consciences as to how we have or have not fostered devotion to the Eucharist according to our particular vocations in life. As the Diocesan Bishop, daily I must ask how I may have failed to introduce God's children to the Most Holy Eucharist and beg the Lord's forgiveness for any lack in fulfilling this grave responsibility. Our own lives of faith are the best witness of Whom we love and in Whom we trust.

Our churches are not museums or mere testimonies to the past, nor are they multipurpose facilities for a wide spectrum of activities. They are the Houses of the Lord where the Holy Mass is offered, the Sacraments are celebrated and where Christ dwells in the tabernacles. If they are to remain open and vibrant, the love for Christ present in the Eucharist must be manifested by those believers who fill the pews of these churches and with their prayers lifted up to the Lord become a true sign of hope, a sign of the active presence of Christ among His people. The success of any parish depends upon the support of its members and their fidelity and devotion to the Holy Eucharist. We all know that no one is attracted to failure! While noting real demographic changes in our landscape, it still is quite discouraging to see in populated places half-empty churches that once were filled.

These occurrences should upset us all and cause us to renew our parishes through genuine and profound attachment to the Holy Eucharist demonstrated by weekly attendance at Holy Mass. In his Apostolic Letter, *Dies Domini* (“*The Lord’s Day*”), of May 31, 1998, Saint John Paul II teaches:

“Since the Eucharist is the very heart of Sunday, it is clear why, from the earliest centuries, the Pastors of the Church have not ceased to remind the faithful of the need to take part in the liturgical assembly. ‘Leave everything on the Lord’s Day,’ urges the third century text known as the Didascalia, ‘and run diligently to your assembly, because it is your praise of God. Otherwise, what excuse will they make to God, those who do not come together on the Lord’s Day to hear the word of life and feed on the divine nourishment which lasts forever?’” (*Dies Domini*, no. 46).

**The poor must be among us as we seek to assist them, since spiritual nourishment is also essential to their lives.** In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis writes: “Since this Exhortation is addressed to members of the Catholic Church, I want to say, with regret, that the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care. The great majority of the poor have a special openness to the faith; they need God and we must not fail to offer them His friendship, His blessing, His word, the celebration of the Sacraments and a journey of growth and maturity in the faith. Our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 200). Our many and very beneficial outreach ministries to the poor must include accompanying them over the thresholds of our churches. Intimately connected with our charitable outreach, we must remember that “Every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the Priest and of His Body, which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others. No other action of the church can equal the efficacy by the same title or to the same degree.” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 7).

Belief in the Eucharistic presence of Christ also means that **we approach the Holy Eucharist properly disposed**, that is, not conscious of serious sin that requires that we avail ourselves of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Confession, before the reception of Holy Communion. An examination of conscience before the worthy

reception of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist is a serious obligation for all Catholics. (Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1454).

In this regard, I wish to make reference to the November 14, 2006 document of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops entitled: “Happy Are Those Who are Called to His Supper: *On Preparing to Receive Christ Worthily in the Eucharist*.” Here we read: “Manifesting the Father’s mercy, Jesus instituted the Sacrament of Penance to allow us to confess our sins in repentance, receive absolution from the priest, and so receive again the grace of the Holy Spirit, who once more makes us living members of Christ’s body, the Church.” (p. 8). Further on, the instruction states: “Sin undermines and weakens our communion not only with the Blessed Trinity but also with one another. Therefore, in order to overcome the cause of sin, we are called to daily repentance and to regular participation in the Sacrament of Penance.” (p. 13).

Recalling that at the Baptism of their children parents are called to be the first and the best of teachers of their children in the ways of the Catholic faith, this *Year of the Eucharist* is intended to **encourage and to support parents** in fulfilling the special responsibilities entrusted to them. By their good example, parents are the ones who first bring their children to the House of the Lord. In introducing our children to this beautiful encounter with the Lord, we introduce them to the very essence of human life, namely every person’s natural instinct to commune with the Divine. Our children must understand that “we worship Whom we know,” Jesus the Christ, and that we indeed do worship “in Spirit and in truth.” (Cf. John 4:22-23). A child is never too young to be brought to church and never too young to be taught to love Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

During this *Year of the Eucharist*, in support of our parents and all entrusted to our pastoral care, I ask that throughout our deaneries and in our schools, institutions, agencies and pastoral programs, the centrality of the Most Holy Eucharist is reflected in our words and actions, in our catechesis and in our religious education programs. It is my hope that there will be greater availability of educational and devotional opportunities for both children and adults to deepen their knowledge about the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. Both the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and our Diocese’s recently promulgated *Policies for the Administration of the Sacraments* are very useful

catechetical resources. In our catechesis, we need to reflect upon ways to better prepare our children and their families for their child’s First Holy Communion, First Penance and Confirmation, and also couples preparing for Holy Matrimony. In all our efforts to proclaim the living presence of Jesus Christ among us in the Eucharist, I am asking our diocesan offices to support and to assist our parishes and institutions in this endeavor which belongs to our entire diocesan family. At the same time, many parishes are able to build upon the resources developed over the years and efforts which have borne positive results.

In his writings, Saint John Paul II encourages **Eucharistic Devotion outside of Mass** and instructs us: “Let us take time to kneel before Jesus present in the Eucharist ...” (*Mane Nobiscum Domine*, no. 18). This includes making visits to church whenever possible, Eucharistic Adoration and the celebration of Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Programs are good and necessary, but there is no substitute for our active worship of Christ present in the Most Holy Eucharist. Priests, deacons, parish administrators and the leadership and faculties in our Catholic schools and religious education programs should foster Eucharistic devotions which become a source of renewed strength in the life of the parish, school and educational programs.



*Catholic Courier* file photo

Father William Coffas offers Benediction at a parish Eucharistic Holy Hour.

The more the Most Holy Eucharist clearly becomes the source and focus of our diocesan life, the greater the possibility for increasing vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and religious life, which, in turn, reaches out in service to the laity and assures the continued firm foundation of our Diocese into the future through the proclamation of Jesus Christ in Word and in Sacrament.

## CONCLUSION

On February 20<sup>th</sup> of this year 2017, we commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the deaths of Father George J. Weinmann and Sister Lilian Marie McLaughlin, S.S.N.D., who lost their lives as they sought to save the Blessed Sacrament from the fire that destroyed Saint Philip Neri Church, Rochester, New York. Their belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, demonstrated by the gift of their own lives, continues to be a very powerful example of Who we believe the Most Holy Eucharist to be. We are now called to renew our profession of faith in the Eucharistic Christ constantly dwelling in the tabernacles of our churches.

At this special moment in the life of our Diocese, daily let us call to mind the words of Saint John Paul II: "...never forget that Jesus in the tabernacle wants you at his side, so that he can fill your hearts with the experience of his friendship, which alone gives meaning and fulfillment to your lives." (*Mane Nobiscum Domine*, no. 30).

My dear brothers and sisters in the Lord, I urge you to continue to deepen your personal devotion to Our Lord in the Eucharist. It is in knowing and in loving the Jesus of the Eucharist that you will have the means to understand life, to find security, to be a people with roots. It is Christ who sustains and supports us in the many trials, struggles, challenges, transitions and happenings of our human existence. Our ancestors in the faith have given us an example of faith that is eternal, a faith that unites heaven and earth, a faith where heaven and earth meet in the Most Holy Eucharist.

As I wrote in the letter of promulgation for the Diocese of Rochester's *Policies for the Administration of the Sacraments*, how difficult it would be to try to "go it alone" – to make sense of this life "on our own." But the Christ of the Eucharist has not left us orphans; He has called us by name. Our Lord has extended the invitation: "Come to me all you who find life burdensome, and I will refresh your souls!" (Matthew 11:28). As a diocesan family, let us respond to Christ's invitation and open our hearts to Him present in the gift eternal, the gift of life, the Most Holy Eucharist, as we pray:

"Grant, O Lord, we pray, that we may delight for all eternity in that share in your divine life, which is foreshadowed in the present age by our reception of your precious Body and Blood. Who live and reign for ever and ever." (Prayer after Communion, Solemnity of Corpus Christi).

United in faith and invoking the intercession of Mary, our Mother, and Saint John Fisher, Patron of our Diocese, I remain

Devotedly yours in Christ,



*Salvatore R. Matano*

The Most Reverend Salvatore R. Matano  
Bishop of Rochester

Catholic Courier photo by Jeff Witherow

The tabernacle at Sacred Heart Cathedral was recovered from the former St. Philip Neri Church, Rochester, where Father George J. Weinmann and School Sister of Notre Dame Lilian Marie McLaughlin both perished in an effort to rescue the Most Blessed Sacrament.

From the Bishop's Office of the Diocese of Rochester, on the twenty-fifth day of May, the *Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord*, in the year of Our Lord, two thousand and seventeen.