

**50th International Eucharistic Congress,
10-17 June 2012, Dublin, Ireland**

The Eucharist and Evangelization

Fr Bede McGregor OP

Legion of Mary

Saturday 16th June 2012

Introduction

Let us start with some basic questions? What do we aim to achieve by the Eucharistic Congress? Or more specifically what is the purpose of this workshop? I suggest that we have the same aim as every Eucharistic Congress as set forth in the Statutes of the Pontifical Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses: 'To make our Lord Jesus Christ ever better known, loved and served in his Eucharistic Mystery, the centre of the Church's life and mission for the salvation of the world.' This is surely a sublime task and one with the utmost positive and unlimited consequences for the Church and the whole world. So our workshop is an intense moment of evangelization: a proclamation of the real presence of Christ among us in the Eucharist and in and with us in His mystical Body the Church.

What is the Eucharist? What is the central point of the inexhaustible literature on the Eucharist? There is the wealth of teaching of the Magisterium, the writings of countless saints and spiritual writers, the contribution of 50 International Eucharistic Congresses, and innumerable national and diocesan Eucharistic congresses and the inspiring Eucharistic traditions of so many religious orders and congregations of men and women and of ecclesial movements new and old. There are an endless number of books and articles on the Eucharist under every aspect in nearly every language to be found on earth. Is it possible to encapsulate this rich and superabundant teaching into a few short paragraphs or even in one short presentation? I will try and present very simply the core teaching of the Church on the Eucharist with special relationship to evangelization.

The Eucharistic mandate and the Evangelization mandate go back to the words and actions of Christ Himself: 'Do this in commemoration of Me' and 'Preach the Gospel to every creature'. These two invitational commands come from the heart of Jesus to each and every one of us. You cannot have one without the other. They are inseparable and intrinsically united. Evangelization without the Eucharist becomes a purely human project and is often simply social work however good and helpful. The Eucharist without Evangelization will deprive the Eucharist of much of its precious fruitfulness. That is my thesis in a nutshell in this presentation.



The Reality of the Eucharist

So we ask again! Why is the Eucharist so supremely important for us and the whole world? What is the bottom line of all Eucharistic catechesis, theology, and preaching? Well, first of all the Eucharist is not just something, it is Someone. It is a Person. It is Jesus Christ, true God and true man. It is the crucified and Risen Christ really present to us and for us. The Eucharist is the real presence of Jesus Christ: body, blood, soul and Divinity, his human and Divine Heart focused on us in love. It is the sublime sacrament and place of the most intimate friendship and union with God Himself. So once more: the Eucharist is Jesus Christ present to us in personal intimacy and total accessibility. And above all the Eucharist is Our Lord's sharing with us his relationship with the Father in the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist is the Sacrament of the real presence of the Trinity because the Father and the Holy Spirit are inseparable from the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is at the centre of history and the world. There is surely nothing and no one more important in salvation and human history than the living presence Person of Jesus Christ in every time and place.

We remember the heartfelt prayer of petition of the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus: 'Stay with us Lord.' And Blessed John Paul II tells us that Jesus answers that prayer with infinite compassion in the Eucharist. Also we remember the last words of Jesus to the Church at the Ascension: 'I am with you always until the end of time.' These words have their magnificent verification in the Eucharist. It will become clear I hope why leading people to our Lord in the Eucharist is the ultimate and precious goal of all evangelization.

The Eucharist and the Church

The Eucharist gives us the whole reality of the Church. The Church like the Eucharist is not something but Someone. With subtle insight Cardinal Ratzinger noted that for Protestants the decision for Christ and the decision for the Church are two decisions, whereas for Catholics the decision for Christ and the decision for the Church is one decision. The Church is the Risen Christ present and active among us and in us His mystical Body. Christ no longer exists apart from his Body, the Church. Yes, indeed, the Church gets its whole reality and identity from the Eucharist. This truth has enormous consequences for our understanding of the Church and how we live the Christian life. Every diocese, every parish, every seminary, every catholic school or hospital, every ministry and ecclesial activity, every ecclesial movement and lay apostolate gets its substance, its motivation, its dynamism and its very identity from the presence of the Risen Lord at the centre of its very existence. This insight must be one of the precious fruits of the Congress. Most of us here present are members of the Legion of Mary and it is good for us too to remember that the Legion is



nothing without the Eucharist. A little later I will try to show this from the teaching and life of our founder Frank Duff and the unmistakable tradition of the Legion primarily contained in written form in the Legion Handbook.

Key texts from the II Vatican Council

Some of the key texts and often quoted from the II Vatican Council on the Eucharist are as follows: 'The most blessed Eucharist contains the Church's entire spiritual wealth....The Eucharist shows itself to be the source and apex of the whole proclamation of the Gospel. The other sacraments as well as every ministry of the Church and every work of the apostolate are linked with the Holy Eucharist and are directed towards it (P.O.no. 5). It is in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, where priests fulfil their chief duty, that the work of redemption is continuously realized' (P0 no. 13 LG no.28 AG no39). Other texts closely related to those just quoted are: 'The Eucharistic sacrifice is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life. (LG no.11). ' It is the centre and summit of the celebration of the sacraments because it brings about the presence of Christ, the Author of Salvation'(AG no.9) 'It communicates and nourishes that charity toward God and man which is the soul of the entire apostolate' (LG no.33). These texts and themes are found frequently in the papal magisterium especially of Paul VI, Blessed John Paul II, and our present Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI.

The Mass and the Sacrifice of Christ on Calvary

Let us very briefly try and unpack the meaning of these tremendous texts. First of all the Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross is the source of every grace of our redemption without exception. As Saint Faustina says in unison with a whole chorus of saints and blessed: 'You expired, Jesus, but the source of life gushed forth for souls, and an ocean of mercy opened up for the whole world. O fount of life, unfathomable Divine Mercy envelop the whole world and empty yourself out upon us.' The Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross is the radical reason and foundation of all Christian hope. Now the Eucharistic Sacrifice is the selfsame Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. All the graces of redemption are lavishly available to us in the Mass. It really is an astonishing truth and reality: the Sacrifice of the Cross is celebrated in our midst. But there is one significant difference between the Mass and Calvary. The Mass unlike Calvary is not only the Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross but is now our Sacrifice too. We offer to the Trinity Christ's perfect Sacrifice of praise as members of his Mystical Body. With and in Christ we are profoundly ad Patrem, that is turned towards the Father and the Trinity in Christ is turned to us in infinite mercy and graciousness.



The Value of Mass

In our workshop we are invited to renew our appreciation of the infinite value of every single Mass. Let me quote Archbishop Walsh who was the Archbishop of Dublin during the Eucharistic Congress in Dublin in 1932 on this theme: 'If all the prayers of loving hearts from the beginning of the world, and all the seraphic worship of the thrones and principalities of heaven, and the burning devotion and love of the B.V. Mary, Mother of God, and the million voices of the Universe, of all creatures of heaven and earth and sea, were offered up in one universal and harmonious act of praise and adoration, they would not equal or even approach, in value and efficacy the infinite value of one Mass.' No wonder the servant of God Frank Duff, the founder of the Legion says in a talk he gave on the Mass: 'The Mass is the last thing on earth about which we should be silent.' In other words the Mass is truly the privileged moment of all forms of evangelization. The Mass is Our Lord's most sublime act of evangelization; it is the perfect proclamation of the Gospel, the Good News; all other forms of evangelization are simply a sharing in and continuation of this supreme moment of redemptive evangelization.

Of course, I must emphasise once more that the Mass is primarily the worship of God, it is adoration but adoration is and leads to evangelization. **As Blessed John Paul says: 'A moment of true adoration has greater value and spiritual fruit than the most intense activity, even apostolic activity.'** If we could be truly convinced of that principle we would have uncovered an immense secret of the whole work of evangelization. It has been said that Europe needs to be given a soul. Indeed it needs to be given the Eucharist. But it is not only Europe but wherever the human heart has been secularised there is the need to plant the seed of the spirit of adoration.

The Liturgy of the Word

Before we explicitly reflect on the intrinsic relationship between the Eucharist and Evangelization there are two other absolutely essential aspects of the Eucharist that I think we need to keep in mind. **First, the real presence of the Risen Christ in the Liturgy of the Word is pivotal.** For the purpose of this presentation I will emphasise the importance of the Word of God by a quotation from Caesarius of Arles as found in one of the Preparatory Documents of the IEC: 'Tell me, brothers and sisters, what do you think is more important: the Word of God or the Body of Christ? If you want to respond well, you must without doubt say that the Word of God is not less than the Body of Christ. And therefore if we are so careful when we are handed the Body of Christ so that nothing of it may fall to the ground from our hands, ought we not take equal care so that the Word of God, that is offered and given to us, might not escape our heart, something that would happen if we are thinking



of something else? It is not less culpable to listen negligently to the Word of God than to let the Body of Christ fall to the ground.’

Some of the Fathers of the Church refer to the Scriptures as a Sacrament of the Heart of God. They see every word of Sacred Scripture as coming from the heart of Christ. So the central place that the Liturgy of the Word should play in evangelization should be self evident. Faith comes from hearing and the renewal of faith in the individual or the parish community or a diocese must also come through hearing the Word. As we are now use to saying following the II Vatican Council: we need to be fed from the table of the Word and the table of the Eucharist.

Holy Communion

Secondly, we must consider the tremendous gift of Holy Communion. Again, because of a shortage of time and space we will have to be content with a quotation that might give us some inkling of the preciousness of this intimate union and communion with Jesus Christ, true God and true man. Mother Theresa writes: ‘No where on earth are you more welcome. No where on earth are you more loved than by Jesus living and truly present in the most Blessed Sacrament. The time you spend with Jesus in the most Blessed Sacrament is the best time you will spend on earth.’ Those few words contain the heart of the matter. We can of course participate in the Mass without receiving Holy Communion but it is a far more perfect participation if we can also receive Our Lord in Communion.

The Eucharist as Evangelization

Let us now try to explicate a bit further the relationship between the Eucharist and Evangelization but I want to do this more through the testimony of the lives and words of outstanding Catholics than by an abstract theological analysis. First of all I would like to say that I am not entirely happy with the title of this presentation because some may take the meaning of the ‘and’ disjunctively rather than intrinsically conjunctively. We say again that the celebration of the Eucharist is an essential and primary form of evangelization. It is not only a preparation and source of evangelization it is the most profound form of evangelization. The Eucharist is the presence of the ultimate proclamation and redemptive and missionary action of Christ on the Cross. All other authentic evangelization is only a participation in the salvific action of Christ in the Eucharist. Let me conclude this part of my presentation with the words of Our Lord himself. He speaks of the Eucharist as a matter of life and death and He is deeply concerned on where each of us will spend eternity, ‘Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you will not have life in you. And whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood will live forever.’ These are tremendous words coming from the heart of God.



A Working definition of Evangelization

We need a working definition of Evangelization in order to get some clarity. The contexts of evangelization vary significantly and therefore the methods and means will vary too. But the goal is always the same: evangelization is basically facilitating an authentic meeting of another person with Jesus Christ true God and true man. Pope Paul VI sums it up in his magisterial Apostolic Exhortation: *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: 'There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed.'

Different Forms of Evangelization

Theologians talk of primary evangelization or sometimes frontier evangelization or some such terminology. They mean by this the preaching of the Gospel to those who have never had the opportunity of hearing the Gospel of Jesus or only very inadequately or indeed to children hearing the Good News for the first time. **The Eucharist is the motivation and dynamism for this primary evangelization or missionary evangelization as it is also called because it is in the Eucharist that Jesus is fully found both for the evangelizer and eventually for the ones to be evangelized.** In this context for a few decades after the 11 Vatican Council perhaps because of the new explorations into a theology of non-Christian religions the word 'conversion' seemed to fall out of usage. But Pope Paul VI insisted: 'The purpose of Evangelization is therefore precisely this interior change, and if it had to be expressed in one sentence the best way of stating it would be to say that the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the Message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs.' Conversion is primary in the vocabulary of the Legion Apostolate.

Not surprisingly when the document 'Dominus Jesus' appeared the secular media, especially the militantly and ideologically driven anti-Catholic sections of it went berserk. Even some Catholic theologians and Catholic media outlets expressed disappointment. In fact it was a magnificent document because it put Christ back at the centre of our lives as our Lord and only Saviour, it put Him at the centre of all presence to others and dialogue with non-Christians, and it put Christ back into the deepest heart of mission outreach and every ecclesial activity. It gives a solid doctrinal basis and motivation for all evangelization. Of course, the words of Pope Paul VI must not be forgotten: 'The obvious importance of the content of evangelization must not overshadow the importance of the ways and means.' But that urgent and extremely important topic would lead me beyond the scope of this present presentation.



Pastoral Evangelization

Secondly there is pastoral evangelization. This is the total approach of preaching the Gospel to those who already have the faith with a view to deepening that faith and empowering them to become genuine evangelizers themselves. I would make a conservative guess that at least 90% of all Church personnel and other resources are engaged in this pivotal form of evangelization. Obviously it can and must be improved both in content, methods and means. The teaching of the 11Vatican Council and the post conciliar Synods and papal magisterium and the Universal Catechism which have still not really been appropriated by ordinary church going people would be a tremendous springboard to renewal. Two areas in particular are prominent in papal teaching in this area: the role of the Eucharist in the formation of community especially in the parish and the formation of the laity for the lay apostolate. Both of these targets are especially cultivated in the Legion of Mary and many other new ecclesial movements like the Focolare and Communio e Liberazione and the neo-Catechumenate.

The New Evangelization

Thirdly there is the New Evangelization promoted so vigorously by Pope John Paul 11 and Pope Benedict XV1. The older word that first appeared in the Acts of the 1937 Eucharistic Congress in Manila was re-evangelization. Basically the New Evangelization is the deep sense of duty in the Church to offer the Gospel to those who have lost contact with the Church for various reasons although they live in cultures which were formerly and even vibrantly Catholic. Many of them are not antagonistic but just indifferent, some are hostile, others are divorced and in new relationships, a small but articulate minority in same gender partnerships or simply with a same gender orientation, there are many who feel they have outgrown their childhood experience of religion and have not found an adult way to be Christian.

The list of reasons for this growing number who live outside any religious or Christian ethos or milieu is legion and diverse. There are the general but real problems of materialism, relativism and denial of any objective truth etc. But whatever the reasons for this distance from Christ in the Church they have a right to hear the Gospel preached to them and we have a compelling duty to share the Good News with them. Whatever the appearances they have a built in need to know that they are loved by God in Christ and that they are infinitely important to Him. We must feel the pain of their being deprived of the friendship of Jesus in the Eucharist. We must be convinced that Jesus is the answer to all problems of loneliness, despair and the sense that there is nothing after death so why bother with anything except to live as comfortable a life as possible here and now within the



bounds of health and the legitimate rights of others. No one must be considered as beyond the love of Christ expressed through his Body the Church.

Pope Paul VI has put it very eloquently in Evangelii Nuntiandi: 'We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church. It is a task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present day society make all the more urgent. Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelise, that is to say in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of his death and glorious Resurrection.'

I might add that what is true of the Church is true of the individual Christian. A Christian exists in order to evangelize. It is our deepest identity. Can we be truly Christian without engaging in some form of evangelization or apostolate?

Ecumenical Evangelization

Finally there is Ecumenical Evangelization. Here we mutually evangelize each other and together as far as is possible we seek to evangelize the world and pray and work towards full and visible unity in the Body of Christ. This involves the conversion in various ways and depths of all of us. And the purpose of Christian Unity is that the world may believe in Jesus Christ and that the whole work of preaching the Gospel to all creation might be so much more effective. And of course, the Eucharist is the central question for ecumenism.

The Witness of Christian Lives

In the concluding part of this presentation we will try to illustrate the intrinsic link between the Eucharist and Evangelization as it was manifested in the lives of some outstanding Catholics.

In the late 1960's in preparation for a talk to the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta when I was a young missionary in India I asked Blessed Mother Theresa to explain to me her charism and that of her Congregation. She answered that it was very simple: 'We go from the real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist to the real presence of Jesus in the heavy disguise of poorest of the poor, in those that nobody seems to love or care about, the rejected, the failures, the sick poor. We go to Jesus in those who are in real need and in the different forms of poverty. It would be impossible to do our work without the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.' Later she wrote that when the Sisters decided to make a Holy Hour in the presence of Our Lord every day, this rule transformed their lives and apostolate. Again we learned after her death that she persevered in this devotion to the Eucharist despite several decades of profound darkness of the soul and the absence of any feelings of



consolation. She said this helped her to enter more deeply into the experience of the destitute poor and the spiritual poverty and deep loneliness of the materially comfortable. Mother Theresa is a clear example of the fact that adoration of the Eucharist leads to actual evangelization rather than just talk about it and actual evangelization leads a person back to deeper commitment to Our Lord in the Eucharist.

Next I think of the Servant of God, Archbishop Fulton Sheen. From the day of his ordination he made it a practice to make a daily Holy Hour. He preached the benefits of the Holy Hour tirelessly especially to priests. In his own case it led to a preaching of the Gospel that was simply prodigious and remarkably fruitful in so many ways. The number of converts he received into the Church is impressive by any standards. It has been said that one can tell when a bishop or priest has a habit of Eucharistic adoration because of his zeal for real evangelization, for the salvation of souls.

Now I think of the layman and founder of the Legion of Mary, Frank Duff. After many years studying his writings and talks but above all his life I have come to the conclusion that the Eucharist was the most important reality in his life. It was absolutely central to his personal existence. The Venerable Edel Quinn once poignantly wrote in her private notes: 'How desolate life would be without the Eucharist.' Frank Duff would fully resonate with those words. But rather than give you chapter and verse to substantiate my opinion let me quote from the Handbook where Frank explains his conviction concerning the relationship between the Eucharist and Evangelization and he makes it the paradigm of Legion Spirituality: 'The Eucharist is the centre and source of grace, therefore, it must be the very keystone of the Legion scheme. The most ardent activity will accomplish nothing of value if it forgets for a moment its main object is to establish the reign of the Eucharist in all hearts. For thereby is fulfilled the purpose for which Jesus came into the world. That purpose was to communicate himself to souls so that he may make them one with him. The means of that communication is chiefly the holy Eucharist....The Eucharist is the infinite good. For in that sacrament is Jesus himself.'

Mary and the Eucharist and the Holy Spirit

I have spoken and written often concerning Mary and the Eucharist and of the relationship of the Holy Spirit to both of them. Mary and the Holy Spirit are the key figures in Legion spirituality because they are the infallible means of leading us to Jesus and bringing him to others. And although the theme of this presentation is more precisely about something else I cannot conclude without saying a brief word about Mary and the Holy Spirit in reference to the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the work of the Holy Spirit and there is a wealth of teaching about the Epiclesis – the invoking of the Holy Spirit that brings about the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. It must also be stressed that the Holy Spirit is the primary agent in the whole work of evangelization so we see



once more the intimate link between the Eucharist and Evangelization. This explains why the Legion is primarily about a true devotion to the Holy Spirit. It is to him we make our Legion Promise.

But Mary is the privileged instrument of the Holy Spirit. The story of the Eucharist begins in her: 'and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.' She is the mother of Jesus in time and eternity and Jesus is always the fruit of her womb and this includes Jesus in the Eucharist. There would be no Eucharist if Mary had not consented to the will and plan of God for the redemption of the world. God could of course have done something different but He chose Mary as an essential part of all his plans. She is the Mother of the Word and in a certain sense she is a living Bible because she kept all the words and deeds of Jesus in her heart where she treasured and pondered over them and above all lived them. So we see the ineradicable link between the Eucharist and Evangelization in Mary. In more recent papal teaching the various popes bring out this connection by calling Mary the Woman of the Eucharist and the Star of Evangelization. Earlier she was called Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament and St. Pius X said that after the title Mother of God the title of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament was the most profound.. It would be another tremendous fruit of this Eucharistic Congress if we could acknowledge ever more fully the role of the Holy Spirit and Mary in all our Eucharistic evangelization. The Legion of Mary is surely called to be in the forefront of this task.