



THE ROMAN CATHOLIC  
DIOCESE OF PHOENIX

## O SACRED FEAST

A Pastoral Letter from Bishop Olmsted  
To all the Faithful of the Diocese of Phoenix

January 28, 2021

Memorial of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Priest and Doctor of the Church

Son of French aristocrats, orphaned at six years of age, twice dismissed from the French army, recklessly adventurous, the life of Charles de Foucauld was eventually seized by the love of Jesus. Not many years after his return to faith, Charles was ordained a priest and lived several years absorbed in prayer as a Trappist monk. Yet his personal love for the Lord now united to his zealous nature made complacency unthinkable. Brother Charles left the Trappist monastery and lived the last twenty-some years of his life essentially homeless without companions, dedicated to loving the Lord in the Eucharist and serving the needy with warm hospitality. It was clarity about the transformative power of the Eucharist that unleashed in him an unshakable confidence and love. For him, the Eucharist was simply “Jesus handing over His life for His people.” Blessed Charles de Foucauld shaped his life around this simple truth.

My dear sons and daughters, I write to you now because we need the clear and simple faith in the Eucharist of Blessed Charles de Foucauld.

Many have shared with me the heavy grief they have carried during the COVID-19 pandemic at the loss of regular accessibility of the great Sacrament of the Eucharist.

As a spiritual father and spouse of the Church, it grieves me to see the flock entrusted to my care suffer separation from the Lord whom I have dedicated my life to serve and to make present among His people. Deprivation of the Eucharist is deprivation of Christ. Whether it was due to my prudential decisions or yours, I am aware of the pain you have suffered. What is more, I know your grief does not stop there.

A recent Pew Research Center survey (July 2019) showed that most Catholics don't believe in the Eucharist. Nearly seven-in-ten Catholics (69%) say they personally believe that, during Catholic Mass, the bread and wine used in Communion "are symbols of the body and blood of Jesus Christ." Just one-third of U.S. Catholics (31%) say they believe that "during Catholic Mass, the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Jesus." This report was a confirmation of what had long been known but not often voiced: there is a grave crisis of faith in the Eucharist as the Real Presence of Jesus Christ, our Lord and God.

These are our own friends and family, our sons and our daughters. What suffering to see those we love not sharing our faith and devotion to our Redeemer.

This crisis of faith affects us all, not only from outside but also from within our souls. Doubt and mistrust are like a virus that spreads from heart to heart at an exponential rate.

A renewal of faith in the Eucharist is desperately needed!

My brother priests and deacons of the diocese, those for whom I have ever-increasing gratitude and affection, you, too, have suffered greatly the pain and confusion caused by this crisis of faith. You are the men who have "left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields" to serve the Lord

at the Altar (Matthew 19:29). You have shouldered with Christ the weight of this loss and felt much of the grief our Lord felt as he wept for Jerusalem (cf. Luke 19:41ff).

Adding to our grief, all of us know Catholics who even before COVID regularly excused themselves from Sunday Mass. But our love of the Eucharist cannot be separated from the Sunday celebration of the Mass! As the Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it, “The Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day and His Eucharist is at the heart of the Church's life” (CCC 2177). Even before live-streamed Mass was commonplace, the centrality of the Lord's Day in the life of Catholics has been dramatically diminishing for years.

What value does the Sunday Mass have? For a group of forty-nine Christians in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, it was fuel for life. Emperor Diocletian of Rome found these faithful believers guilty of celebrating Sunday Mass which had been outlawed. When they were asked why they broke the law, one member of the group, named Emeritus, spoke in response: “Sine dominico non possumus,” which our Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI once explained to mean, “without ‘Dominicum’ [Sunday], that is, without the Sunday Eucharist we cannot live” (Angelus, 26 June 2011). Why did they feel so strongly?

For more than nine years I was blessed to observe and learn from the spiritual fatherhood of Pope Saint John Paul II as an assistant at the Secretariat of State of the Holy See. Permit me to share an exhortation he gave us nearly 22 years ago, expressing our faith in the Sunday Eucharist:

“From the beginning of my Pontificate, I have not ceased to repeat: ‘Do not be afraid! Open, open wide the doors to Christ!’ In the same way, today I would strongly urge everyone to rediscover Sunday: Do not be afraid to give your time to Christ! Yes, let us open our time to Christ, that he may cast light upon it and give it direction. ... The rediscovery of this day is a

grace which we must implore, ... so that we may respond concretely to the deepest human yearnings. Time given to Christ is never time lost, but is rather time gained, so that our relationships and indeed our whole life may become more profoundly human" (Dies Domini 7).

I wish to unite myself to the words of our late Pope: as the pandemic subsides over the coming weeks and months, I would strongly urge everyone to rediscover Sunday Mass! I invite you to implore from God the grace of rediscovering the joy and rest of the Lord's Day.

My dear brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, with love and care as your spiritual father, I call you to turn your hearts with renewed fervor to our Lord in the Holy Eucharist and to unwavering fidelity in keeping holy the Lord's Day every Sunday.

These are difficult times with health concerns and conflicting information about what is needed to remain healthy and to prevent the spread of disease. However, we all have a real need to find our security and life in Christ. Are we not in need of a Savior? Is He not the only Lord?

I wish to assist and accompany you to an ever-increasing knowledge, love, and commitment to this great gift of our God. To seek to do so in a short letter would not give due reverence to either the needs of our times or the thirst of our souls.

For this reason, I now would like to announce a forthcoming Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist.

Five years ago, I discerned there was a great need to write a substantial exhortation for Catholic men. Two years ago, I discerned a need to do the same for marriages and families of our diocese. These two documents have born and continue to bear much fruit.

The time is now to speak to the Heart of it all.

Another humble man with a great Eucharistic heart is St. Thomas Aquinas who wrote the familiar Eucharistic hymn, *Tantum ergo*, among many others. For the name of the forthcoming Exhortation I have chosen two words from the second line of this hymn of praise of the Eucharist: *Veneremur cernui*. It is difficult to translate these words, yet they capture the reverence we should foster: *Let us venerate with body prostrated* which are expressed in reference to the Great Sacrament of the Eucharist.

In my forthcoming Apostolic Exhortation, I wish to offer a thorough exploration of the Church's faith on the Sunday Eucharist with a particular attention to the following:

- The Gift of the Real Presence in the Eucharist
- Eucharist as Sacrificial Offering and heavenly banquet
- How the Eucharist unleashes peace, charity, and justice to our society
- Ways for parishes and families to deepen their Eucharistic faith and love
- Proper Disposition for the Reception of the Eucharist
- How to reach out to friends and family who do not share our faith

You can expect this document to be made public on the Feast of the Lord's Supper, Holy Thursday of the Sacred Triduum, which this year falls on the first of April.

In 1916, Blessed Charles de Foucauld was engaged in Eucharistic adoration when he was attacked and killed for his Christian faith in North Africa. All hope seemed lost, his life and faith without noticeable effect. French soldiers who came upon his ransacked hut found a monstrance with the Sacred Host still inside. They placed the monstrance with the Host exposed on the saddle of a horse and walked back to the French camp—the first Eucharistic procession in that part of the world. Charles' blood had hardly dried and his Catholic faith was being boldly announced

to the world. Since then, the Church in Africa has been blessed with breathtaking growth and remarkable strength.

My dear brothers and sisters, faith in the Eucharist is *always* fruitful when it is cherished and lived. My hope is that our rediscovery of the beauty and truth of the Eucharist might be similarly blessed.

With sincere hope and fatherly affection, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,



**+ Thomas J. Olmsted**

Bishop of Phoenix