



Year of the
EUCCHARIST
DIOCESE OF RAPID CITY | JUNE 2019 - JUNE 2020

The Announcement of the Year of the Eucharist

“Once you understand the Eucharist, you can never leave the Church. Not because the Church won’t let you but because your heart won’t let you.”

We just recently celebrated the greatest event in human history – the depth of the Father’s love for us in the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In giving away His Son, the Father’s only and deepest desire was and is to have a relationship with those whom he has called his own – each and every one of us.

As the mystical Body of Christ, in our Catholic communities, each week we gather to experience this reality in the celebration of the Most Holy Eucharist. Far from being merely an event that we attend, it is here, in this sacramental moment, where each of us is drawn into this great mystery of love.

In order to draw us more deeply into this mystery, I have called for a Holy Year of the Eucharist in the Diocese of Rapid City. Unlike recent holy years, such as the Year of Faith and the Year of Mercy, this was not initiated by the Holy Father for the Church around the world. It is intended to invite each of us in western South Dakota to a deeper experience of encounter with Christ.

Because sin has entered into the world, humanity has fallen far from God’s graces, keeping us from that original holiness and thus subjecting us to “eternal” death. Our Catholic faith proclaims a “good news” and gives us an answer of hope that death does not have the last word. God’s compassion toward us and His mercy are infinite. But God has proved His love for us. While we were still sinners Christ was sent into the world by the Father to die for us (Rom 5:8). “How much more then, since we are now justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath (Rom 5:9).”

Through his death on the Cross, Jesus presented to the Father in heaven his perfect homage and obedience as reparation for humanity’s disobedience and sin. Jesus offered himself on the Cross for each of us, fulfilling his own words, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends (Jn 15:13).” Christ’s complete act of charity towards humanity allows us the opportunity to re-establish an authentic relationship with God and grow towards that original holiness.

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This saving action of Jesus Christ is re-presented each time the Eucharist is celebrated. “It is Christ himself, the eternal priest of the New Covenant who, acting through the ministry of the priest, offers the Eucharistic sacrifice. And it is the same Christ, really present under the species of bread and wine, who is the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice.”ⁱ

The Church Fathers of the Second Vatican Council proclaimed that the Eucharistic sacrifice is “the source and summit of the Christian life”.ⁱⁱ The Church draws her very life from the Eucharist. The other sacraments and all the works of the Church flow from and are directed toward this great mystery.

The Church's mission, our mission, flows from the mission of Christ: “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (Jn 20:21). From the Eucharist, the Church draws her spiritual power and then is sent on mission to “go therefore and make disciples” (Matt 28-19). The Eucharist comes to be “both the source and the summit of all evangelization, since its goal is the communion of mankind with Christ and in him with the Father and the Holy Spirit.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Our union with Christ in the Eucharist, both a gift and grace, makes it possible for us, in him, to embrace fully his mission of love and mercy. When we come to understand this great mystery celebrated in the Eucharist and participate fully each time we gather, our lives will never be the same. We come to understand more deeply the Father's love for us in Christ Jesus. Our desire for spiritual union with the Lord deepens. Our own sacrificial love intensifies and expands. Our aspiration to serve the Lord grows. These are the very fruits of our Holy Communion.

Dear brothers and sisters, I have often thought of how the Lord Jesus desires to bring us, individually and communally, deeper into this love relationship. When we deeply encounter Love, we are transformed by it, and become like the Lover.

As Shepherd of the Diocese of Rapid City, I long to help others come to know and experience Jesus in a more personal and life-changing way, especially through the celebration of the Sunday Mass.

Over the past many years, there has been a decline in Mass attendance around the world. Half of all baptized Catholics in the United States who have left the Church now declare no church affiliation. Every family knows of people who no longer regularly attend Mass or have fallen away from the Church altogether. Perhaps it is because they have no clear understanding of the Eucharist, the Church's greatest treasure. Or perhaps they came to Mass but did not give themselves over to this beautiful encounter with Love.

If not attended to, our faith can “become like smoldering cinders or embers – weakened by sin and secularism. It must be reawakened, fanned into flame. We must help Christians to encounter once again, this Jesus, especially those who have left the Church.”^{iv} The Year of the Eucharist is meant to help awaken the hearts of all Catholics across the Diocese of Rapid City, deepening the desire for Jesus in all of us. Celebrating this Year of the Eucharist is meant to help us come to a deeper understanding, appreciation, and experience of the Church's greatest treasure.

This Holy Year of the Eucharist will commence on Sunday, June 23, 2019, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, and will conclude on that same Solemnity, Sunday, June 14, 2020.

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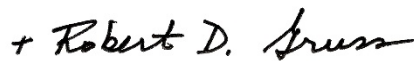
Over the course of this year, the focus of the spiritual life of the Diocese will be oriented towards the importance of the Holy Eucharist in our lives as Catholics. All adult and youth religious education will give attention to some aspect of the Holy Eucharist – the Mass, its meaning and importance; Eucharistic Adoration; etc. Materials have been prepared for use in all parishes to help the faithful come to a deeper understanding and experience of this great gift so that the Eucharist will always be held in highest honor, received devoutly and frequently, and worshiped with supreme adoration. These materials will also assist pastors in carrying out their responsibility to teach the faithful diligently about this area of sacramental life.

By giving the Eucharist the prominence it deserves, we will show that we are attentive to the importance of the greatness of this gift Jesus left us. Over the course of this year, we will recall in more intentional ways the central event of history of our Catholic faith – Christ offering himself on the cross, the acceptable sacrifice which is made present each and every time the Holy Eucharist is celebrated. This is at the heart of the Gospel and the living Tradition of the Church. Christ has promised to be with us always (Matt 28:20), and he is to be known, loved and imitated. The Holy Eucharist brings us into communion with him, enabling us to live with him in the life of the Trinity, and to not only be transformed by this love, but, with him, to transform the world through our lives made holy by this union.

We must remember that we are never alone because through the humble signs of bread and wine, changed into his Body and Blood, Christ walks beside us as our food for the journey, strengthening us to become, for everyone, witnesses of love and hope for the world.

As we begin the Year of the Eucharist, let us not forget Mary, Mother of the Eucharist. We ask her to intercede for us and assist us in meeting her Son in the Eucharist. Every time we approach Jesus in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we turn to her who received the lifeless body of her son, and so received Christ's sacrifice for the whole Church. In her, the world is renewed in Christ's love. Mary, Mother of the Eucharist, pray for us.

Given in Rapid City, on 27 April, the Vigil of the Second Sunday of Easter, or the Sunday of Divine Mercy, in the year of our Lord 2019, the eighth year of my Episcopacy.



Most Rev. Robert D. Gruss
Bishop of Rapid City

ⁱ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1410.

ⁱⁱ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

ⁱⁱⁱ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Life and Ministry of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 6.

^{iv} Archbishop Rino Fisichella, Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization.