

On Holy Thursday evening, we begin a “Year of the Eucharist” in the Diocese of Joliet. Although in my heart there are many reasons to do so (and I plan to write about them each month over the next year), one prayer encapsulates them all:

I pray that during the Year of the Eucharist, we of the Diocese of Joliet – laity young and old, religious women and men, deacons, priests and bishops – will develop such a deep appreciation and hunger for the Eucharist that we will give God the opening to renew and refresh our diocese, to make us holy.

We can be confident that this is what God desires for us, because in the Eucharist Jesus remains with us as spiritual food (as he said, “I am the Bread of Life”) and assurance of his Father’s undying faithfulness (his Covenant of Love). Everything we need and desire in life (and more!) can be found in the Lord Jesus and his gift of the Eucharist.

Do we sometimes forget that in Jesus we have everything? Do we go looking for fulfillment elsewhere, all the while missing the fact that he is with us, within us, in the Church, waiting for us to open our hearts and let him in? Even if we see ourselves as religious people, do we sometimes look beyond Jesus, or around him, forgetting that we need look no further than him? And if we see ourselves as active Catholics, do we sometimes take the Eucharist for granted, as if Sunday Mass is just one more religious activity among many?

If we live in a home that is strained by tension, do we wonder where peace is to be found? If we are lost and do not know where to turn, have we thought of turning to God but do not know how to do so?

We need a Year of the Eucharist to re-awaken ourselves to the truth that for us Catholics, the Eucharist is the absolute center of our lives – because in the Eucharist Jesus himself feeds us and remains with us as a companion on the journey of life. We need a Year of the Eucharist to awaken within us as individuals and as a diocese a hunger for Jesus so profound that it inspires us to love him more, to surrender our very lives to him, to confess our faults and failings, and to learn to live sacrificially. We need a Year of the Eucharist so that we will never forget that through his Son Jesus our heavenly Father saves us from evil and makes us holy.

You little ones in elementary school, Jesus loves you and comes to you in the Holy Eucharist! Learn to participate at Mass with all your heart and reverence Jesus’ holy presence.

You teens and young adults, see in the Eucharist Jesus himself, your food and sure guide through years of growth and budding dreams.



You married couples, see in the Eucharist the very covenant sealed with the blood of Jesus which is the origin and strength of your marriage.

You who seek to understand the Lord's plan for you no matter your age, let him issue that call from within by making the Eucharist your inspiration and strength.

You religious women and men, allow your daily participation at Mass to inspire your apostolate and become the source of the presence of Jesus you bring to those you serve.

You deacons, see in the Lord's washing of the apostles' feet at the first Eucharist the symbol par excellence of your bond with Jesus the Servant.

And we priests, ordained as ministers of the Eucharist: May we celebrate the sacraments with such fervor, faith, care, and humility that we marvel at the mystery of the Lord himself at work in us, that we grow in awe of what he accomplishes through us. By our daily celebration of Mass, may we give ourselves even more generously to the Lord and his people, whose lives he purchased with his own body and blood. If he loves them so, can we love them less?

In his beautiful book, *He Leadeth Me*, Fr. Walter Ciszek, S.J., wrote of his years of confinement in Soviet Russia. He was deprived of the Eucharist for many months, and he eventually went to heroic lengths to celebrate Mass in prison and in the camps. Once he found a way to say Mass secretly every day, he recognized that he was doing so not only for himself and the Catholics in the camps, but also for the spiritual good of people who did not even know he was doing so, including nonbelievers. He wrote, "I would go to any length, suffer any inconvenience, run any risk to make the bread of life available."

We need a Year of the Eucharist so that we will be so transformed by the Lord that our neighborhoods, our towns and our workplaces will be changed by his abiding presence within us – by our holiness.

This is precisely what the Lord does in the Eucharist. In the coming year, may we, too, "go to any length, suffer any inconvenience, run any risk" to make the Eucharist the center of our lives.

Bishop Peter Sartain
Christ is our Hope
April, 2010



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Diocese of Joliet

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