On March 27, 2020, Pope Francis blessed an empty St. Peter’s Square with the Most Blessed Sacrament, praying for an end to the COVID-19 pandemic.
PASTORAL LETTER
BY THE BISHOP OF SPOKANE

THE MOST HOLY
EUCHARIST

MOST REVEREND
THOMAS ANTHONY DALY, D. D.
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Peace be with you. During the momentous events of these past months, I have prayed for you each day.

The Solemnity of Corpus Christi, which we celebrate today, inspires me to reflect with you on the Most Holy Eucharist: the great wedding gift of Christ the Bridegroom to His Bride the Church. The Church’s devotion to this precious gift is demonstrated in her annual celebration of this Solemnity and in her daily celebration of the Mass.
The Body and Blood of Christ is our viaticum, our food, as we make our pilgrimage through this earthly city to the heavenly Jerusalem. The Heavenly Host and Precious Blood satisfy our spiritual hunger, filling us with an intense love of God and an ardent charity toward our neighbor. As Vespers of this *Solemnity of Corpus Christi* states, “Lord Jesus Christ, we worship you living among us in the sacrament of your body and blood. May we offer to our Father in heaven a solemn pledge of undivided love. May we offer to our brothers and sisters a life poured out in loving service of that kingdom where you live with the Father and the Holy Spirit one God, for ever and ever.”

**The Divine Physician in a Time of Pandemic**

One might ask with the social, cultural, and global issues that preoccupy these times, why I choose to write on the Eucharist. I have chosen
to do so while observing the devastating effects of COVID-19. It has wrought a terrible havoc upon us: physically, economically, emotionally and spiritually. The necessary measures taken to limit its spread have caused many small businesses to close, public events to be suspended, people to be quarantined, and “social distancing” to become the norm. The virus and the precautions taken have impacted the lives of all and the livelihood of many. I pray for those who have succumbed to the virus and for their loved ones. Likewise, I pray for those who have lost their jobs and for those who have lost their savings.

Customarily, in stressful times the faithful turn to the Church for solace. Yet, during this pandemic, the Church herself has been hampered in her care for the faithful: the doors of our churches were shut and Masses suspended, causing great sorrow for so many.
While fasting and abstinence are a part of Catholic spirituality, little could one have foreseen that such a Eucharistic fast would be required of us. This unexpected trial compels me to reflect anew on how vitally necessary the Holy Eucharist is for the Church and for every believer; it is the Eucharist which is “the overflowing core of love and of inexhaustible life.”

On the night before He died, at the Last Supper, Jesus said, “Take this, all of you, and eat of it, for this is My Body, which will be given up for you. … Take this, all of you, and drink from it, for this is My Blood. … Do this in memory of Me.” Christ, the Divine Physician, prescribes His own Body and Blood as the medicine that heals our wounds and makes us one in Him. In this pastoral letter, I wish to reflect with you on the healing and unifying effects of the Holy Eucharist. Certainly, COVID-19 which has caused us to be quarantined, isolated and apart from one another, nevertheless deepens my
awareness of how the Eucharist is the great unifier for us as Catholics. Now that our Eucharistic exile is over, let us return to our churches and joyfully reflect on the Eucharist together.

**Eucharistic Images**

At the end of a busy day overflowing with activity, imagine walking into the tranquility of your parish church. In this holy place, your gaze comes to rest on the altar. It is to this altar the newly baptized is drawn when rising from the baptismal waters; it is to this altar your body will be carried when your earthly pilgrimage has been completed. Between one’s first and last day, there are those many days when one first skips, then strolls, and finally shuffles to the altar of sacrifice to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. The altar, that consecrated stone on which the Eucharistic Sacrifice takes place, represents Christ the “living stone” upon whom
we “like living stones” are to be built into a spiritual house.⁵

Imagine now as you sit in the refreshing quiet of the church, people of all ages, from all walks of life, approach the altar; the priest appears and Mass begins. Through the readings and prayers of the Mass, one is made aware that the faithful are not alone in this most sacred act of worship. In the Mass two angelic hymns are heard, the *Gloria* and the *Sanctus*: the *Gloria*, first sung by angels on the night of Jesus’ birth⁶ and the *Sanctus*, sung unceasingly by angelic choirs surrounding God’s throne.⁷ In the Mass, our voices blend with theirs in singing God’s praise.

Where the Eucharist is celebrated there is the threshold of heaven and earth. The voices of patriarchs and prophets are heard in the Old Testament readings; the voices of martyrs and saints are heard in the New Testament readings. Angels, patriarchs and prophets, martyrs and saints, all the citizens of heaven, join their
voices to ours in praising God. As the Divine Word is the Author of the Sacred Scriptures and its subject, the Old Testament readings foretell the Christ who is to come and prefigure the Eucharistic gift He has left us. Abel’s offering from his flock, Melchizedek’s offering of bread and wine, Abraham’s offering of Isaac, his only son: these Old Testament offerings foreshadow Christ’s offering of Himself on the cross and the Eucharistic offering at the altar.⁸ “Under the old law it was the flesh of calves and goats that was offered, but here Christ himself, the true God, is set before us as our food.”⁹ In the Sacred Scriptures we are told of how the early Church shared the Eucharist, the same Eucharist we share today. At the altar we receive “the Blood of the new and eternal covenant …”¹⁰ to which all Old Testament sacrifices and covenants lead.

Standing amidst the heavenly and earthly congregation is the priest. He is given a unique role in this cooperative work of creation. While his voice is frequently one with that of the
faithful, it is his voice alone that is heard at the heart of the Eucharistic Prayer; the voice is his, but the words he speaks are those of Christ. In the words he speaks and in the actions he performs we encounter the unseen High Priest, Jesus Christ.

Vocations to the Holy Priesthood

This truth prompts me, as your bishop, to ask your daily prayers for priestly vocations. In 1844, Father Adrian Hoecken, S.J., celebrated Mass for the largest village of the Kalispel Tribe in present day Pend Orielle County. This was the first Mass offered in what would become the Diocese of Spokane. That mustard seed of the Church planted long ago has developed deep roots and large full branches throughout eastern Washington which require the care of priests.
Lord, send Your Church good workers, but they should be really good ones; send good missionaries, men such as they should be, to work hard in Your vineyard; priests, my God, truly detached from themselves, their own ease, and worldly goods; they can be a smaller number; provided they’re good. Grant Your Church this grace, O Lord.

The Sacrament of Unity

Our diocese is blessed with the rich wheat land of the Palouse and the many vineyards of Walla Walla and the Columbia Basin. From our soil come wheat and grapes, by our hands they are crafted into bread and wine, and on our altars they become the Body and Blood of Christ. The bread and wine are signs of the Church’s unity. The many grains are ground into a single loaf and the many grapes are crushed into wine. Like
the bread and the wine, we the many are made one in Christ.

St. Augustine, in an Easter morning sermon, addressing those who had been baptized the night before, asks them to consider how the bread that will become the Body of Christ is made, and how they the newly baptized went through a similar process. He states that as the grain is ground into flour, they were ground down through their Lenten fasting. As water is poured over the flour to form a dough, the water of baptism was poured over them. And as the dough is baked into a loaf, they are fired with the Holy Spirit being formed into the Body of Christ.\textsuperscript{12}

After the Consecration of the Mass, the priest beseeches God the Father, “grant that we, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit may become one body, one spirit in Christ.”\textsuperscript{13} Brothers and sisters, there is no room for division among us;
it is our prayer, it is God’s will that we be “one body, one spirit in Christ.” I often reflect upon this oneness — which anticipates our unity in heaven — when I pray at the altar: “Lord, renew your Church which is in eastern Washington by the light of the Gospel. Strengthen the bond of unity between the faithful and the pastors of your people … that in a world torn by strife your people may shine forth as a prophetic sign of unity and concord.”

Three-fold Communion

The Eucharist reaches its summit in the Communion Rite during which there are three communions. All join with one voice in praying the Our Father together. In this prayer to God the Father, we profess the filial union we have with Him. This is the first communion. Then we exchange the “Kiss of Peace,” whereby the priest and people express fraternal union which is the second communion. Following the Kiss of Peace is what St. Ambrose of Milan understands
to be a kiss between Christ, the Bridegroom, and His Bride, the faithful soul. This “kiss” is our reception of the Body and Blood of Christ. This is the third communion and through it we are to become what we have received.

In the Eucharistic kiss we receive Christ, the Incarnate Word. Our mouths become sacred, consecrated with the Body and Blood of Christ. In imitation of the Incarnate Word there are to be no words of anger, slander or gossip coming forth from our mouths. Our words are to praise God and bless His Holy Name, they are to give peace and solace to our neighbor, they are to bring justice and truth to our world.
Divine Savior,  
transform me into Yourself.  
May my hands be Your hands.  
May my tongue be Your tongue.  
Grant that all my senses and my whole body  
may serve only to glorify You.  
Above all, transform my soul and all its powers that  
my memory, my will and my affections may be the  
memory, the will and the affections of You.  
I pray You to destroy in me all that is not of You.  
Grant that I may live in You and by You and for You,  
That I may truly say with Saint Paul,  
“I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me.”17

Before his own reception of Holy Communion, the priest prays quietly, “May the receiving of your Body and Blood Lord Jesus Christ, not bring me to judgment and condemnation, but through your loving mercy be for me protection in mind and body and a healing remedy.”18 This theme of the healing and protective power of the
Blessed Sacrament is reiterated when he purifies the paten and chalice and prays, “What has passed our lips as food, O Lord, may we possess in purity of heart, that what has been given to us in time may be our healing for eternity.”¹⁹ These divine provisions are to strengthen us on our earthly journey; this supernatural medicine, dispensed by the Divine Physician, keeps us safe for eternal life.

**Eucharistic Mission**

With the conclusion of Holy Communion, the priest exhorts us to “Go forth …”. “Go forth” to proclaim your faith in God the Father to a broken world; “Go forth” to share your hope in Jesus Christ, the Son of God with a doubting world; “Go forth” filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit to offer tender charity to a dejected and impoverished world. This is our mission; this is the mission of the Church. When the priest sends us forth, we cry out with one voice, “Thanks be to God!” It is with great gratitude to
God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit that we go forth to do God’s will in the world. We who have shared in the Eucharistic Sacrifice now offer ourselves as a living sacrifice for the sake of others.

Indeed, the Eucharist is “a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, [and] a bond of charity.” When we receive Holy Communion, we are given new strength to love our neighbor. In a fourth-century sermon to the faithful in Antioch, St. John Chrysostom warned those who receive the Holy Eucharist, yet fail to love their neighbor: “You have tasted the Blood of the Lord, yet you do not recognize your brother, … You dishonor this table when you do not judge worthy of sharing your food [with] someone [already] judged worthy to take part in this meal. … God freed you from all your sins and invited you here, but you have not become more merciful.”

In our own times, Pope Benedict XVI echoed this warning: “A Eucharist which does not pass
over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented.”

As evening draws to a close and your visit to the parish church is concluded, you imagine how other members in the Body of Christ, somewhere — near or far — are joining their voices with angels and saints in Eucharistic celebration, “from the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the Lord is praised.” The great Eucharistic Mystery is without end on this earth, being for us “a pledge of the glory to come.”

Contemplating this gift of wonder, the Eucharist, the words of Deuteronomy become ours, “For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call upon Him?”
The Real Presence and Eucharistic Devotion

The Mass is “the source and summit of the Christian’s life.”26 From her beginning, the Church adored the Eucharistic Food she received as the Body and Blood of Christ. Over the centuries she developed Eucharistic devotions apart from the Sacrifice of the Mass.27 The Middle Ages distinguished itself by an abundant display of Eucharistic piety. In that time, the Elevation of the Host and Chalice became common and the pealing of bells at the Consecration of the Mass became popular. Soon devotions outside of the Mass such as Benediction, Eucharistic processions, and this Solemnity of Corpus Christi itself were celebrated.

The Solemnity of Corpus Christi was first celebrated near Liège in 1246. Pope Urban IV declared it a universal celebration of the Church in 1264. Later Holy Hours, Forty Hours and
Perpetual Adoration would be added to the Church’s storehouse of Eucharistic treasures. There is a need in these times to renew our Eucharistic catechesis. Studies demonstrate that many Catholics misunderstand Holy Communion to be simply a symbol of the Body and Blood of Christ and not His Real Presence.

In a letter dated December 16, 1955 to a friend, the Catholic author, Flannery O’Connor, relates the story of a dinner party she had attended several years before. At the party was a woman who had been raised Catholic. This woman fondly remembered receiving Communion as a child. Yet, that which she fondly received as a child, she now believed to be simply a beautiful symbol. O’Connor, sitting quietly the whole while, blurted out, “if it’s only a symbol to hell with it.” Catholic theologians would no doubt have chosen different words, but O’Connor did state the Catholic position most plainly. The consecrated bread and wine are not simply symbols, they are the Body and Blood of Christ.
If God created the world *ex nihilo* [out of nothing] — which He did; if God became man — which He did; is He not able to change bread and wine into His Body and Blood? The Church calls this change “transubstantiation.” That is, the very substances of bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. While the substance is changed, the appearance remains that of bread and wine.

There is also a need of catechesis regarding reception of Communion. You may recall as an initial precaution regarding COVID-19, I instructed parishes to discontinue distribution from the common chalice. This caused some to feel they were deprived of receiving Christ whole and entire. Yet, if we tap into the memory of the Church, we discover her ancient teaching that in receiving either the consecrated bread or wine, the communicant receives Christ, whole and entire, His soul and His divinity.
Eucharist and Our Catholic Schools

As I consider the need for Eucharistic catechesis, I look to our Catholic schools to be centers of Eucharistic learning. May the students of our schools come to know and love the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament; may they dedicate themselves to His will. The Church is only able to fulfill her mission in this world if she nourishes her children spiritually and intellectually on the Eucharist.

_O Divine Savior, let our Faith be an acceptable offering while we adore You in Your Real Presence, though yet unseen let us delight to call You with St. Thomas, “My Lord and my God.”_”^{31}
Finally brothers and sisters, let us recognize our Blessed Mother, who under the title of Our Lady of Lourdes, is the patroness of our diocese. Let us consider briefly the Marian dimension of the Church’s Eucharistic spirituality. In *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Pope St. John Paul the Great makes a comparison between Mary answering, “Be it done to me according to your will,” at the Annunciation and our “Amen” at Communion. Mary receives the message of the angel that she will conceive and bear in her womb the Body and Blood of the Son of God; and she voices her belief when she responds, “Be it done to me according to your will.” In the Mass, we who receive the Body and Blood of Christ likewise voice our belief by responding “Amen.”

The Holy Father then speaks of Mary’s visitation to her kinswoman, Elizabeth. On her journey she bears in her womb the Christ child; Mary’s womb serves as the first “tabernacle.”
Hidden in this tabernacle Christ was adored by Elizabeth. Mary is the model of the Church and is a model for each of us. We who receive the Body and Blood of Our Lord are to be tabernacles bearing Christ in the world, bearing the invisible Christ but nevertheless making Him present to the world. It is in beholding Mary, our mother, that we might better behold her Son in the Eucharist.\textsuperscript{33}

\textit{Mary, give me your Heart:}
\textit{so beautiful, so pure, so immaculate;}
\textit{your Heart so full of love and humility that I may be able to receive Jesus in the Bread of Life and love Him as you love Him and serve Him in the distressing guise of the poor.}\textsuperscript{34}
Solemn Declaration

On this Solemnity of Corpus Christi 2020, I declare a Eucharistic Year throughout the Diocese of Spokane, which will conclude with the celebration of this same Solemnity in 2021. This great year will be marked with votive Masses and special devotions in parishes throughout the diocese.

Our fast is finally over, let us give thanks for the gift of the Most Holy Eucharist; let us go forth being Christ-bearers to the world. Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for us! Live Jesus in our hearts forever!

Most Rev. Thomas A. Daly, D.D.

*From the Cathedral of Our Lady of Lourdes, 14 June, the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, in the Year of Our Lord 2020.*
1 The Liturgy of the Hours, Collect, Corpus Christi.
3 Lk 22, 14-20; Mk 14, 22-26; Mt 26, 26-30.
4 St. Ignatius of Antioch, Epistola ad Ephesios, 20, 2: PG 5: 661-662.
5 1 Pt 2, 4.
6 Lk 2, 14.
7 Rv 4.
8 Missale Romanum, Eucharistic Prayer I (The Roman Canon).
10 Missale Romanum, Words of Institution.
11 Prayer of St. Vincent de Paul (1581-1660). My devotion to him comes from my education by the Daughters of Charity, who were founded by St. Vincent and St. Louise de Marillac. I have the relics of St. Vincent and St. Louise in my personal chapel with those of other great Vincentian saints: St. Catherine Labouré, St. Jean-Gabriel Perboyre and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton.
12 See for example, St. Augustine, Sermon 227: PL 38: 1099-1101.
13 Missale Romanum, Eucharistic Prayer III.
15 St. Ambrose, De sacramentis, V. 2. 5-11: PL 16: 447-448.
17 Prayer of St. Jean-Gabriel Perboyre, C.M., (1802-1840), Vincentian priest martyred in Wuhan, China in 1840. I have prayed before his tomb in the chapel of the Motherhouse of the Congregation of the Mission (the Vincentians), 95, rue de Sevres, Paris 6.
18 Missale Romanum, The Communion Rite.
19 ibid.
21 St. John Chrysostom, Homily on First Corinthians, 27, 4: PG 61, 229-230; as cited in: Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1397.
23 Missale Romanum, Eucharistic Prayer III.
24 The Liturgy of the Hours, Antiphon for the Magnificat, Corpus Christi.
25 Dt 4, 7.
29 St. Ambrose, De mysteriis, 9. 52; PL 16: 406-407.
30 This longstanding teaching was articulated at the Council of Constance in 1415 and referred to as the Doctrine of Concomitance: Council of Constance, Session XIII, Decretum de communione sub panis tantum specie: DS 1198-1200. Subsequent Councils reiterated this teaching; see for example, Council of Trent, Session XXI, Canon 3: DS 1729.
31 Adapted prayer of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774-1821). Elizabeth Ann Seton was the first native-born saint and was canonized in 1975. She founded the Sisters of Charity who dedicated themselves to the education of youth. Her community later adopted the rule written for the Daughters of Charity.

Christ the High Priest
Stained glass window above the high altar at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Lourdes