

**ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE**  
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**“THE EUCHARIST AND ECCLESIAL DISCERNMENT”**  
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My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the Holy Father’s representative to the United States, I wish to express His Holiness’ spiritual closeness and paternal affection to the faculty and students of The Catholic University of America, as well as all the guests here present. In a special way, I wish to thank Dr. Peter Kilpatrick, President of the university, for his warm welcome and his leadership of this most esteemed institution, the Provost, Dr. Aaron Dominguez, for the gracious introduction and the Very Rev. Mark Morozowich, Dean of the School of Theology and Religious Studies, for the invitation to deliver the Cardinal John Francis Dearden Lecture.

During the Octave of Easter, the liturgy is punctuated by Gospel readings in which the Lord appears to the disciples after his resurrection and, by means of specific signs, helps them recognize him. These encounters are moments of discernment that also have a close connection with the mystery of the Eucharist. Consider, for example, how the eyes of the two disciples whom Jesus encounters on the road to Emmaus are opened at the breaking of the bread: they recognize him and believe in him (Lk 24:19-35).

I am convinced that the Church today is in need of an eye-opening experience. Jesus meets the two disciples as they are leaving Jerusalem saddened and disoriented. In their words one hears the echo of disappointment, “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel” (Lk 24:21). We have seen many of our brothers and sisters leave the Church disillusioned, thinking that Christ is not the answer to their quest for happiness and meaning. We experience on a daily basis the hardships of living out the faith in the face of a society which is increasingly secularized and polarized. The temptation to remain stuck in the past is real; the path forward is often difficult to discern and discouragement can set in. But now as then the risen Christ walks with us to help us find the way. He is the Way, and we recognize him as such in the breaking of the bread. The Eucharist is the place of this encounter that grants discernment, that affords a new vision of reality, an ecclesial vision of reality.

At this time in which the Holy Father is inviting the Church to walk the synodal path, we are called to see reality with the eyes of faith. The Eucharist plays an essential role in allowing us to obtain such perspective. It is for this reason that I wish to use the occasion of this lecture to reflect on the Eucharist as the fulcrum of ecclesial discernment.

Three statements from Jesus introduce us to the heart of this dynamic that encompasses the Paschal Mystery, the Eucharist and discernment: “I am the resurrection and the life”, “I am the bread of life” and “I am the Way.” The three go together as steps in a gradual process of ever deeper compenetration between the life of the Risen One and that of every believer. In the Eucharist Christ makes himself edible so that the power of his resurrection can be experienced at a personal existential level. Thus, the Eucharist becomes the place of a transformative encounter which points the life of the believer, and the life of the

Church, in a new direction. The paradigm of this trifold connection will serve as the guiding thread for our reflections.

“I am the resurrection and the life”

In the letter to the Corinthians St. Paul writes, “If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain, and your faith has been in vain” (1 Cor 15:13-14).

Is our faith in vain? Is faith irrelevant in today’s world? As Christians, do we have an answer to the great dilemmas that confront humanity, to suffering, to the lack of meaning that many experience in their lives? These questions are central to the mission of Christ’s disciples.

Christianity is fundamentally good news, which means it is a revelation that once communicated has the power to bring about an existential change in the recipient. Consider the example of the battle of Marathon. The Persians are invading Greece and face the army of Athens in a place near the city of Marathon, some 26 miles away from Athens. The people in Athens are terrified. They know that if their army lose the battle their fate is sealed. They will be killed, or sold into slavery. The Greek army wins the battle and the commander dispatches a messenger to announce the victory to the people in Athens. The man runs for 26 miles, delivers the good news, and breathes his last. The moment the news reaches the ears of the Athenians their life changes radically. Fear is gone, hope for the future is restored, they go from crying to shouts of joy. A tangible existential change has taken place in their life.

The good news of Christianity is that Christ is risen, but is this an event that touches people’s lives today, that can be experienced at a personal level? Even if Christ is victorious over death, in fact, we continue to live in a world where death seems to have the last word. As we shall see, the answer to these questions hinges critically on the incarnational aspect of our faith. Christ can be encountered today because he became man and triumphed over death so that he continues to be alive and present in his Church. The possibility of this encounter changes everything, it makes our faith not only relevant but essential as a remedy to the malady of the contemporary man. Pope Francis spoke of this in his Apostolic Letter *Desiderio desideravi*.

If the resurrection were for us a concept, an idea, a thought; if the Risen One were for us the recollection of the recollection of others, however authoritative, as, for example, of the Apostles; if there were not given also to us the possibility of a true encounter with Him, that would be to declare the newness of the Word made flesh to have been all used up. Instead, the Incarnation, in addition to being the only always new event that history knows, is also the very method that the Holy Trinity has chosen to open to us the way of communion. Christian faith is either an encounter with Him alive, or it does not exist. (Pope Francis Apostolic Letter *Desiderio Desideravi*, 10)

The Paschal Mystery stands at the very heart of the Eucharist. If Christ is not victorious over death, then the Eucharist has nothing to offer, it remains a purely ritual observance of a group of people and will eventually disappear altogether. In *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* Saint John Paul II writes,

The Church was born of the Paschal Mystery. For this very reason, the Eucharist, which is in an outstanding way the sacrament of the Paschal Mystery, stands at the center of the Church’s life (Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 3).

The connection between Eucharist and Paschal Mystery, so readily apparent in the early Church, was progressively obscured by the development of a theology that focused primarily on the sacrificial aspect of this sacrament. It would take too long to consider in detail such historical development, but it is worth noting that this shift came at the expense of the profoundly incarnational dimension of the Eucharistic and consequently of the Church.

In order to catch a glimpse of the original dynamic, which links Eucharist, Paschal Mystery and discernment, we have to go back to the beginning, to the accounts of the resurrection appearances that the evangelists have preserved for us and that afford us a more complete vision of this mystery.

I have already mentioned in passing the episode of Jesus' appearance to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He meets them in their concrete existential situation of dejection, he walks with them and explains the events of the suffering and death of Christ in the light of the Scripture. He is the risen Lord and yet they do not recognize him. The event of the resurrection has not touched their lives. It is only when the Lord sits at table with them and breaks bread that their eyes are open, the good news of his victory over death reaches them. This encounter issues a change of direction, and gives them discernment about the path to follow. They return to Jerusalem, the place of the painful passion of their Master, with great joy (Lk 24:19-35).

In the cenacle they meet with the Apostles gathered there and, as they recount their experience, the Lord himself appears in the room while the doors are closed. They think he is a ghost and are all afraid. To help them overcome their fear the Lord invites them to touch his wounds, to look at the marks of his passion. This is remarkable. To dispel the doubt, to heal the wound of their betrayal, the risen Lord does not make an imposing appearance, or perform a wondrous sign of his glory. He rather invites them to behold the unmistakable signs of his humanity. Given their lingering fears he asks them for something to eat and they offer him a portion of roasted fish (Lk. 24: 36-43). Jesus' participation in this meal, reminiscent of the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and the fishes, with its clear Eucharistic overtones, communicates to the disciples the truth of his victory over death. His victory becomes also theirs. Their fears dissolve and the Lord entrusts them with the mission of bearing witness to his resurrection.

In the Gospel of John, we hear of another appearance of Christ, this time on the Lake of Galilee. On this occasion, the Lord meets the disciples who, disillusioned and disoriented, had gone back to fishing. The Lord appears and calls out to them from the shore, but they do not recognize him. He asks them if they have anything to eat and invites them to throw the net on the right side of the boat. At the miraculous catch of fish that ensues their eyes are opened. When they bring the net ashore, they find a meal prepared. Jesus distributes to them bread and fish and then proceeds to entrust Peter with his mission. Once again, the power of his resurrection is communicated through the symbols of a Eucharistic banquet and, in that context, Christ restores the apostles' ability to discern, to discover their calling (John 21:1-23).

There is one more Gospel passage that I wish to mention because, even though it is not a post-resurrection appearance, it displays the same dynamic. It is the miracle that Jesus performs at the wedding of Cana, which brings into the picture the other great eucharistic symbol, wine. Jesus is invited to the feast, which quickly turns into a situation of distress because the wine runs out. Solicited by his mother, he intervenes and makes a better wine appear. John closes the episode commenting that this was the first sign Jesus performed, manifesting his glory and his disciples believed in him. At this festive meal wine symbolizes joy. The banquet is an image of human existence that cannot be truly happy without Christ. In this concrete existential situation, he intervenes providing a new and better type of joy. The eternal life that comes with

him is communicated to the people who partake of the wine. The sign performed reveals Jesus' identity, it affords discernment, helping the disciples recognize him as the Messiah (John 2:1-12).

The dynamic that I have tried to illustrate through these Gospel passages is one of great importance for the life of the Church today. The Lord chooses to communicate the transformative good news of his resurrection through Eucharistic symbols, created realities that make this mystery accessible. These mediate an encounter which happens at an existential level, where the recipient experiences the closeness of Christ. The humanity of the Savior, makes possible this personal connection. Hence, the incarnational dimension of the redeeming act of Christ is brought to the fore. St. Teresa of Avila eloquently said,

I see clearly that God desires that if we are going to please him and receive his great favors this must come about through the most sacred humanity of Christ (Teresa of Avila, *Autobiography*).

The Paschal Mystery is fundamentally a dynamic that acts from within. The good news is a seed that must be planted in the soil of the human condition. In the letter to the Corinthians St. Paul writes,

So it will be at the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body (1 Cor 15:42-44).

Bread and wine become the transubstantiated species, created realities become the vehicle of grace. The transformation that the resurrection of Christ comes to bring about only happens in the mysterious encounter between our weakness and God's power. In this sense, the Eucharistic symbols operate at a very deep level, expressing and realizing the integration of created realities with the workings of grace. To understand more deeply the incarnational dimension of this sacrament, we now turn our attention to an exploration of the significance of the Eucharistic symbols.

### "I am the Bread of Life"

This statement of Jesus introduces the next section and a few remarks on Christian anthropology are in order at this point, as they serve to set the right frame of reference for our discussion. To this end, allow me to briefly consider the thought of Henri De Lubac on the issue of the supernatural finality of human nature. De Lubac was worried that a certain strand of Catholic theology, circulating during his time, was prone to a fallacy exemplified in the fact that, "many could see salvation only in a complete severance between the natural and the supernatural." (Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism*). This assertion came to mind as I reflected on the polarization that we witness today, especially when it comes to the role of the Eucharist in the life of the Church. The relevance of this sacrament, in fact, is often analyzed through the lenses of a Christian anthropology that is progressively losing the appreciation of the intrinsic link between the creatural condition of man and his supernatural finality. Hence, we see emerging in both theory and practice a tendency to understand the supernatural in a way that renders the Eucharistic sacrament ethereal, removed from the most concrete aspects of the human condition, a mystery that imposes a certain distance and calls primarily for a posture of contemplation. Such incomplete perspective is at the root of the ideological debate concerning the Eucharist, its weaponization in the cultural wars and the at times isolated focus on Eucharistic adoration.

The Christian anthropology that must function as the framework of reference to fully comprehend the significance of the sacramental signs is rather one that is vocational, one that identifies in human nature

a teleological propensity for the beatific vision. This is possible in virtue of God's call, which generates in the human heart a longing for eternity. De Lubac writes,

For this desire is not some "accident" in me. It does not result from some peculiarity, possibly alterable, of my individual being, or from some historical contingency whose effects are more or less transitory. *A fortiori* it does not in any sense depend upon my deliberate will. It is in me as a result of my belonging to humanity as it is, that humanity which is, as we say, "called." For God's call is constitutive. My finality, which is expressed by this desire, is inscribed upon my very being as it has been put into this universe by God. And, by God's will, I now have no other genuine end, no end really assigned to my nature or presented for my free acceptance under any guise, except that of "seeing God" (Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*).

The desire for God is rooted in the creatural dimension of mankind. It is the result of being fashioned in the image and likeness of God. "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you," said St. Augustine in the Confessions. We discern inscribed in the very structure of created realities a vocational dimension that generates a need for God. "All creation," St. Paul writes, "has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Rm 8:22-23).

Every person experiences this existential tension towards God mediated through the body. It is a phenomenon that concerns the whole human apparatus. Hence, the very corporeity of the person expresses a call to transcendence, to an intimate union with the divine that cannot be realized or experienced apart from the body. In one of the catecheses on the theology of the body St. John Paul II writes,

The body, and it alone, is capable of making visible what is invisible, the spiritual and divine. It was created to transfer into the visible reality of the world, the invisible mystery hidden in God from time immemorial, and thus to be a sign of it (Saint John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, Feb 20, 1980).

In light of this anthropology, created realities become the appropriate vehicle for grace. The inbreaking of the supernatural finds a receptive soil in the very lowliness of the human condition. Echoing the words of Mary, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my savior, for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant" (Lk 1:46-48).

The terms of the debate have somewhat changed from the time de Lubac wrote, yet I find his insights appropriate to identify a root cause for some of the tendencies emerging today in Catholic circles, which the Pope has denounced when speaking of neo-Pelagianism and neo-Gnosticism.

The neo-Pelagian fails to discern the necessary integration of the working of grace within the very fabric of the human nature, and thus advocates for a certain autonomy of the latter in the achievement of salvation. The dichotomy natural/supernatural can be seen here working in the background and fueling what pope Francis characterizes as,

The self-absorbed Promethean neo-Pelagianism of those who ultimately trust only in their own powers and feel superior to others because they observe certain rules or remain intransigently faithful to a particular Catholic style of the past (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 94).

Neo-Gnosticism is a different shoot from the same stock. Common to the gnostic archetype is the juxtaposition of corporal realities, conceived as evil, and spiritual realities, the realm of the good. It is easy to recognize in this worldview the same dichotomy severing the natural from the supernatural and resulting in what the Pope denounces as the attitudes of,

Elite groups offering a higher spirituality, generally disembodied, which ends up in a preoccupation with certain pastoral “*quaestiones disputatae*” (Pope Francis, *Address to the Leadership of the Episcopal Conferences of Latin America during the General Coordination Meeting*).

The antidote to these tendencies lies in the correct integration between natural and supernatural in the economy of salvation. As we have seen, the call of every human person to a profound union with God is discernable through the body, through the specific historical instantiation of being. Christ’s salvific act is mediated through his sacred humanity, and communicated through the symbols of bread and wine that he chose to be the vehicle of such communication, and which are expressions of the creatural dimension of the human person. The symbol opens the natural to the supernatural.

The Liturgy does not leave us alone to search out an individual supposed knowledge of the mystery of God. Rather, it takes us by the hand, together, as an assembly, to lead us deep within the mystery that the Word and the sacramental signs reveal to us. And it does this, consistent with all action of God, following the way of the Incarnation, that is, by means of the symbolic language of the body, which extends to things in space and time (Pope Francis Apostolic Letter *Desiderio Desideravi*, 19).

What is a symbol? In what way does it facilitate the weaving of the supernatural into the fabric of creation? The Catechism teaches that,

A sacramental celebration is woven from signs and symbols. In keeping with the divine pedagogy of salvation, their meaning is rooted in the work of creation and in human culture, specified by the events of the Old Covenant and fully revealed in the person and work of Christ. In human life, signs and symbols occupy an important place. As a being at once body and spirit, man expresses and perceives spiritual realities through physical signs and symbols. As a social being, man needs signs and symbols to communicate with others, through language, gestures, and actions. The same holds true for his relationship with God (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1145-1146).

Bread and wine are symbols of nature, they are the fruits of the earth that God gives, but they are also the result of human work. As such, they are an expression of culture and freedom, the actualization of the human spirit, the activity by means of which a person humanizes the world around her. The tilling of the soil is also the activity assigned to Adam after the fall, it is the direction of the way back to God, so that work becomes redemptive.

Moreover, the Eucharist is a meal, a moment of communion, where social interactions are forged, where the person develops by means of the corporeity of her existence. The person, in fact, develops through relationality and every human relation is mediated by the body. In offering food and drink at the Eucharistic meal Jesus underlines that the recipients are all beings in need. In this sense, hunger defines an essential element of corporeity which points to the same dynamic described by de Lubac, to the desire for God. Luigi Giussani spoke of this in his book *The Religious sense*,

Life is hunger, thirst, and passion for an ultimate object, which looms over the horizon, and yet always lies beyond it. When this is recognized, man becomes a tireless searcher (Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*).

Symbols are also an expression of history. In them there is a distillation of the human experience, so to speak. Consider, for example, the art of making wine, refined by the experience of centuries. This also means that symbols enshrine a memory of the past. In this sense, the body becomes the tapestry of our history. We can discover on it the traces left by the meandering of our freedom through the maze of both good and bad decisions. The body of Christ bore the marks of the sin of mankind, the misuse of human freedom brought to its ultimate consequence, the rejection of God. Hence, his body becomes the sacramental sign of the redemption of all human history, but more essentially of our personal history. It is possible to understand, therefore, how profound was the sign of the Risen One showing to his frightened apostles the wounds of his passion. They are the telltale signs of human weakness. But these wounds are glorious, they can be touched without producing pain. The Lord invites the disciples to thus enter into a profound communion with his Paschal Mystery that proceeds through the redemption of their personal history, made sacramentally visible and accessible in his glorified body.

The Eucharistic liturgy is characterized by a movement proceeding from God. He comes to look for us, he enters the space of our lives even if the doors are closed, as they were in the cenacle. He has the power to win our resistance and descend into the history of each believer. He enlightens it through an encounter made possible by his humanity, through which the divine life is given. This dynamic is sacred and is the safeguard of the gratuitousness of the salvific act, which can never be the outcome of human initiative. The Pope elaborates on this very point in *Desiderio desideravi* when says,

If there were lacking our astonishment at the fact that the Paschal Mystery is rendered present in the concreteness of sacramental signs, we would truly risk being impermeable to the ocean of grace that floods every celebration. Efforts to favor a greater quality to the celebration, even if praiseworthy, are not enough; nor is the call for a greater interiority. Interiority can run the risk of reducing itself to an empty subjectivity if it has not taken on board the revelation of the Christian mystery. The encounter with God is not the fruit of an individual interior searching for Him, but it is an event given. We can encounter God through the new fact of the Incarnation that reaches in the Last Supper the extreme point of his desiring to be eaten by us. How can the misfortune of distancing ourselves from the allure of the beauty of this gift happen to us? (Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter *Desiderio Desideravi*, 24).

The fact that the encounter with Christ happens in the context of the liturgy also points to the ecclesial character of the Eucharist. The Church draws her life from the Eucharist. In the Acts of the Apostles this dynamic is skillfully summarized by the brief statements that describe the early Christian community. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the breaking of the bread" (Acts 2:42). "The community of the believers had but one mind and heart" (Acts 4:32). It is in the heart of the Christian assembly that it is possible to experience the victory of Christ over death. We are taken up in the dynamic of his Paschal Mystery as a community of believers, not as individuals. Thus, the Church becomes sacrament of salvation, the place where an intimate knowledge of the Savior and of his will is possible. The Eucharist is the place of proximity between Christ and his Church, which in turns engenders a moment of profound ecclesial discernment. We have now all the elements necessary to turn our attention to the last panel of our tryptic.

## “I am the Way”

It is necessary to regain anew in the Church the space of proximity, which is the forum of ecclesial discernment. “Lord, we do not know where you are going,” Thomas asked to Jesus, “how can we know the way?” (John 14:5). In answer to this question Jesus does not make an appeal to the intellect by giving a rational explanation of the direction to follow. He does not offer a roadmap with turn-by-turn instructions. This is what some desire today. A Catholicism that can spell out definite directives, provide a few boxes to check in order to be in the right relationship with God. This is a mechanism of control that curtails the horizon of faith and folds it onto itself.

Jesus answers by declaring that he is the Way. Hence, discerning becomes encountering, it is a process of knowing which requires personal involvement. The posture of the scientific method mandates a certain distancing between the observer and the object of study. Knowledge is thus obtained by means of an aseptic operation that results in a dissection of reality. As we have seen, however, the dynamic outlined by the appearances of the Risen One to his apostles is quite the opposite. There, knowledge and discernment come as a result of a movement that bridges the gap between the observer and the reality that is being probed.

Discernment is at its core an act of discovery that happens by means of a process of rapprochement and immersion rather than abstraction. I am convinced that many of the difficulties we encounter in the Church today, especially when it comes to discerning the way forward, and which result in division and polarization, are caused by the absurd claim to analyze reality from a lofty ideological stronghold. The Christian is never a spectator. There is no better way to discover who Christ is than to enter into a relationship with him. The correct hermeneutic, one that affords an unadulterated vision of reality, is that of the person who lets herself be drawn into a personal relationship, who is willing to abandon her prejudices. This person reaps the fruit of her search and has a much keener grasp of reality than the one conditioned by preconceived ideologies.

To Andrew and John that went looking for him, who were searching for a direction in life, Jesus answered “Come and see” (John 1:38-39). Commenting on this Gospel passage in one of the Wednesday catecheses on discernment the Pope writes,

A very brief exchange, but it is the beginning of a change that, step by step, will mark their whole life. Years later, the Evangelist will continue to remember that encounter that changed him forever, and he will remember that time: “It was about four o’clock in the afternoon.” It is the hour when time and the eternal met in his life. And in a good decision there is an encounter between God’s will and our will; there is an encounter between the present path and the eternal. Making the right decision, after a path of discernment, is to make this encounter: time with eternity (Pope Francis, General Audience of August, 31, 2022).

Paraphrasing the words of the Pope we could say that discernment results from an encounter between the natural and the supernatural. Here is the rapprochement with our line of thought. The Eucharist is the place of such encounter, the Eucharist is the place of proximity. As we have seen, communion with the Eucharistic symbols mediates a transformation by which the power of Christ’s resurrection enters the life of the believer. Quoting again from *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, a passage that echoes the words of *Lumen Gentium*,

When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the memorial of her Lord's death and resurrection, this central event of salvation becomes really present and the work of our redemption is carried out (Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 11).

The door by which salvation enters is that of the body, through which Christ redeems every aspect of the human condition. Christ touches our life, our history, our poverty and enlightens them from within.

This encounter produces a knowledge which is intimate, and which charts a new direction in life. We do not need a map to know where to go, to discern the path forward. We need a person. The words of Saint John Paul II come to mind,

We are certainly not seduced by the naive expectation that, faced with the great challenges of our time, we shall find some magic formula. No, we shall not be saved by a formula but by a Person, and the assurance which he gives us: I am with you! (Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 29).

The communion with Christ that the Church experiences in the Eucharist is the ecclesial compass. The north is the direction of immersion, of entering every situation of human desolation following the way of the Incarnation. This is the reason why Pope Francis is inviting the Church to go out, to be missionary, to reach the existential peripheries. The New Evangelization is not a program, it cannot be devised by a committee. It must be the fruit of a discovery that proceeds from an honest encounter with reality. Allow me to quote Giussani again,

And here is the alternative in which man risks himself, even if almost unconsciously: either you face reality wide open, loyally, with the bright eyes of a child, calling a spade a spade, embracing its entire presence, even its meaning; either this, or you place yourself in front of reality, defend yourself against it, almost with your arms flung in front of your eyes to ward off unwelcomed and unexpected blows (Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*).

Many ask how we evangelize the modern world. The answer can only be found by evangelizing, with that openness to other that Pope Francis is asking us to have. There, in the struggle of the everyday encounter with sin, with poverty, with the challenges of indifferentism and atheism, we will find the path. The charisma of the evangelizer is that of a path-finder, of one who navigates by sight.

The same reasoning lies behind the invitation of the Pope to synodality, which is not an undercover attempt to introduce a parliamentary system. Rather, it is an exercise of communion, which expresses at its core the true way of being Church. Synodality invites us to listen to the other, to break the barrier of isolation in order to know what the suffering of our neighbors are. Here again the Eucharist is the north star. It leads us down the path of the Incarnation not to judge but to love.

### Conclusion

This lecture was intended to offer a foretaste of a mystery that surpasses us and whose depth we will never be able to probe. I feel the responsibility to offer a perspective that might provide a way out of the many ideological impasses that we experience today. The Eucharist provides a paradigm for rapprochement. In this sacrament we experience at a personal level the love of Christ and the power of his resurrection. We experience it if we are willing to look inwardly, at the reality of poverty that characterizes the human condition, and which becomes the place of proximity with Christ and the

sacramental sign of our salvation. This experience has the power to level the barriers of prejudices, political factions, racial divides and cultural differences.

I have had the opportunity to live out this dynamic in my responsibilities as Apostolic Nuncio. In every country where I was called to serve, I had the privilege of encountering different realities. I always made it a point to travel, to see and touch firsthand the concrete situation of many local Churches. From the vantage point of these experiences, I witnessed how the Church discerns, how we can arrive at a knowledge of the reality that surrounds us and to interpret it with eyes of mercy. Such knowledge becomes thus infused by the experience of compassion.

A Church that is compassionate becomes a beacon of light, the sacrament of salvation, the sign of Him who has loved us to the point of giving himself totally to us, so that we might experience the power of his victory over death.