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APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
“LIVING A EUCHARISTIC LIFE: TRANSFORMING THE CULTURE”
CMSWR NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
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My Dear Sisters in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, I greet you in the name of the Holy Father, assuring you of his prayers and closeness as you gather for this national assembly, addressing the theme, “Living a Eucharistic Life.” The theme is timely as I am sure your communities, like the Church throughout the United States, are preparing to celebrate the Eucharistic Revival.

Today I would like to speak to you about transformation of our culture through building a Eucharistic culture. I would like to begin by offering an overview of *Leisure as the Basis of Culture* by the German philosophy Josef Pieper and then to offer a few ideas, following the thought of a lay theologian, Timothy O’Malley, regarding characteristics of a Eucharistic culture.

Leisure as the Basis of Culture – the Restoration of the Person

Very often at the Nunciature, I will tell members of the staff that 1946 was a very good year, because it was the year of my birth and a number of others who work at the Nunciature. However, it was in 1947 that Josef Pieper would give a series of lectures which would be collected in the work *Leisure as the Basis of Culture*. Emerging from the Second World War, Christians had to face a critical question: could society be rebuilt on the basis of culture, whether secular or Christian, on the basis of Aristotle and Thomas?

For Pieper, if a Christian culture was to be rebuilt, then this would be contingent on first restoring the heart of man, and this restoration demands leisure. It would seem that after the war, and even in our day, work is more necessary than ever. I might add that emerging from the pandemic there is much today – in restoring a regularity of life and work; of achieving racial harmony in the country; of dealing with polarization in our neighborhoods and in politics; in fostering a greater awareness of our own common home and the need for some asceticism; and, in welcoming new immigrants to the country.

The amount of catechetical activity that is necessary, after generations of poor catechesis, seems endless, and this is one of the reasons for the Eucharistic revival year. Moreover, the Church, as a whole, has the work of rebuilding trust with its own people following the scandals. Additionally, it seems that there are fewer priests and religious to do the work; thus, the amount of work that each of us faces, including you as women religious, seems to have multiplied. There is much work to do, and yet, Pieper contends that to have a true revival, renewal, or restoration, we must first have leisure to restore the heart of man. Only on this basis can culture be restored.

We can, therefore, ask: *What is leisure?* To answer this, I think we must begin by defining *what leisure is not*. Leisure is not idleness or slothfulness. It is certainly not taking vacations, watching television

or movies or surfing the internet. It is not that which involves our weekend or our hobbies; rather, leisure is that which is opposed to toil.

Leisure is not embraced for the sake of work or for utilitarian ends. Sometimes, for example, we read a book, but only inasmuch as it is useful for our work rather than for the enjoyment of the book itself. Sometimes we think that leisure is that time allotted to us so that we can be refreshed for work or for ministry. But if that is all leisure is, haven't we become subjects of the "total work" state?

Attempts were made in the last century to reduce man to mere work, a cog in the machine to serve the state, to serve the collective. In our own day, we live in an increasingly technocratic society in which there is an ever-greater emphasis on the use of technology to enhance productivity and economic success. In this context, leisure is reduced to refreshing us for work or to a mere social function that while technically not work, in fact, is for work.

In this way, man and woman, priests and religious, are also held captive by the total work state. We are becoming robbed of our dignity by forces that are seemingly too great and powerful to be stopped. Even religion is co-opted for work: "to work is to pray" or "make your work your prayer." People are "forced" to work even on Sundays, and while occasionally, we have "Labor Day" or some holiday off, the culture that once supported the life of faith has been usurped by the culture of total work.

There are, of course, a few who resist this. On the one hand, you have already committed Catholics and Christians or even pious Jews who are very intentional about giving the Lord His due by refraining from servile work on a particular day, whether Sunday or the Sabbath, but these are few and far between. The other form of "resistance" is not so much resistance as resignation. Many people today simply have given up on searching for work. There are many positions open but no one to fill them, and this is not merely a function of a low birth rate but also of a group of people who no longer want to live in a "total work" state, which breeds a listlessness.

In Pieper's time, and it could be said of us today, it is the Church which forbids useful activity and servile work on Sundays, exhorting its members to keep particular days holy. That Sunday is reserved for God, however, is forgotten by the vast majority of people, even churchgoers. Restoring the culture demands reclaiming Sunday as a day of rest, and you, as women religious, can be witnesses to this, not only within your communities, but especially to the lay faithful.

It is not that work doesn't have value; rather, it is that when work and productivity drive everything, we lose a sense of who we are as persons, including a sense of who we are before God. It is interesting when we think about the effects of the pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, we had many plans and initiatives, but during the pandemic, when everything was locked down, those plans went away. So man, ourselves included, had been swept up in work so much so that we defined ourselves by our work; thus, it became difficult to act significantly outside of our work.

The "fulfilling life" of work proved to be a mere illusion, and many discovered themselves to be slaves of a Pharaoh named work and in need of a new Moses to deliver them. Work cannot be the source of our happiness, nor can it be the basis of a Christian or Eucharistic culture, for that we need, according to Pieper, leisure.

Saint Augustine famously wrote: "You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You." Leisure is the anti-thesis of the restless heart that tends toward

workaholism to fill the void. Leisure tames the restless heart, and the silence afforded by leisure allows God's plan to unfold. Leisure, then, is contemplative; it permits us to receive God's gifts, including spiritual gifts received in Adoration, with humility.

When we are engaged in prayer, in the eyes of the world, we are simply sitting or kneeling in a place. We are not working. We are not being economically productive. We are wasting time. However, leisure and prayer are not principally concerned with utility, but with bringing a well-roundedness to the whole person. In prayer, we can affirm truth, goodness, and beauty; that is, we can express our faith in God Himself.

Pieper contends that the ultimate form of leisure is worship, which he describes as "the deepest springs by which leisure is fed." Although our worship and the sacrifice of the Mass may be useful, worship is never carried out for purely utilitarian purposes. In worshipping God, we direct our focus toward Him for His sake, allowing Him to renew us, particularly on celebrations of Feasts or the Lord's Day.

The tendency we have is to give ourselves entirely in service, but this could also be a manifestation of workaholism instead of leisure and true worship. Here, the words of Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est* can be helpful:

"Man cannot live by oblation, descending love alone. He cannot always give, he must also receive. Anyone who wishes to give love must also receive love as a gift. Certainly, as the Lord tells us, one can become a source from which rivers of living water flow (cf. *Jn* 7:37-38). Yet to become such a source, one must constantly drink anew from the original source, which is Jesus Christ, from whose pierced heart flows the love of God (cf. *Jn* 19:34)." (BENEDICT XVI, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *DEUS CARITAS EST*, 25 DECEMBER 2005, 8)

Characteristics of a Eucharistic Culture

Renewal, through the Eucharistic liturgy, is essential for the restoration of man, and, therefore, of culture, the fruit of man's activity. But is our ecclesial culture truly Eucharistic? We say that the Eucharist makes the Church, and the Church makes the Eucharist. Is it true? The hope of this year is a Eucharistic revival, that is, an awakening in the hearts of the faithful of the desire to live a truly Eucharistic life in light of the Church's Eucharistic faith. What then will help restore a Eucharistic culture in our communities and in this country?

In his book, *Becoming Eucharistic People*, Timothy O'Malley offers four theses about building a Eucharistic culture: 1) A Eucharistic culture is a human creation, which is nonetheless entirely dependent on the self-giving love of Christ in the Eucharistic mystery; 2) A Eucharistic culture is also a worldview, one that shapes how we approach all of reality; 3) A Eucharistic culture is interested in every dimension of what it means to be human; and 4) Eucharistic culture pertains not only to persons in the parish but to the neighborhood, the city, and the nation.

As we examine these four theses, it is important to understand them within the context of what it means to be human and fully alive, and we are most fully alive in communion with God, who restores us through leisure and worship.

In examining O'Malley's first thesis - A Eucharistic culture is a human creation, which is nonetheless entirely dependent on the self-giving love of Christ in the Eucharistic mystery - we must

acknowledge that the Eucharistic liturgy is not defined by, nor is it limited by, human activity. The Mass is principally about what Christ has accomplished through His Death, Resurrection, and Ascension for the salvation of the world. It is from His Paschal Mystery that the Church comes forth. Liturgy is principally the work of God for us and for the whole cosmos.

Benedict XVI, in *Sacramentum caritatis*, explained:

“The remembrance of his perfect gift consists not in the mere repetition of the Last Supper, but in the Eucharist itself, that is, in the radical newness of Christian worship. In this way, Jesus left us the task of entering into his "hour." "The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' act of self-oblation. More than just statically receiving the incarnate Logos, we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving." Jesus "draws us into himself." The substantial conversion of bread and wine into his body and blood introduces within creation the principle of a radical change, a sort of "nuclear fission," to use an image familiar to us today, which penetrates to the heart of all being, a change meant to set off a process which transforms reality, a process leading ultimately to the transfiguration of the entire world, to the point where God will be all in all (cf. 1 Cor 15:28).” (BENEDICT XVI, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *SACRAMENTUM CARITATIS*, 22 FEBRUARY 2007, 11)

Because we are “drawn into Him,” we also share in His self-giving. Our cooperation in His saving work also transforms us, so that we can contribute to the transformation of culture. It is in this sense that we can understand the words “human creation”. We want to avoid a neo-Pelagianism of which Pope Francis warns in his letter *Desiderio desideravi*:

“If neo-Pelagianism intoxicates us with the presumption of a salvation earned through our own efforts, the liturgical celebration purifies us, proclaiming the gratuity of the gift of salvation received in faith. Participating in the Eucharistic sacrifice is not our own achievement, as if because of it we could boast before God or before our brothers and sisters.” (FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC LETTER *DESIDERIO DESIDERAVI*, 29 JUNE 2022, 20)

Just because the culture of a religious community or parish may be a “human creation” does not mean that it is a Eucharistic culture. We may have read and studied the latest letter of the Holy Father, been grounded in the approach of Saint Thomas to the Eucharistic Mystery, or have long hours of Adoration, but these do not in themselves create a Eucharistic culture.

Rather, what is necessary, O’Malley contends, is reverence, placing Christ at the center of all that we do. To have a healthy sense of reverence, or fear of the Lord, is what the Holy Father calls wonder or astonishment. He writes:

“The astonishment or wonder ... is ...marveling at the fact that the salvific plan of God has been revealed in the paschal deed of Jesus (cf. Eph 1:3-14), and the power of this paschal deed continues to reach us in the celebration of the “mysteries,” of the sacraments. ... if the astonishment is of the right kind, then there is no risk that the otherness of God’s presence will not be perceived, even within the closeness that the Incarnation intends. If the reform has eliminated that vague “sense of mystery,” then more than a cause for accusations, it is to its credit. Beauty, just like truth, always engenders wonder, and when these are referred to the mystery of God, they lead to adoration.” (Ibid., 25)

Within our own religious communities or even those parishes, hospitals, or schools that we serve, we could ask:

Do we celebrate feast days in a way that truly points to Christ or are they merely an intrusion into the “total work state”?

Our celebrations of Mass an opportunity for an encounter with Christ? In what way are they an encounter between the Divine and human?

What in our community is transformed or needs to be transformed through our worship?

Do we have a healthy sense of reverence and awe in the liturgy or do we remain distracted by the so-called liturgy wars?

What are some strategies for promoting a healthy sense of reverence, beyond mere externals?

Turning to O’Malley’s second thesis - A Eucharistic culture is also a worldview, one that shapes how we approach all of reality – we are invited to deepen our understanding of active participation in the Eucharistic liturgy. Of course, you may exercise liturgical roles such as reading or singing, but how do you participate in the Mass interiorly?

Participation in the Mass is not merely interior either. The Pope cautions:

“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.” (Ibid., 24)

Rather than being reduced to “empty subjectivity”, true active participation would lead to a greater awareness that the Eucharist is not merely something or Someone to be received but that it is a mystery that is to be celebrated and lived, that is, in relationship to daily life.

Integral to living the Eucharistic mystery is deepening our own theological understanding of the Eucharist through better intellectual formation but also offering catechesis to students, members of our community in formation, adults through faith formation efforts, that is essentially Eucharistic in its nature. While we want to pass on deeper knowledge of the faith, the Holy Father’s letter on the liturgy also wants to help immerse us into the mystery of Christ in the liturgy.

Deeper knowledge of the Eucharist is not merely intellectual knowledge, but demands a catechesis that attunes the heart of individuals to imitate Christ in every dimension of life. Is this happening in your communities? Perhaps, it is, but could this “attunement” of heart be further refined or deepened? What from your own experience of prayer could be helpful to the lay faithful in educating their hearts to the life of prayer? Similarly, your communities could examine whether the structure or rhythm of your day is Eucharistic, not only liturgically but in the way it builds community. What insights from your spirituality of communion could be brought to the communities you serve?

O’Malley himself offers strategies for expanding our “Eucharistic worldview” to include all of reality. First, he suggests studying scripture and doctrine in an intentional way and proposing these truths to others. Second, he suggests working on formation of the heart – the dispositions necessary to enter

more deeply into worship with a spirit of reverence, thanksgiving, and praise. Third, the Eucharist cannot be separated from morality inasmuch as living the Eucharistic mystery means responding in love to the mystery received. Fourth, equipping others in the life of prayer is critical as extension of Eucharistic gratitude; in this regard, the experience of Mass for an hour each week must be extended to reading our daily experiences, work, and family through a Eucharistic lens, and finally, he suggests nurturing our love for our community – whether it is your own religious community or your neighbors.

You sisters know the challenges of community life; nevertheless, this is an opportunity for you to witness to those outside of your community as to what love looks like, even by loving those members of your religious communities who, at times, grate on you or try your patience. The Eucharist is mystery, not only to be believed through better catechesis, but to be lived through love of neighbor.

O'Malley's third thesis - A Eucharistic culture is interested in every dimension of what it means to be human – follows this same line of reasoning. Returning to Benedict XVI's *Sacramentum caritatis*, we can learn that the Eucharist is a mystery to be lived. Benedict writes:

“Christianity's new worship includes and transfigures every aspect of life: ... Christians, in all their actions, are called to offer true worship to God. Here the intrinsically eucharistic nature of Christian life begins to take shape. The Eucharist, since it embraces the concrete, everyday existence of the believer, makes possible, day by day, the progressive transfiguration of all those called by grace to reflect the image of the Son of God (cf. *Rom 8:29ff.*). There is nothing authentically human – our thoughts and affections, our words and deeds – that does not find in the sacrament of the Eucharist the form it needs to be lived to the full. Here we can see the full human import of the radical newness brought by Christ in the Eucharist: the worship of God in our lives cannot be relegated to something private and individual, but tends by its nature to permeate every aspect of our existence. Worship pleasing to God thus becomes a new way of living our whole life, each particular moment of which is lifted up, since it is lived as part of a relationship with Christ and as an offering to God. The glory of God is the living man (cf. *1 Cor 10:31*). And the life of man is the vision of God.” (BENEDICT XVI, *SACRAMENTUM CARITATIS*, 71)

Thus, a Eucharistic culture, in contrast, to American society, is one that does not relegate faith to the individual or private sphere; rather, a Eucharistic culture is one that touches upon every dimension of life. A Eucharistic culture is one that evangelizes, and this demands not only that the Church herself be evangelized, but that the Church, that is, we, allow every aspect of our lives to be touched by Christ's love so that we may share that love with all those around us in every strata of society, mindful of the words of Pope Paul VI: “For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new.” (PAUL VI, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *EVANGELII NUNTIANDI*, 8 DECEMBER 1975, 18)

Finally, O'Malley proposes that a Eucharistic culture pertains not only to persons in the parish but to the neighborhood, the city, and the nation. Here we see the continuity in the thought between Benedict XVI and Pope Francis. Benedict XVI reminds us that worship pleasing to God demands a public witness to our faith. Pope Francis reminds us that the Church is always missionary, and he does so by emphasizing the virtues of solidarity and human fraternity.

How are the joys, sorrows, and concerns of those within my religious community part of my concerns and my prayer? How are the sufferings and misery, the loneliness, hopes and dreams of those in my neighborhood or city brought to my worship of God or my Holy Hour? Another way of asking the same question is: what are the public consequences of the celebration of the Eucharist in my community? Another related question is: does the Eucharistic culture of my community, as we live and worship now, contribute something significant to the flourishing of the whole city or *polis*?

My sisters, I do not have all the answers for you. I only propose a few things for you to stimulate your reflection. If we are to have a meaningful Eucharistic Revival, then first we ourselves need to be renewed. Pieper proposes that the basis for cultural renewal and for the restoration of man is leisure, whose highest form is worship of God. O'Malley, in conjunction with the Popes, proposes characteristics of a culture based on the Eucharist as transformative of our lives and our world.

I conclude with the words of Pope Francis:

“The Liturgy gives glory to God not because we can add something to the beauty of the inaccessible light within which God dwells (cf. 1Ti 6:16). Nor can we add to the perfection of the angelic song which resounds eternally through the heavenly places. The Liturgy gives glory to God because it allows us — here, on earth — to see God in the celebration of the mysteries, and in seeing Him to draw life from his Passover. We, who were dead through our sins and have been made be alive again with Christ — we are the glory of God. By grace we have been saved (Eph 2:5). Irenaeus, the *doctor unitatis*, reminds us of this: “The glory of God is man alive, and the life of man consists in seeing God: if the revelation of God through the creation already gives life to all living beings on earth, how much more then is the manifestation of the Father through the Word the cause of life for those who see God.” (FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC LETTER *DESIDERIO DESIDERAUI*, 43)