



CATECHETICAL SUNDAY

SEPTEMBER 18, 2011

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



For the Pastor

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Facundo Cabral, an Argentinean songwriter and a believer in God, says that mystics are the ones who knew and know that we are all part of God's wonderful creation. In one of his inspiring musical presentations, Cabral writes, "*Nacemos para encontrarnos*," which can be translated freely as, "We are born to encounter each other." He continues, "Life is the art of encounter. We encounter each other to confirm that humanity is only one family and that we live in a country called 'Earth.' We are sons and daughters of love, for we were born to be happy. Outside of happiness, all other things are pretenses." Cabral reflects the words of St. Augustine, who realized that true happiness is found only in God: "Our heart is restless until it rests in you" (*Confessions of St. Augustine* 1,1).

As a pastor, you place the gift of your priesthood at the service of the Christian community. You are a voice of the mystics in our world of conflicting messages. You preach the good news that God loves us. You call us to a deeper relationship with Jesus. You reassure us that we are the sons and daughters of Divine Love: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have

eternal life" (Jn 3:16). St. John continues, "Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ" (Jn 17:3). An encounter with the Person of Jesus is the greatest of all encounters. You help us encounter the living God through the Person of Jesus, who is the human face of God in the world. In our Catholic tradition, we encounter Jesus in the celebration of all the sacraments, especially in the Holy Eucharist.

"Do This in Memory of Me" is the theme of Catechetical Sunday 2011. The general focus is on faith formation and sacramental practice regarding the Holy Eucharist. This focus endorses the goal of the Catholic bishops of the United States "to invite all Catholics to a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ in the Church through formation focused on Sacred Scripture and Tradition, and Sacraments, especially the Sunday Eucharist" (www.usccb.org/priorities/goals.shtml). If we are to experience a greater appreciation of the Eucharist, having a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ and restoring Sunday as the Lord's Day are essential components of our faith formation.

Jesus is central to our Christian faith and life. "At the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, the only Son from the

Father" (Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi tradendae*, no. 5, www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae_en.html). As a pastor, your teaching and preaching inspire us to know the Lord Jesus. You help us regain a sense that we are in love with a real Person. By pronouncing the words of consecration, you bring about the change of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. You prepare us adequately to receive Jesus in the Eucharist with reverence and respect. Jesus is a central figure of our faith and worship. For without Jesus, we have no Eucharist; without Jesus, we have no salvation; without Jesus, we have no Church.

As a pastor, you may be assigned to a large metropolitan parish or a small rural community or two or more parishes located miles apart. Your commitment is the same: to be a spiritual leader and a shepherd, providing for the moral, spiritual, and material needs of those entrusted to your care. The parish is the place where we experience being Church. "The parish is 'the primary experience of the Church' for most Catholics. It is where the faithful gather for the celebration of the sacraments and the proclamation of the word of God" (*National Directory for Catechesis* [NDC] [Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), 2005], no. 60). It is the place where you nourish us with the Word of God and the Bread of Life. The demands made on you are great.

Listing all your public functions in service to the faith community, including the expectations of the people, is an impossible task. From baptizing a

person into the Church to accompanying a family in their last farewell to a loved one, your presence is a gift for the community. In your priestly ministry, the Eucharist is the top priority, for the Eucharist is the sacrament of unity in the Lord. We celebrate our unity in the one Lord in our diversity of cultures. The Eucharist makes us one in Christ. As Church, the Body of Christ, we are one faith community without borders. We recognize and celebrate the many faces in God's house in the breaking of the bread: "Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (1 Cor 10:17).

The human spirit is tested by human suffering beyond words. Individuals, families, and entire communities search for ways to deal with pain caused by random or deliberate human acts of violence, as well as those caused by natural disasters. In this context, the words of a popular song, *Una Espiga*, by Cesáreo Gabaráin have much meaning. This is a free translation: "The wheat made golden by the sun, the bunch of grapes cut by the cultivator of vines, now become bread and wine of love in the body and blood of the Lord. . . . We are wheat of the same sower. A mill, life, crushes us with pain. God makes us Eucharist in love" (*Flor y Canto* [Portland: Oregon Catholic Press, 1975]). Jesus took bread and wine, the simple fruits of the earth, and consecrated them as a memorial of his great love for us. At every Eucharist, we recall, remember, live, and celebrate Christ's Paschal Mystery: his Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension. We, too, have our own paschal mystery. Our merit depends on how we accept and

unite our suffering to that of Christ's on the Cross. "Through the Eucharist, the People of God come to know the Paschal Mystery ever more intimately and experientially. They come not simply to the knowledge of God—they come to know the living God" (NDC, no. 33). In the Eucharist, we come to know the living God. In union with Christ, the Eucharist becomes our gift to the Father and a way of life as we celebrate the Lord's Day.

There was a time in our country when religion was protected by the blue laws. They designated Sunday as a special day for worship and family. Gradually these laws were repealed, and Sunday lost its significance. In *Dies Domini*, his Apostolic Letter on Keeping the Lord's Day Holy, John Paul II states, "The Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day and his Eucharist is at the heart of the Church's life" (www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp_ii_apl_05071998_dies-domini_en.html, no. 32). As a Church, we are called to restore Sunday as a special day for the Lord and for the family.

Families are dealing with many concerns and issues. Among them are disintegration of the family, not transmitting the Catholic faith to the youth, domestic violence, abortion, drugs, gangs, teen pregnancies, solutions to present immigration issues, and unemployment. The future of our nation is at risk due to lack of Christian values and morals at all levels. Your words of wisdom alleviate their burdens, giving them hope and direction. "For Christian families, the Sunday assembly is one of the most outstanding expressions of their identity and their 'ministry' as

'domestic churches,' when parents share with their children at the one Table of the word and of the Bread of Life" (*Dies Domini*, no. 36). The celebration of the Eucharist is extended to the home. Parents teach their children the value of praying together, adoration and visits to the Blessed Sacrament, making the Sign of the Cross when passing in front of a Catholic Church, and participating at Sunday Eucharist as a family. You encourage them to be a domestic church where parents are the first educators of the faith for their children. You help them discover a new sense of being God's family.

In conclusion, to paraphrase Cabral: We are born to encounter each other in the one human family. In the family of God's sons and daughters, as a pastor, you are the one who facilitates our Divine Encounter with the Source of our unity. You are a voice of the mystics for us today. You deepen our understanding that, as the Body of Christ, we are all part of God's family in a very real and intimate way. Through the Eucharist, we are one in the Lord.

The USCCB has published excellent materials for Catechetical Sunday 2011. These materials are written for pastors, parish Catholic catechetical leaders, principals, catechists, and parishioners. Visit www.usccb.org or search for Catechetical Sunday 2011 using Google. Become familiar with these materials so that you can recommend them to parish leaders who assist you in your priestly ministry. Use your influence to coordinate the gifts of the parish leaders. Recognize their ministerial commitment and motivate them to live out their baptismal call as they respond to the needs of our brothers and sisters.

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