

The Eucharist and The Transfiguration of The World  
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The Most Rev. Andrew H. Cozzens. S.T.D., D.D.

I am delighted to be with you today at this historic meeting of the 53 International Eucharistic Congress. Some of you may know that in the United States in order to strengthen the Eucharistic Life of the Church, the US Bishop began a three-year Eucharistic Revival, which we are still in. And we also just finished our own National Eucharistic Congress which was a supreme moment of grace for the whole Church in the United States of America. We have not had a National Eucharistic Congress since 1941, and the experience of profound renewal and conversion for all who attended was tangible.

I'm also so delighted to speak with you about today's theme: The Eucharist and the Transfiguration of the World. This theme touches the very heart of our faith. We have been reminded often in these days about the wounds of our world and the wounds which so many carry in their hearts, including us. But brothers and sisters, we know the one who is able to turn a wound into a place of life. We know the one who is able to transfigure our broken humanity into glory. We know the one who came not only to fix broken humanity – but to glorify it – as he revealed in his transfiguration. Jesus Christ came to share with us the Glory of the Father. He wants the whole world to participate in this glory.

The moment of the Transfiguration is so central to the Gospels and to Jesus own mission. In this moment Jesus reveals who he is. He reveals for his closest disciples a glimpse of his true glory. We search for words which might capture this revelation of who Jesus Christ is to us. I think the best words come from St. Paul:

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Ephesians 1:15-17).

His glory reveals his divinity as the second person of the Blessed Trinity. This sight is both terrifying and consoling for Peter, James and John who are there. But we know that his transfiguration reveals who Jesus is, the Transfiguration also reveals who we are called to be, and who we will be in heaven – a glorious son or daughter of God. Just Jesus in his Risen Body – every wound will be transformed into glory.

Brothers and sisters, this is why he gives us the Eucharist. Through the Eucharist the gifts of bread and wine are transubstantiated – they are changed in the very substance of Jesus Christ – Life of God. This is for our transformation. This is for our gradual entering into his glory. And this is for the transformation of our world.

Here is the key to today's talk. It is found in the scripture itself. Scripture scholars tell us that to understand the mountain of the Transfiguration, you have to understand another mountain – that is Calvary. Both Mark and Matthew's version begin to speak about the Transfiguration by saying “after 6 days” Jesus goes up the mountain with his closest Apostles. 6 days is an incomplete number that reveals something is yet to come. After the the event itself, Jesus commands them not tell anyone, so people don't mis-understand what kind of Messiah he is. And in all three Gospels the event of the Transfiguration is followed by the Lord predicting his passion. It is as if this revelation of his glory is incomplete, because his true glory will only be known through another reality – the reality of the Paschal mystery. Christ must go through his Paschal Mystery to reveal how he will glorify our world.

Here we come to the heart of Christ's mission and to the heart of the Eucharist. We always stand in awe before the incredible plan of redemption that we see enacted in Jesus Christ.

I love the way St. Ignatius invites the retreatant to meditate on the world before the incarnation. He encourages us to imagine the Trinity in heaven looking down upon the incredible brokenness of our world. To see the sin, war, death that are so present in our world. And then he invites us to see the answer of the Trinity to this brokenness, is to send the Son into the world. God chooses to enter into the brokenness. He chooses to descend into our sinful reality in order to return us to glory.

As it is summarized in Philippians chapter 2:

“though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6-8).

God empties himself, to become human, then he enters into the brokenness of our relationships to bring healing, but this is not enough! No, he allows himself to be completely emptied. He is willing to drink the cup of our suffering to the full, experiencing all the abuse, hatred, abandonment of sin. He enters into our brokenness to renew it. Through his death and resurrection he pours out his divine life into the world. To heal the world.

It is important to meditate on how Christ redeems the world – he redeems it through his paschal mystery. Jesus allows himself to experience all our darkness and even our death. And in this, the one who is both God and man, chooses love. He takes all that evil on himself and offers himself to the Father for our sake. In doing this he destroys the power of sin and death and through his cross transforms death in to life.

The Paschal Mystery, is the greatest mystery in the world, because it transforms evil into good. This is why St. Paul can cry out in Romans, “We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (8:28). How can it be that all things work for good? Through the Cross, through his suffering, death and resurrection, all things can be redeemed.

This is the power of the redemption we proclaim. There is nothing so evil, that it cannot be taken up by God and turned into a good. There is no wound so profound that it cannot become a place of grace. Think of the power of that statement. Yet this is the power of Christ's cross. His paschal mystery is healing for the world.

First, so we are all on the same page, what is the Paschal Mystery? To understand this you have to understand how three things are intimately united.

First, the Last Supper of Jesus: Jesus gathers to celebrate the Passover with his disciples. There in the place where there would have been a Passover lamb, as he should be renewing the Passover Covenant, he says... “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 the chalice of my blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in memory of me.”

These words, which represent the heart of the Eucharist, are intimately connected with Jesus' death on the cross.

Our Holy Father Pope Francis points this out in his Apostolic Letter on the Liturgy, *Desiderio desideravi*, “The content of the bread broken is the cross of Jesus, his sacrifice of obedience out of love for the Father. If we had not had the Last Supper, that is to say, if we had not had the ritual anticipation of his death, we would have never been able to grasp how the

carrying out of his being condemned to death could have been in fact *the* act of perfect worship, pleasing to the Father, the only true act of worship, the only true liturgy” (*Desiderio Desideravi*, 7).

He is saying that the words of Jesus and his death are essentially interdependent. The words without the death would have no meaning! It would be an empty ritual, only a symbol. The words only make sense when we see the Cross. He is dying for us. This is his body given for us, his blood poured out for us. The death without the words would also be empty – it would be the death of an innocent man. But the words and the death together – reveal that his death was an act of worship. It was a gift to the Father for us. It was the fulfillment of the Passover and Worship of the Old Testament. As Pope Francis says, “*The act of perfect worship*”. The only true worship ever offered in the history of the world. Brothers and sisters this is the true worship we offer in the Mass – not our worship but his!

Of course, the death without the resurrection would also be meaningless – because of the resurrection, his death is a passage to life, it redeems us, it saves us. These three things together – the Last Supper, the Death on the Cross, the Resurrection – together they are one reality – the Paschal Mystery.

Together they are the mystery by which salvation comes to us. Jesus redeems us. You know what redemption is, we purchase something. We are redeemed from sin and death through the paschal mystery. And at the last supper Jesus says, “Do this in memory of me.” What does this mean? He invites his apostles to make ritual remembrance of this event. When Jesus tells his apostles, his first priests to “Do this in memory of me” He is inviting them to make present his Paschal mystery through the celebration of the Eucharist. We believe that through the action of Christ at every Mass, not only does he become really present in the Eucharist, but that his paschal mystery, his sacrificial death, also becomes present.

Why? Why does Christ make his Paschal Mystery present in the Eucharist? So that we can live from it and participate in it? Jesus died on the cross 2,000 years ago, how does his salvation reach me today? The life of God is poured out from Jesus on the Cross. Remember the blood and water that came from his side? The water, that living water that becomes eternal life within me, comes to me through baptism. The blood? He shares his very life with me through the Eucharist.

But here is the key to this talk – we don’t just receive Jesus in the Eucharist as a passive gift – the Eucharist wants to change us – it wants to draw us into Christ’s Paschal mystery. I love the way Pope Benedict says this in his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, “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.” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 13). The Eucharist is not something we just statically receive. The Eucharist wants to make us lovers! Lovers like Christ. Lovers who want to make a gift of themselves... even lovers of the Cross.

You see the Paschal mystery of Jesus is the pattern to understand our lives. Jesus did not take away human suffering – such a mystery! He could have. He wiped away the eternal effects of sin, but he allowed sin to continue in the world.

What did Jesus do? He transformed suffering from within. He made suffering a path of love that leads to redemption. This is what the Cross is – the love of Jesus poured out in suffering that leads to redemption. This is what the Eucharist makes present every day for us. He wants us to learn what he showed us in the paschal mystery... that suffering is a path of love and redemption. Pope Francis says, “The Paschal Mystery is made present so that the baptized, through their participation, can experience it in their own lives” (*Desiderio desideravi*, 49).

Jesus says to his apostles “Do this in memory of me.” This means not only celebrate this particular ritual, it does mean that. It means do for me what I have done for you. Not only offer my sacrifice again by means of these visible signs... but by the grace it gives you, live this sacrifice in your lives, making yourselves a living sacrifice. Learn to bring your sufferings, your crosses to this altar to offer them to the Father with me.

The Eucharist wants to teach us how to transform our lives, especially the suffering of our lives, into a gift. It is essential to learn this lesson. It is the only thing that can make sense out of the suffering of our lives. It is the only thing that can really make sense out of our wounded humanity. And it is the only thing that can make our mission fruitful.

It is a very difficult lesson to learn. But I am convinced it is the key to the transformation of the world. When we allow this love of the Eucharist to transform us into lovers, we are driven to transform our world by love!

Brothers and sisters this is one of the most disconcerting parts of the Gospel. On Monday Juan Manuel Cotelo reminded us of this disconcerting plan of God. Remember when Jesus speaks about his cross and St. Peter tries to dissuade him – what does Jesus say? He says, “Get behind me Satan.” This is the strongest rebuke anyone ever we receives from Jesus. Jesus will not allow us to separate Christianity from the Cross. The same is true for us. We cannot remove the cross from our lives. Jesus shows us the path that we must learn to follow to become like him. Learning, like him, to make our own lives a gift. To make of our lives an offering for redemption.

How does this happen practically? Very simple but very important, because it has the power to make our Crosses fruitful. Practically, I am experiencing some pain, some distress, some suffering. It can be almost anything – distress in my family, traumatic experiences in my world, it can even be the the suffering of my own sinfulness – I wish I wasn’t such a sinner! Then, in my heart, I think of some need I want to apply this suffering too. It can be anything, the beautiful young people I encountered in the local parish here two days ago, who grow up in difficult circumstances. Someone I know in a nursing home. The people who live in war torn Ukraine or the Holy Land. Then I bring this suffering to Mass. I ask Jesus to take this suffering and unite it to his own – and apply the merits to the need I’m offering it for.

This is the famous Catholic teaching of “offering it up”. This is what my mother used to say to me when I encountered some difficulty in my life. I did not like it because it meant that I could not complain anymore. However, it is really a profound way to stop us from turning in on ourselves in our suffering – from wallowing in our pain – and using the energy of love to transform suffering.

Suffering wants to turn us in on ourselves. Love gives us the energy to turn transform suffering into self-gift.

Of course, on my own this would be impossible. It would be a fantasy to think that my fasting can help people in Ukraine in a war, or the people suffering in poverty around us. But this is not just me. Through the power of your baptismal priesthood, you are uniting my offering to the offering of Christ, and asking Christ to apply some of the infinite merits of his sacrifice to the need I’m praying for. This is no mere fantasy – it is living the power of the cross in our lives.

This is also what Vatican II meant by Active participation in the liturgy. A lot is made of what Vatican II said about fully conscious and active participation. What is active participation in the Liturgy? It is not just singing or standing or saying the words. It is actually the participation of the heart.

The Second Vatican Council said it this way:

“[The faithful] should be instructed by God's word and nourished at the table of the Lord's Body. They should give thanks to God. Offering the immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him, they should learn to make an offering of themselves” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 48).

Remember this moment in the Mass when the priest says, “Pray brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours, may be acceptable to God the almighty Father”? What is your sacrifice? Mine, as the priest, is the bread and wine offered which will become Christ’s offering to the Father. What is yours? Could be the fact that you just lost your job. Could be the couple you know going through a divorce. Could be the health struggle you are going through. You are invited to participate in the Paschal Mystery! You are invited to place that suffering of yours – concretely whatever it is – on the Altar and then allow it to be transformed and become part of the offering of Christ for the salvation of the world. My imperfect offering is joined with him for the salvation of the world!

Brothers and sisters, this is in fact the plan of Jesus for the healing of our world. The Eucharist is at the heart of that plan because, through the Mass we are able to bring the sufferings of this world to Father – so that grace can be poured out upon the world. So that the Transforming power of the Cross can continue to work here and now today. So that the evil, the suffering in my life can become part of the power for good. Just as Jesus did himself as he offered his life for good!

Remember Brothers and sisters, Jesus greatest action was not his teaching, or his miracles, it was the offering of himself through the paschal mystery, as the act of perfect worship, for the reconciliation of the world with God. Through the Mass we participate in that reconciliation which pours out grace upon the world.

Can you see that this is the key to transforming suffering in our lives. We must learn how to transform our sufferings! How they can be part of the offering. So they are not empty.

In a very important quote Pope Benedict XVI explains this reality – He says, “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” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* 71).

What does he mean? You and I have difficulty in our daily lives. Little things and big things. But we can bring those things to the Eucharist and unite them to Christ’s offering in the Paschal mystery. Then those things take on infinite meaning – because they are joined to his self-offering for the world!

If I can learn this, everything I do, everything I suffer can come to have meaning.

This is St. Paul who says, “In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is the Church” ( Col. 1:24). What is lacking in Christ’s affliction? What is lacking is the sufferings you, his body, undergo today. That is still waiting to be offered to the Father for the redemption of the world. Thus, you and I have a place to cooperate in redemption.

Or as St. Paul says in Romans: “I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1). This is what we learn to do through the Eucharist. Making an offering of my body.

The Eucharist wants to teach me how to make a gift of myself. I stand in awe before this incredible gift of Christ for me. I desire to give him something in return. I desire to give him everything.

Learning this lesson is extremely important.

First, I must allow my heart to be pierced by Christ's gift of himself. It is very important to remember it cost Jesus his life to give us the Eucharist. Jesus poured out everything on the Cross, so that we could receive this gift. When I realize the magnitude of this gift. When I realize his love for me, then I desire to give everything for him. I desire to pour out my life for him. As Pope Francis says, "Giving of oneself" means letting all the power of that love which is God's Holy Spirit take root in our lives, opening our hearts to his creative power." (Pope Francis, *Homily for Mass for the Evangelization of Peoples*, Quito, 7 July 2015, quoted in Base Document, 44).

This means we are committed to showing God's love to all people. This is why those who love the Eucharist are those who also love the poor, the least. Their heart has been pierced by Christ's suffering present in the Eucharist. They want to take away his suffering, not only in the Eucharist, but in his body in the poor.

This was certainly the love that drove St. Teresa of Calcutta. She would often say that you cannot love Jesus in the poor if you do not love him in the Eucharist, and the opposite is also true... you cannot love Jesus in the Eucharist if you do not love him in the poor. She found an intimate relationship between her adoring Jesus in the blessed sacrament, receiving him at Holy Mass, and then going out to serve him in the poorest of the poor.

This is part of why the Eucharist is called the "Sacrament of Charity". It fills us with love which makes us want to go out and share his love with the world. If we truly fall in love with the Eucharist we will become missionaries in every sense of that word. We want to bring his love to our world: His truth, his mercy, his goodness. We want to make his love presence through serving him. We want to work for justice for those who are oppressed.

Again Pope Benedict XVI said "The relationship between the eucharistic mystery and social commitment must be made explicit. The Eucharist is the sacrament of communion between brothers and sisters who allow themselves to be reconciled in Christ, who made of Jews and pagans one people, tearing down the wall of hostility which divided them (cf. *Eph 2:14*)" (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 89).

He points out if we don't have this social impulse. If we don't have this impulse towards fraternal communion, towards those who are broken in the world, then we have not yet encountered fully Christ in the Eucharist: "Only this constant impulse towards reconciliation enables us to partake worthily of the Body and Blood of Christ (cf. *Mt 5:23-24*)" (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 89).

The Eucharist certainly calls us to act for social justice, but it calls us to more than that. Because the goal of the Eucharist is not social justice, but the glory of God and glorification of our world. Remember our title: The Eucharist and the transfiguration of the world. The transfiguration reveals we are all called to glory of divine filiation – to be his sons and daughters. We are called to become like God – to share his glory. Redemption is a spiritual action not only a social action. Redemption happens through the Paschal mystery. Christ redeems the world – he does that we cooperate with his redemption by joining our lives to him and by letting him live in us.

We already spoke of Mother Teresa of Calcutta – who loved the poor Christ so much she wanted not only to feed him but to bring redemption to the poor. She would often say to her sisters, what Jesus said to her when he asked her to found the Missionaries of Charity. Jesus asked her, are you willing to pay the price for the salvation of the poor? He asked, who will

suffer for their salvation? She would ask the same thing to her sisters: are you willing to suffer for the salvation of the poor?

Mother Teresa understood what St. Paul wrote about in his letters – that we are the Body of Christ today and we are called like Christ did to enter into the brokenness of the world today in order to redeem it. St. Paul said it this way,

“We hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being given up to death for the sake of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you” (2 Cor. 4:7-12).

Do you see what he is saying? He knows he is only a human being, but he also knows that Christ is living in him. As he seeks to share the love of Christ, he experiences great suffering! Yet, he has come to see his affliction, his being perplexed, his persecution, his being struck down... as his participation in Christ’s paschal mystery. It is Jesus dying in him! And he sees that this is bringing life to his people. “So death is at work in us, but life in you.”

The fruitfulness, the healing of the wounds of the world, comes through his sharing in Christ’s paschal mystery

Do you see what is meant to happen in us? We are meant to become Jesus. Not just to imitate his teaching, his healing, his breaking down of barriers, his love for the least. Yes we must do that, but he wants us even more to imitate him in his greatest act. He wants us to live in our lives his paschal mystery.

Brothers and sisters, we are gathered here together under the important theme, “Fraternity to heal the world.”

What will heal the world? Only one thing: The Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ... who entered into our suffering and death to pour out his healing love on the world. Jesus entered into the wounds of this world to bring his divine life.

Really, only Jesus is able to enter the wounds of your heart and the wound of our world and bring his glory. Those places where you experience hopelessness, sadness. Those places where you find it difficult to forgive. Those places where you find it difficult to overcome your own sin. All of us have these wounds! He wants to enter into those wounds to bring his healing – to reveal his grace. And then he wants you to share this healing love with our wounded world.

Let me tell you one story of a man who taught me this lesson. A lay man, who taught me about the priesthood, because he lived his own baptismal life as an offering to God.

When I was a student priest, I had the privilege to get to know the Missionaries of Charity, Mother Teresa’s Sisters. I was studying in Rome and on a few occasions they invited me to Gent Belgium for a retreat. When I was there they took me to meet a paralyzed man whom they know named Fernand.

Fernand had wanted to be a priest, but shortly before he was to enter seminary, he came down with a strange disease that paralyzed his whole body. He was only able to move his head, and he was able to squeeze his thumb enough to allow him to press a button which opened the door of his one room apartment.

When I met Fernand he had been in his bed for 40 years, and he said to me, “I know I have done more good for God from this bed than I would have if I had become a priest.” Fernand was actually the reason that the Missionaries of Charity were in Belgium. Mother Teresa had

gone to Ghent to give a talk and the bishop asked her to leave her sisters there, but she did not see enough poor people. The Bishop took her to meet Fernand.

Mother Teresa was so impressed with his joy in his suffering that she wanted her sisters to live close to him. When Mother Teresa was visiting him, one of the Coworkers was looking around the room and she said, “Fernand, you don’t have a crucifix on your wall. Why don’t you have a crucifix.” Mother got a little frustrated with the co-worker and she said – don’t you understand? He is the crucifix. And in fact Fernand did have a crucifix, he kept it right on his chest between his arms.

When I went to visit him we celebrated Mass on a little table in his one room apartment. And when I did that the sisters took that cross from his chest and they put it on the altar. To me it was such a great image of what was happening at that mass. All Fernand’s suffering in that bed, poured into that cross. Then it is placed on the Altar and united with Christ’s suffering and becomes part of the salvation of the world.

The last time I visited Fernand, he said something to me that has remained with me. We had just finished Mass, and I had given him Holy Communion. He spoke first about how much he loved Holy Communion and how he could not wait until the next day to receive it again. Then he said, “I’m just a man with all my weakness but I am burning with love.” That phrase remained in my heart the whole way home – 9 hours on the airplane. I thought of the burning bush – that fire that burns but does not consume. I thought of the burning heart of Jesus – a heart that burns with love for our world but is not consumed.

Brothers and sisters – what happened to Fernand. He was deeply wounded. He was physically, completely handicapped. But he allowed Jesus into that wound. And that wound was glorified – he became a burning fire. He was transfigured in that bed. He was radiating Christ’s glory. He believed that his suffering had profound meaning for our world. That this was his way to participate in Christ’s paschal mystery.

Are you willing to become like Fernand? My suffering, your suffering is much smaller than his. What would happen though if I learned to unite my suffering in love to Jesus in the Mass. My heart would begin to burn like his. Then like him – I’d become a beacon of glory! I would be focused on others and not on myself in my suffering. I would be able to speak of his mercy and love for me. I would be opening the door spiritually for the renewal of our world.

The Eucharist is for the transfiguration of the world. It is so that you and I and the whole world can be brought into his glory. This is why Jesus gave his Paschal Mystery an enduring presence in the Eucharist. Your glory and mine is to participate in it.

Can you allow your wounds to be healed by his love so that you too can say, “I am just a man, just a woman with all my weakness, but I am burning with love.” Then we can become part of the transfiguration of our world.