

Christmas Day Mass Homily

Bishop John Barres

St. Agnes Cathedral

December 25, 2022

In union with our Holy Father Pope Francis and in a spirit of mercy, humility and charity, I invite everyone present at our Christmas Masses, or watching our Christmas Masses via the *Catholic Faith Network*, or through you to those not present at all: If your life has been far from the Catholic Mass and the Eucharist, I invite you to return.

I invite you to experience the power and liberation of Christ's mercy and forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance and to cross the bridge into the full practice of your Catholic faith through a radical fidelity to the Sunday Mass and an ever-deepening love for our Lord's presence in the Holy Eucharist.

Perhaps you are not a Catholic and yet have some mysterious attraction to the Catholic Mass and the Eucharist.

You are not alone! Many saints had the same experience and were drawn to enter the Church through their intuitive experience of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist in our parish churches.

Be open to the Eucharistic movement of the Holy Spirit in your life!

Our celebration of Christmas 2022 occurs this year as every Catholic diocese, every Catholic parish, every Catholic Hospital, University, and Institution in the United States is engaged in an evangelizing *Eucharistic Revival*.

What do we mean by the phrase "Eucharistic Revival" and why is it so important for our celebration of Christmas?

Pope Francis points out the relationship between the Birth of Christ, the Incarnation and the Holy Eucharist and the Catholic Mass. The very word Bethlehem means "house of Bread."

Pope Francis states: "Bethlehem is the turning point that alters the course of history. There God, in the *house of bread*, is born in a *manger*...The Lord knows that we

need to be fed daily. That is why he offered himself to us every day of his life: from the manger in Bethlehem to the Upper Room in Jerusalem. Today too, on the altar, he becomes bread broken for us; he knocks at our door, to enter and eat with us (cf. Revelation 3:20). At Christmas, we on earth receive Jesus, the bread from heaven. It is a bread that never grows stale, but enables us even now to have a foretaste of eternal life.”¹

Eucharistic Revival, in the words of Pope St. John Paul II, is a “rekindling of Eucharistic Amazement.”²

It is an understanding that “The Eucharist is truly a glimpse of heaven appearing on earth. It is a glorious ray of the heavenly Jerusalem which pierces the clouds of our history and lights up our journey (19)...The Eucharist is the source and summit of all evangelization...(22)”³

Eucharistic Revival means that we grow in our understanding that every Mass has a cosmic significance and every Mass is celebrated on the Altar of the world⁴ – the Altar of Ukraine and every war torn and injustice-ridden area of our world.⁵

¹ Pope Francis Homily for Midnight Mass, Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord, December 25, 2018.

² Pope St. John Paul II’s April 17, 2003 Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 6.

³ Pope St. John Paul II’s April 17, 2003 Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 19 and 22.

⁴ Cf. Pope St. John Paul II’s April 17, 2003 Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 8.

⁵In his December 25, 2022 *Urbi et Orbi* Address, Pope Francis asked us to pray for peace in troubled regions of the world: “Let us also see the faces of our Ukrainian brothers and sisters who are experiencing this Christmas in the dark and cold, far from their homes due to the devastation caused by ten months of war. May the Lord inspire us to offer concrete gestures of solidarity to assist all those who are suffering, and may he enlighten the minds of those who have the power to silence the thunder of weapons and put an immediate end to this senseless war! Tragically, we prefer to heed other counsels, dictated by worldly ways of thinking. Yet who is listening to the voice of the Child? Our time is experiencing a grave *famine of peace* also in other regions and other theatres of this third world war. Let us think of Syria, still scarred by a conflict that has receded into the background but has not ended. Let us think too of the Holy Land, where in recent months violence and confrontations have increased, bringing death and injury in their wake. Let us beseech the Lord that there, in the land that witnessed his birth, dialogue and efforts to build mutual trust between Palestinians and Israelis may resume. May the Child Jesus sustain the Christian communities living in the Middle East, so that each of those countries can experience the beauty of fraternal coexistence between individuals of different faiths. May the Christ Child help Lebanon in particular, so that it can finally rebound with the help of the international community and with the strength born of fraternity and solidarity. May the light of Christ illumine the region of the Sahel, where peaceful coexistence between peoples and traditions is disrupted by conflict and acts of violence. May that light lead to a lasting truce in Yemen and to reconciliation in Myanmar and Iran, and an end to all bloodshed. May it inspire the political authorities and all people of good will in the Americas to attempt to calm the political and social tensions experienced by various countries; I think in particular of the people of Haiti who have been suffering for a long time.”

Eucharistic Revival is a rekindling of Pope Benedict XVI's insight that every period of Church reform can be traced to a rediscovery of the Real Presence of Jesus Christ, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity in the Holy Eucharist.⁶

This past August 7th the Pulitzer Prize winning American historian David McCullough (1933-2022) died.

McCullough was constantly asking us to go deeper in our understanding about how the American pioneering experience, presidential leadership, entrepreneurial and inventive ingenuity and a spirit of hope forged and developed the American character and spirit.

This, in turn, sparks in us a curiosity to go deeper into an understanding of how the Catholic American experience propelled by the Eucharist and the Catholic Mass has impacted the American experience.

The great Catholic evangelization pioneers of this country were contemplative and swash-buckling missionary risk-takers.

St. Isaac Jogues (1607-1646) and Companions, St. Juniper Serra (1713-1784), St. John Neumann (1811-1860), Blessed Fr. Michael McGivney (1852-1890), Blessed Fr. Solanus Casey (1870-1957), Blessed Fr. Stanley Rother (1935-1981), St. Mother Francis Xavier Cabrini (1850-1917), St. Katherine Drexel (1858-1955), St. Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774-1821), Blessed Sr. Miriam Teresa Demjanovich (1901-1927), St. Kateri Tekakwitha (1656-1680), Venerable Pierre Toussaint (1766-1853), Venerable Fr. Augustus Tolton⁷ (1854-1897), Venerable Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen (1895-1979), Servant of God Sr. Thea Bowman (1937-1990) – the list of holy American Eucharistic missionaries goes on and on to the present day.

Most were short on personnel and short on funds. They had no sophisticated business plans. They were contemplative wheelers and dealers in the best sense who trusted in the Lord and forged ahead by trusting in the power and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

⁶ See Pope Benedict XVI's 2017 Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* 6: "Every great reform has in some way been linked to the rediscovery of belief in the Lord's eucharistic presence among his people."

⁷ See Michael R. Heinlein, Editor's *Black Catholics on the Road to Sainthood*, (Huntington Indiana, Our Sunday Visitor Press, 2021)

It would do us well to recapture some of that humbly audacious Catholic missionary spirit for these 21st century times.

We celebrate at this Christmas Day Mass the holiness of so many current and future American saints. Each of them experienced a contemplative and missionary rebirth each Christmas as they meditated on the manger (St. Leo the Great).

We remember too that each one of us is called to be a saint in our own unique way with our own unique gifts, family and moment of history.

As your servant, Successor of the Apostles and Bishop, this is my prayer for each one of you on this Christmas morning.

We pray that each of us could be Divine Mercy instruments of bringing many, many people back to a full fidelity to the Eucharist and the Catholic Mass.

We are being called to be intentional, compassionate, understanding and listening Eucharistic missionaries.

Merry Christmas to you and your families!

May the love of the Christ child, the Prince of Peace, and the love of the Holy Family light your remaining steps on earth and light your path to Heaven and Eternal Life.

