

Leading the FLOCK

BY BISHOP DANIEL E. THOMAS



“My Flesh for the Life of the World”

What an exciting, hope filled and truly needed initiative! I’m talking about the “*National Eucharistic Revival*,” recently introduced by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and inaugurated here, as in dioceses throughout the country, on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, traditionally known as the Feast of *Corpus Christi*. For the next three years, as Catholics, we will focus our attention, in our parishes, dioceses and nation, on the Holy Eucharist!

It’s hard to imagine a more timely, pertinent, and *filled with potential* initiative. The very title, taken from the Gospel of John, says it all: Jesus gave us himself in the Holy Eucharist so that all of us, indeed the whole world, might have and share in his life! The use of the word “Revival” is key. Hearing the word revive or revival, one’s thoughts might turn to persons whose lives are at risk on whom paramedics work using defibrillator paddles to “revive” them. One might think of evangelistic “revival” meetings meant to reawaken religious faith. The use of the word connotes an instance of returning to life or consciousness, a restoration of vitality or vigor, a coming back to life! This *Revival* has the potential to fulfill so many of

the various definitions of the word one can imagine: to improve, reawaken and strengthen (belief in the Eucharistic); to rejuvenate, reintroduce and re-establish (understanding of and appreciation for the Eucharist); to provide an upswing, a rallying and a resurgence (of Eucharist piety and practice).



NATIONAL Eucharistic Revival

We all need this *Revival*! Who does not know someone who has fallen away from the practice of the faith and from attending Sunday Mass? Who does not know persons who, due to various life circumstances, have distanced themselves or felt distanced from the Eucharist? Who of us does not recognize, if humble enough, that each of us stands in need of deepening our love for, devotion to and living out of the Eucharistic?

If this *National Eucharistic Revival* is to be impactful, it must begin with each one of us! It begins first with opening anew our minds, hearts and souls to the power and grace which flows from the Holy Eucharist, the “source and summit of our faith.” This *Revival* is an invitation to new life, life in Christ Jesus, who offers his very self to us in the Eucharist. We need to ask ourselves: how does the Holy Eucharist define, drive and determine who we are as Catholics?

How do we invite others to life in Christ in the Eucharist?

On *Corpus Christi* Sunday, as so many of our priests and people did in parishes throughout our diocese, I had the joy and privilege of offering the Feast Day Mass in our Cathedral, followed by a public Eucharistic Procession. As is often the case, it was little children whose participation taught me that day once again how I should approach the Eucharist! One child was squirming in his father's arms as he approached to receive Communion. As his father received the host, the little boy blurted out "I want some!" His childlike desire for earthly food made me pray for an increase in a childlike desire for heavenly food. During the procession, a little boy and girl were holding hands, pushing and pulling each other to keep up, intent on being part of the crowd, and regarding with childlike wonder the monstrance beneath the canopy. Their childlike efforts made me pray to be a more faithful pilgrim on the way, regarding and living with wonder Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. At one of the stations where we paused to worship the Eucharist, one little girl knelt near me there in the parking lot, and as we sang, she was joyfully singing away, even though she was too young to know any of the words! Her childlike praise made me pray to offer more joyful, worthy and fitting praise of the Lord, within and without Mass.

During this three-year period of the *National Eucharistic Revival*, we will be offering encouragement for all the faithful to engage at the diocesan, parish and national levels. We've formed a great group from across the Diocese to assist us in embracing the Mission of the *Revival*: "To renew the Church by enkindling a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist." At the diocesan level, we've planned a number of regional "Diocesan Eucharistic Celebrations;" this *Leading the Flock* Column will be dedicated to the Holy Eucharist; and all the members of our diocese (priests, deacons, consecrated religious and lay faithful) are invited

to deepen their understanding of, love for and living out of the Eucharist. Our Senior Staff and the various departments of our pastoral center are making a focused effort to pray and more deeply enter into the mystery of the Eucharist. All individuals, families, parish councils and groups are invited to pray and discern how best to respond to this initiative and how best to deepen Eucharistic faith and practice.

Folks have already asked what reading I would recommend to "kickstart" their prayer, discussions, reflection and action. Here are a few suggestions: Abbot Jeremy Driscoll, *What Happens at Mass*, Unfolding the Meaning of the Church's Eucharist; Fr Phil Smith: *What Nobody Ever Told Us*, A Guide to Getting More Out of Catholic Mass; Scott Hahn: *The Lamb's Supper*; Edward Sri: *A Biblical Walk through the Mass*; Bishop Robert Barron: *Eucharist*; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: *The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church*; Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (Sacrament of Charity).

Friends, please join me in praying that, for the spiritual and pastoral health of our diocese, we might all embrace the Vision of this *National Eucharistic Revival*: "A movement of Catholics across the United States, healed, converted, formed and unified by an encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist – and sent out in mission 'for the life of the world'."

You can find information on this nationwide initiative here: www.eucharisticrevival.org and on our diocesan engagement here: toledodiocese.org/eucharist



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