

Homily of Cardinal Justin Rigali  
Closing Mass 66<sup>th</sup> Serra International Convention  
Aguas de Lindonia, Brazil  
August 16, 2008

Praised be Jesus Christ! Now and forever!

We gather this evening from many nations and from many parts of the world to echo the refrain of the responsorial psalm of the Eucharistic liturgy: “O God, let all the nations praise you!”

As we do so we are mindful of the Lord’s words to the prophet Isaiah in the first reading of this evening’s Mass: “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”

Indeed, we gather as people from many nations, from different cultures and diverse languages, but we find ourselves at home in the Lord’s house because we gather as a Christian community united in prayer, in the presence of the Lord Jesus Himself. It is through the Eucharist that we come into communion with Christ, who in turn draws us into a deeper communion with his Father and the Holy Spirit. This makes it possible for us to grow in love and communion with one another.

It is no coincidence that we refer to the reception of the Eucharist at Mass as “receiving Holy Communion” for that is precisely what we do; or better, what God does for us, as we come together to praise and worship Him in Word and Sacrament. This communion, with God and neighbor, is both a gift resulting from our active participation in the Eucharistic liturgy, and a goal constantly to strive for, in order to build up the Church in love with the grace of God.

As Saint John the Evangelist tells us: “God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him” (1 Jn 4:16). In this regard we are empowered through the Eucharist. Significantly, Saint John also reminds us: “We are able to love because God first loved us” (1 Jn 4: 19). In fact, we can say that this growth in Christian love is basic for each of our different individual vocations, whether priestly, religious or lay, since this is what the Lord commands us to do. Saint John tells us: “This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must love his brother” (1 Jn 4:21).

The Second Vatican Council in its document on the Sacred Liturgy speaks of how the Eucharist empowers us as individuals and as a community to grow in Christian love. It states: “The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows. For the aim and object of apostolic works is that all who are made children of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of His Church, to take part in the sacrifice, and to eat the Lord's supper.

“The liturgy in its turn moves the faithful, filled with ‘the paschal sacraments,’ to be ‘one in holiness;’ it prays that ‘they may hold fast in their lives to what they have grasped by their faith;’ the renewal in the Eucharist of the covenant between the Lord and man draws the faithful into the compelling love of Christ and sets them on fire. From the liturgy, therefore, and especially from the Eucharist, as from a font, grace is poured forth upon us; and the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God, to which all other activities of the Church are directed as toward their end, is achieved in the most efficacious possible way” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10).

The Council likewise spoke of the essential link between the Eucharist’s power to build up the Christian community in love and its power to strengthen it to witness to Christ in the world through active apostolic works. Once again in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy we read: “The liturgy daily builds up those who are in the Church, into a holy temple of the Lord, into a dwelling place for God in the Spirit, to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ. At the same time it marvelously strengthens their power to preach Christ, and thus shows forth the Church to those who are outside as a sign lifted up among the nations under which the scattered children of God may be gathered together, until there is one sheepfold and one shepherd” (no. 2).

In his message for the 44<sup>th</sup> World Day of Prayer for Vocations (April 29, 2007) entitled: “The Vocation to the Service of the Church as Communion,” Pope Benedict XVI drew a direct parallel between *the growth of the Church in communion* and *the promotion of vocations*. It is essential, the Holy Father tells us, that ecclesial movements be grounded in building up communion within themselves and within the wider body of the Church if they are effectively to promote vocations. He writes: “Thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit, all the members of the Church form ‘one body and one spirit’ in Christ. This people, organically structured under the guidance of its Pastors, lives the mystery of communion with God and with the brethren, especially when it gathers for the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the source of that ecclesial unity for which Jesus prayed on the eve of his passion: ‘Father...that they also may be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me’ (Jn 17: 21). This intense communion favors the growth of generous vocations at the service of the Church. The heart of the believer, filled with divine love, is moved to dedicate itself wholly to the cause of the Kingdom. In order to foster vocations, therefore, it is important that pastoral activity be attentive to the mystery of the Church as communion; because whoever lives in an ecclesial community that is harmonious, co-responsible and conscientious, certainly learns more easily to discern the call of the Lord.”

The Gospel of our Mass this evening presents us with a remarkable story of faith and prayer. A Canaanite woman, a pagan, implores Jesus to heal her daughter who is tormented by a demon. Jesus seems at first to ignore, even to spurn her request. But she persists. She has a mother’s love which drives her faith and she will not give up until her prayer is answered. Her faith, and her prayer, are both bold and persistent. In response to this persistent, persevering and unwavering prayer Jesus does in fact respond to her and says: “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish” (Mt 15: 28).

As individuals and as members of Serra International, we have much to learn from the example of the Canaanite woman in the Gospel this evening. As she came into the presence of Jesus with expectant, trustful and persevering prayer, we too come into the living and real presence of the Lord in the Eucharist that we now celebrate. Like her, we come with our individual needs and requests to present to the Divine Physician. We also come as members of the community of Serra International to “beg the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Mt 9: 38). The Gospel teaches us that the Lord will surely hear our prayers, and willingly grant our requests, if we come to him in the Eucharist with an attitude of trust and persistent prayer.

In his dialogue with the Canaanite woman Jesus tells her that “it is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs”, but in fact, he does symbolically provide her with the food she requests by granting her petition to heal her daughter.

Will not the Lord grant our petitions and provide us with the Bread of Life in the Eucharist if we come to Him with faith and persevering prayer? Does He not tell us: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world” (Jn 6:51)?

If we are prepared, Jesus invites us to receive Him at this Mass in Holy Communion. He yearns to unite to Himself all who accept Him in faith. As we do this let us ask Him to help us to grow in communion with Him, with His Church and with one another so that Serra International may truly reflect the communion our Holy Father tells us is so necessary for the promotion of vocations. Let us listen again to his Message for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations in 2007: “According to the explicit command of the Lord, we must implore the gift of vocations, in the first place by praying untiringly and together to the ‘Lord of the harvest.’ The invitation is in the plural: ‘Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest’ (Mt 9: 38). This invitation of the Lord corresponds well with the style of the ‘Our Father’ (Mt 6: 9), the prayer that he taught us and that constitutes a ‘synthesis of the whole Gospel’ according to the well-known expression of Tertullian (cf. *De Oratione*, 1,6: CCL I, 258). In this perspective, yet another expression of Jesus is instructive: ‘If two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven’ (Mt 18: 19). The Good Shepherd, therefore, invites us to pray to the heavenly Father, to pray unitedly and insistently, that he may send vocations for the service of the Church as communion.”

Dear friends: May Mary, Mother of the Church, intercede for each of us that, through the Eucharist, we may remain in communion with her Son, Jesus, and with one another. Only by truly living in this communion will we be worthy and able to contribute effectively to making the Eucharist more available in the Church by promoting vocations to the priesthood, without which there can be no Eucharist and hence no Church, no consecrated life, and no holy people of God.

Through Mary, Queen of Serra and Mother of Vocations, we can contribute greatly to the holiness of all God’s people who live their individual vocations as priests, deacons, consecrated

religious, and lay faithful—married, widowed and single persons—for the glory of the Most Blessed Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.