

ADORING THE EUCHARISTIC LORD

“LET US KNEEL BEFORE THE GOD WHO MADE US” (PS 94:6)



PASTORAL LETTER FROM ARCHBISHOP ANTHONY FISHER OP
to the Priests, Religious, and People of the Archdiocese of Sydney on the
Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ 2026

“Source and summit of the Christian life”—so the Second Vatican Council described the Eucharist (*Lumen Gentium*, 11), and so the Church has believed from the beginning. On this great solemnity of Corpus Christi 2026, and as we look forward to the International Eucharistic Congress in Sydney in 2028, we celebrate that mystery from which the Church draws her life (St John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 1): that under the simple signs of bread and wine, the Lord Jesus gives His flesh and blood, His body and soul, His humanity and divinity, everything He is, all given for us.

But what does it mean for God to share Himself with us?

He shares His love with us, so that we can commune with the three-personed God and His saints; so He enables us to love and serve our families and friends, our fellows, even strangers.

He shares His life with us, as we experience Him moving our hearts, provoking and strengthening, converting and consoling; so He shapes our character, gracing us to be more and to do more than we could ever alone. *He shares His truth with us*, as we perceive Him in creation and receive Him in revelation; so His wisdom enlightens our minds, directs our wills, and inspires our actions including our mission to humanity.

God shares His love and life and truth with us. But we are not just spirits, minds, wills. We are *bodily* beings. And so the God who would share everything with us, took our flesh (*Jn* 1:14), joining in every aspect of our human bodily lives except sin (*Heb* 4:15), and offering Himself to us not just as an idea or feeling or inspiration but as a person, whom we can receive even bodily. He pours His grace over

us and into us through the waters of Baptism, the anointing with holy oil in Confirmation, the one-flesh union of Holy Matrimony, above all in the Holy Eucharist, where the very Body and Blood of Christ are received into our bodies and souls.

The liturgical life is one that engages the whole person through all the senses.

We see the sacred in the beauty of the liturgical actions, in church art and architecture, in ‘beholding’ the Lamb of God at Mass or in

Eucharistic Adoration.

We hear the sacred in the Word of God proclaimed and preached, in the liturgical prayers, in the sacred psalms and songs.

We touch the sacred in the water sprinkled over us, in the sacrament placed on our hands and tongues, in the touch of our brothers and sisters at the sign of peace.

We smell the sacred in the incense offered as prayer and adoration, in the perfumed chrisam, in the Christmas pine and Holy Week palms.

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Of these physical postures, kneeling most clearly reveals what we believe about God and our relationship to Him.



We taste the sacred in the bread become Christ's body, and in the wine become His blood. All our senses are engaged in the liturgy, and so too our sinews: we stand, sit, bow, process, and kneel.

Of these physical postures, kneeling most clearly reveals what we believe about God and our relationship to Him. The Church invites us to genuflect, if we conveniently can, at the end of our pew, as we greet or farewell Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament on our way into and out of church. In Australia it directs us to kneel for the entire Eucharistic Prayer, when the Church recalls her history and our destiny, intercedes for many needs, offers the great sacrifice of Christ to the Father, and witnesses bread and wine become Christ's Body and Blood. The Church calls us to kneel again, in adoration as we "Behold the Lamb of God", in thanksgiving after Communion, in Eucharistic Adoration and Benediction. We are also called to make a sign of reverence before we receive Holy

Communion at Mass (GIRM 160). In most cases this reverence is shown by bowing deeply, however many people choose to genuflect, or even to receive Communion kneeling. This is a perfectly valid option envisaged in the current Missal. Kneeling was the default

position of receiving Holy Communion in the Latin church for many centuries. Altar rails, which still exist in many of our churches, are a reminder of this reverent custom. So, too, we genuflect before the mystery of the Incarnation as we recite the Creed on certain feasts, recall Christ's death in the Gospel of the Passion, or venerate the Cross on Good Friday. We may well kneel to propose Marriage, for Confirmation, for Absolution,

for Ordination, for Religious Profession, for the Litany of the Saints or for some blessings. In the *Tantum Ergo*, sung at Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, St Thomas Aquinas reminds us that where our senses and intellects fail before so great a mystery, our faith and very bodies must supply by bending

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We might kneel at least for part of the time, as a Gospel expression of thanksgiving and trust, adoration and awe, penitence and need, sheer companionship with Jesus.

our knees.

Of course, prayer postures are partly a cultural matter: some religions stand or make profound inclinations. And people sometimes have good reasons to stand or sit instead. But in Western Christianity at least, it has been customary for the last 1500 years to kneel where possible for private prayer and for the past millennium for public prayer.

Some people think kneeling is degrading, the grovelling of a slave, a sign of desperation, penitence, even of self-hatred. They regard it as unbecoming of children of God or inconsistent with the modern sensibility to "bow to no-one". Perhaps on this basis kneelers were removed from pews and confessionals in some churches, and people even instructed not to kneel.

Yet kneeling has a history for us. In the Scriptures, kneeling means far more than penitence. Moses prostrated himself before the burning bush (*Ex 3:1-6*). Solomon knelt at the consecration of the Temple (*1 Kgs 8:54; 2 Chr 6:13*). Daniel knelt to pray in the privacy of his room (*Dan 6:11*). The Magi bowed low before the infant King (*Mt 2:11*). And the Psalmist calls us all to do the same: "Come in, let us bow and bend low; let us kneel before the God who made us" (*Ps 95:6*).

In the New Testament, kneeling before Jesus is common and never demeaning. Most often it is a posture of supplication, especially for healing: the leper or the bleeding woman seeking healing (*Mk 1:40; 5:33; cf. Mt 15:30*), the parent pleading for their child or official for his servant (*Mk 5:22; 7:25; Lk 8:41; cf. Acts 9:40*), Mary grieving the death of her brother Lazarus (*Jn 11:32*). Sometimes it is a gesture of thanksgiving, as when the one grateful leper returned and knelt before Christ (*Lk 17:16*); the word St Luke uses there is *εὐχαριστῶν*, from which we get our word "Eucharist." Kneeling is also an expression of awe and worship, as with Peter after the miraculous catch of fish (*Lk 5:8*), or the disciples at the Transfiguration (*Mt 17:6; cf. Jn 18:6*), or the woman anointing Jesus' feet (*Lk 7:38ff; Jn 11:2; 12:3ff*), or those who encountered the Risen Lord (*Mt 28:9*). St Paul summarises this reverence for Christ in his *Letter to the Philippians*: "At the name of Jesus



every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (*Phil 2:10*).

On the night before He suffered, Jesus modelled a Eucharistic kneeling when He knelt to wash His disciples' feet (*Jn 13:1*), and having given us His all in the Eucharist, He went out into the darkness to pray, kneeling in anguish (*Lk 22:41*) and asking His disciples to watch one hour with Him (*Mk 14:37*). When we "make a holy hour" praying before the Blessed Sacrament, or at least a few holy minutes, we might kneel at least for part of the time, as a Gospel expression of thanksgiving and trust, adoration and awe, penitence and need, sheer companionship with Jesus.

On this Solemn Feast of Corpus Christi, and in preparation for the International Eucharistic Congress, I challenge all our faithful clergy, religious and laity:

- To be regular at Mass
- To prepare well for Mass through Confession, observing the 1 hour Eucharistic fast, quiet prayer before Mass, and attention to your heart at the Penitential Rite
- To make worthy thanksgiving after Mass
- To find time and enthusiasm to adore the Eucharistic Lord in Mass and outside of Mass
- To take part in parish and archdiocesan devotions such as Adoration, Benediction and processions

- To reflect on how you might enact and share what you have received at the Eucharist with the world outside.

I also ask our parish clergy:

- To be generous in opening our churches for longer hours each day, as our faithful requested at the recent Synod of Sydney
- To offer at least one holy hour each week in each parish, and to collaborate with adjoining parishes to increase availability of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, including a Perpetual Adoration chapel in each deanery
- To reflect with your community on other ways that we might foster a more prayerful, Christ-centred and missionary spirit in our hearts, our homes and our parishes
- To restore kneelers in every church where they are missing
- To teach the faithful the appropriate postures as set out in the rubrics of the liturgy and encourage them to adopt them in worship and in private prayer so that our bodies support and express our hearts in their acts of devotion.

We kneel in adoration or thanksgiving, to plead for mercy and healing, but God does not leave us on our knees indefinitely. He raises us up and sends us out. Isaiah knelt in awe before the throne of God and heard the

words, "Whom shall I send?"; then, to his own astonishment, he found himself answering, "Here I am, Lord, send me" (*Isa 6:8*). Peter fell to his knees before the Lord and was told, "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men" (*Lk 5:10*). At Emmaus the two disciples recognised the Lord in "the Breaking of the Bread" and immediately after that Eucharist rose and returned to Jerusalem to proclaim Christ Risen (*Lk 24:30-35*). At the Ascension the disciples fell down in worship before Christ and were told *to get up and go*—"Go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I commanded you." (*Mt 28:16-20*). Worship and mission are inextricably linked; Eucharistic prayer and a Eucharistic life. We kneel to recognise Him and then we rise to make Him known. Lord, grant us the grace to receive you reverently, worship you truly and serve you with hearts renewed.

With my blessings on this beautiful feast,

Yours in Christ our Eucharistic Lord,



Most Rev. Anthony Fisher OP
Archbishop of Sydney

