



WONDERFUL NEWS!

Pastoral Letter to the Priests, Religious and People of
the Archdiocese of Sydney regarding the International
Eucharistic Congress in Sydney 2028



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Congratulations Sydney!

At the recent 53rd International Eucharistic Congress in Quito, Ecuador, the Papal Legate, announced what the Church of Sydney had been hoping for: that we will host the 54th International Eucharistic Congress in 2028, 100 years since Sydney last hosted this great event and twenty years since it hosted World Youth Day.

First established in the 19th century, the International Eucharistic Congress is a global ecclesial event that celebrates the central importance of the Eucharist in the life of the Church. Taking place over a week, it typically involves liturgical events such as Masses, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Eucharistic Processions, as well as educational and cultural activities.

Eucharistic Congresses are animated by the belief that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life, and that, through the presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, Catholics can renew their faith and be spiritually nourished to carry out their mission of evangelisation and service to all people (cf. Mt 28:19-20).

A three-phased project

The project will unfold in three phases. The first will begin next year which, providentially, is a holy year or major anniversary of Christ's birth. Over three years we will allow Christ to till the field of our hearts so we can receive the seeds of grace when 2028 comes. To this end we will be appointing organisers centrally but also locally, and seeking your ideas on what preparatory activities you would like to see unfolding in the coming years.

The second phase will take place in 2028 through the celebration of the congress itself: who could forget the wonderful days of World Youth Day in Sydney and the many fruits for our

Church? We will be applying the faith, imagination and energy of our people, including our young people, to ensure we offer the Catholics of Australia, the Pacific, and the world, those of other faiths who wish to join us, and all the on-lookers a truly joyful, faith-filled celebration of all that is most precious to us.

Phase three will come into effect in the decade after the International Eucharistic Congress, as we continue to unpack all we have experienced with additional programmes, groups and events. We can expect long to be harvesting fruits such as increased Mass attendance, deeper prayer and devotional lives, increased vocations, revitalised parishes, greater outreach to our neighbours...and whatever surprises God has in store for us!

To deepen our understanding and love for "this wonderful sacrament", we might reflect on what it means for each of us personally and for our families and communities.

The Sacred Banquet in which Christ is received

An ancient love-song, Psalm 62, begins with the hunger in the human soul: "O God, you are my God, for you I long; for you my soul is thirsting, my body pines for you." This theme recurs throughout the Old Testament. In the New Testament and with the coming of Christ, it became clear that *he* is the food and drink we most deeply desire: the Eucharist is God's response to the deepest hunger of the human heart.

But is such *physical* contact with God possible or even desirable? Aren't words and thoughts enough? Well, as spiritual *and material* beings, we are capable of a union with God that captures all that makes us human. God became one of us so he might express himself in touch and tears, through soothing words and loud cries, in all the ways human beings do. Jesus is no ghost or

theory: he is God communicating his life to us as a flesh and blood human being, in bodily signs and visible symbols. We participate in this physical-spiritual connection through the sacraments that Christ instituted during his earthly life.

The greatest of these is the Eucharist—what St Thomas Aquinas called “the sacred banquet in which Christ is received”. Here Jesus gives his all: his body, blood, soul and divinity, and under simple signs of bread and wine we receive “the unfathomable holiness of God”.

Where the memory of his passion is renewed

God gives himself to us and in return we render him *eucharistou*, which means thanks and praise. The Eucharist is our biggest *Thank-you* to God for sending his Son to save us – indeed the only adequate thanks we could offer.

The Mass is not just a nostalgia trip to first century Palestine: rather, it extends the all-sufficient sacrifice of Good Friday to every time and place. When St Thomas says that in the Eucharist “the memory of Christ’s passion is renewed”, he means that the events are here and now for us, that we are present as “the work of our redemption is accomplished” and we participate in it. When the priest says the words of consecration – “Take this, all of you, and eat of it, for this is my Body... Take this, all of you, and drink of it, for this is the chalice of my Blood” – the Sacrifice of Love anticipated on Holy Thursday, consummated on Good Friday, and victorious at Easter, is ours to receive and to offer to the Father.

Where the mind is filled with grace

But the Eucharist is not magic. If we don’t prepare well, we won’t receive all the Mass promises. So we fast for at least an hour before Holy Communion. We confess all serious sins in Con-

fession and all lesser ones during the Penitential Rite in Mass. If we are not (yet) a Catholic or have committed some serious but yet-unabsolved sin, or are otherwise not well disposed, we abstain from Communion until we have rectified things. We can also prepare for God’s grace by reading prayerfully in advance the Scriptures set down for that Mass; by attending Mass or visiting the Blessed Sacrament during the week; and getting to church early to pray before Mass. One way or another, we must get into the rhythm of attending Mass every Sunday as God and the Church call us to do, and open ourselves up to receiving the graces of the Mass.

We do this because more than just filling our stomach with earthly food, the Eucharist fills our hearts and souls—as St Thomas put it, “the mind is filled with grace”—and we need to be recharged in this way with the divine life if we are to become more Christ-like, imitating him and living a disciple’s life.

Where the pledge of future glory is given to us

At the Last Supper, Jesus washed the feet of his bride the Church, as some of the ancients did in their wedding ceremonies; he then gave his Body in the Eucharist; and finally, from the Cross, declared “it is consummated”. Jesus renews that marriage vow, to be with us always, whenever the Eucharist is celebrated.

So the Eucharist recalls the *past* (what Christ

has done for us), informs the *present* (by uniting and inspiring us now), but also promises the *future* (preparing us for glory). Early Christians called it “the food that prepares us for incorruptibility”, “the journey food” on the way to heaven and “the medicine of immortality”. Like spiritual superannuation, it gives us security for the future, getting us ready for the afterlife.

That future begins every time the priest says, “Go forth, the Mass is ended.” After receiving the Eucharist, we give thanks for the gifts received not by storing them up for ourselves but rather by putting them to the service of others. We do this whenever we turn our attention to a neighbour in need, give witness to all we have proclaimed in Mass, and work to build a more just and compassionate society.

Experiencing the fruits of our redemption

It is my hope that, in hosting the International Eucharistic Congress in Sydney 2028, we might: reach out to those who have never known or long been disconnected from the Eucharistic Lord; ensure a higher proportion of the faithful come to pray and celebrate the Mass with us on a regular basis; deepen our own faith in “this wonderful sacrament” through catechesis; renew our understanding of the *ars celebrandi* and commit ourselves to a more active and conscious participation in the Mass; cultivate our piety towards the Mass, Holy Communion, and the Church’s rich treasury of devotions; be activated to live the Christian life in all its fullness and to reach out to others in spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

The International Eucharistic Congress can do all this for us and more!



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF SYDNEY

For more information, including a footnoted version of this pastoral letter, visit iec2028.org

Prayer of St Thomas Aquinas to the Blessed Sacrament

(a good prayer after Mass)

O Sacred Banquet, in which Christ is received, the memory of his Passion is renewed, the mind is filled with grace; and we are given a pledge of future glory.

✠. You have given them Bread from Heaven.

✠. Having in itself all sweetness.

O God, who in this wonderful Sacrament have left us a memorial of your Passion, grant us, we pray, so to reverence the sacred mysteries of your Body and Blood that we may always experience in ourselves the fruits of your redemption. Who live and reign with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, One God, for ever and ever.

Thanks be to God for this wonderful Sacrament that the Vatican Council called “the source and summit of the whole Christian life”. Thanks be to God for your devotion to it! May our Eucharistic Lord hold you close to him always.

Yours sincerely in Christ our Eucharistic Lord

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads “Anthony Fisher, OP”.

(Most Rev.) Anthony Fisher OP
ARCHBISHOP OF SYDNEY

