**Homily at Mass for Eurocampo – Carfin, 1st August 2017**

The Congregation for Divine Worship wrote a letter to all bishops recently on behalf of Pope Francis reminding us about the need to ensure the required integrity of the elements used in the celebration of the Eucharist. This basically means that the bread is identifiable as bread and the wine as wine and it laid down the basic requirements for this to be so. This instruction was issued to guard against the possibility of alternatives being used which would therefore compromise the validity of the Mass being celebrated.

Perhaps this may sound a bit technical for yourselves, whose very presence at this week’s gathering indicates your belief in the presence of the Lord in the Eucharist and your great love for the celebration of the Mass and the adoration of Our Eucharistic Lord both in the tabernacle and when exposed upon the altar. The word integrity in regard to the Eucharist extends beyond the essential elements used in its liturgical celebration and I would like to express some thoughts about this.

First of all considering the priest celebrant - although the reality of what is celebrated and the saving effects of its grace do not depend on the worthiness of the priest, all priests (and bishops) are aware that they are indeed the “earthenware vessels” as described by St Paul. We are unworthy in ourselves but are the recipients of the grace of Christ through ordination so that we can celebrate the sacred mysteries in his person for the benefit of his people. Allowing for personal flaws of character the faithful though have a right to expect that there is true integrity in the person of the priest and that he is truly striving to be a faithful minister, living a holy life in accord with the promises made at his ordination. This is not always the case and unfortunately scandal is caused if this comes to light. It can be a struggle for the priest to live up to all that he has promised and accepted in his priestly commitments, thus the need for his own deep relationship with the Lord and the support of the prayers of the faithful. At this Mass therefore and at every Mass I ask your prayers for the priest celebrating the Mass and for all priests that there may always be within them a truthfulness, and an integrity between the great mysteries they celebrate and the holiness and wholesomeness of their own lives.

We can think of integrity also in regard to all the faithful who come to Mass and participate as fully as they can in its celebration. Like the priest you bring your own awareness of sin and weakness and your need to be saved by Christ and receive the blessings of his grace, especially in the reception of Holy Communion. The Church teaches us that in order to receive the Lord in the best way possible and to benefit from the grace of the sacrament we should strive to live in a manner worthy of our Christian calling. In order to do this there needs to be a desire to change whatever is sinful in our lives and make the effort necessary with the Lord’s help to do this. If people are living estranged from the Lord and his Body, the Church, because of the choices they have made and the life-style they are following it is necessary to confess one’s sins before coming to receive the Lord in Holy Communion. Freed from sin we are ready then to receive the Lord with pure hearts and can then hope to live the virtuous lives he expects of us. In our present world when we can sometimes presume too easily our own worthiness it is necessary to have a proper awareness of our need for repentance and renewal in order to be open to the grace the Lord offers us in the Eucharist. Integrity in the lives of each of us is a necessary condition therefore for receiving the Lord worthily in Holy Communion and in carrying its fruitfulness into our daily lives.

Another point worth considering in regard to the integrity of the celebration of Mass is that the whole of the Mass is important, from the Sign of the Cross at the beginning until the final blessing and dismissal at the end. People should not come late for Mass nor leave early. Each part of the Mass, the prayers said and gestures made, have their own significance and we need to concentrate throughout the whole of Mass and participate as best we can in the words and actions and in our interior stillness and openness to the Lord’s loving presence. Its celebration opens for us the Word of God along with the prayers and tradition which have come down to us from the apostles and the early Church. It is not something made up in the recent past but something which has always been the most precious part of the Church’s life and worship. We celebrate Mass in the many languages of the peoples across the world but wherever we go and in whatever language Mass is celebrated we use the same prayers, listen to the same scripture passages, and repeat the same actions as we have been instructed to do so by Our Lord at the Last Supper. However grand or modest the setting in which the Mass is celebrated it is always the same Eucharist, in which the saving passion, death and resurrection of Our Lord are renewed for us and we participate in its grace and blessing. It is such a precious action that we should never wish to miss one moment of the celebration we are so privileged to participate in.

Going back to the integrity of the elements used at Mass, the bread and the wine, I think it is important to emphasise how great a privilege it is to receive the Body and the Blood of Christ. When communion under both kinds is offered to the faithful in Holy Communion the people should reach out in the same way for the Precious Blood of Christ as they do for his Body. In doing so we are acknowledging and benefit from the fulness of Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross, his Body broken and Blood outpoured. To accept the cup of the Lord’s suffering, with its promise of sharing the new wine at the eternal banquet enriches our understanding of the wonder of what we receive in Holy Communion and heightens our desire to thank the Lord for his goodness to us.

It is wonderful that you, the participants at Eurocampo 2017, have gathered here in Scotland to reflect on the gift of the Holy Eucharist in the life and worship of the Church. I am sure such a time of prayer and reflection with and before the Lord in the Holy Eucharist will bring great blessings to yourselves and to all whom you bring to the Lord. May the fruits of this blessed time remain with you always and may we all, and especially the Church here in Scotland, benefit from your prayers and from your love for and devotion towards the Holy Eucharist.

+ Joseph Toal