

Vicar Apostolic of Arabia – Pastoral Letter 2011

“Do this in memory of me!”

(Luke 22:19)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

May the Lord give you peace and joy in the Holy Spirit! – **In this pastoral letter I would like to speak to you about a few aspects of the Holy Eucharist.** Right from the beginning when I came to the Gulf region I was impressed by the deep faith you show regarding the Holy Eucharist: Both those who have the possibility to participate in the Holy Mass regularly and those who thirst for it although they do not have very often the possibility to share in the Eucharist. I remember having seen tears in the eyes of some faithful when I had the opportunity to celebrate the Holy Mass in places where freedom of worship is not readily available. At such times I wished that people who were living in countries with religious freedom but did not profit from it would have been present, realising what it means to yearn for the sacrament.

Respect for the daily bread

1. The respect for the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist begins with the respect for the daily bread we are asking for in the Lord’s Prayer. The following experience during my childhood has remained with me for the rest of my life: At home we had a small farm with a few cows. We also planted wheat from which we got our own bread. We were rather poor and had to work hard for the daily bread. When we were at table before cutting the first slice from a new loaf of bread, my father or my mother would cut with a knife the sign of the cross on it. It was the expression of respect for the daily bread as a gift from God and the fruit of hard work during the year. Bread was considered something holy. I still remember how angry my father could become, when he saw a piece of bread thrown away. “Never throw bread away, it is holy”, he used to say.

From the daily bread to the bread of life

2. Before Jesus instituted the Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper he taught his disciples a kind of natural respect for the gifts of God. When Jesus fed the crowds “looking up to heaven, he said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples“ (Matthew 14:19). After the people were satisfied, the disciples had to collect carefully what was remaining not only to show the greatness of the miracle but also out of respect for the wonderful gift from God: “Pick up the pieces left over, so that nothing is wasted” (John 6:12). We find similar behaviour whenever Jesus is dealing with food. The blessing of the food was part of the Jewish tradition and continued among the Christians. During the Last Supper we find the words again: “While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, ‘Take and eat; this is my body’” (Matthew 26:26). However, at this moment the blessing had a particular quality because it was intended for a food that should be more than the daily bread, namely the “bread of life”, the body of Christ

himself. This bread was worthy not only of the respect we should have for the natural food as a gift of God; this bread is worthy of adoration.

“Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life”

3. Let us listen to the words in chapter 6 of the gospel according to John where Jesus announces the Eucharist. In it we receive actually the “bread of life” which is much more holy than the bread we eat in our own home. Jesus says: “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. ... Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you” (John 6:51, 53). The natural bread and other basic food guarantee the physical life. The bread Jesus speaks about is the basic food for the spiritual life which means: The life, which lasts even when our bodies become weak and when – one day – we shall die. That’s why Jesus says: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day” (John 6:54). Of course: These words were scandalous and unbearable to those who heard them at the time: “How can this man give us (his) flesh to eat?” they said (John 6:52). We should not be surprised when throughout history again and again, people were scandalised by the words of Jesus. Despite the grumbling of his listeners he does not change his statement but confirms it again: “My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him” (John 6:55-56). We know that many of the first disciples left Jesus because of these words. He even asked his closest friends: “Do you also want to leave?” (John 6:67). He took the risk of losing his disciples rather than weaken his words. We know the wonderful answer Simon Peter gave: “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). It is the answer we still have to give to the question of the Lord.

Word of God and Eucharist

4. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* Pope Benedict XVI has given us a profound reflection about the connection between the Word and the Sacraments. The *“Scripture itself points us towards an appreciation of its own unbreakable bond with the Eucharist. It can never be forgotten that the divine word, read and proclaimed by the Church, has as its one purpose the sacrifice of the new covenant and the banquet of grace, that is, the Eucharist”. Word and Eucharist are so deeply bound together that we cannot understand one without the other: the word of God sacramentally takes flesh in the event of the Eucharist. The Eucharist opens us to an understanding of Scripture, just as Scripture for its part illumines and explains the mystery of the Eucharist. Unless we acknowledge the Lord’s real presence in the Eucharist, our understanding of Scripture remains imperfect. For this reason ‘the Church has honoured the word of God and the Eucharistic mystery with the same reverence, although not with the same worship, and has always and everywhere insisted upon and sanctioned such honour. Moved by the example of her Founder, she has never ceased to celebrate his paschal mystery by coming together to read ‘in all the Scriptures the things concerning him’ (Luke 24:27) and to carry out the work of salvation through the celebration of the memorial of the Lord and through the sacraments’” (No. 55).*

The taste of the Paschal Lamb

5. Jesus puts into action what he had announced in Capernaum on the evening before he delivered himself into the hands of those who condemned him and put him to death on the cross. Our Lord celebrated the Passover with his disciples and “he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me’. And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you’” (Luke 22:19-20). Jesus spoke these words while celebrating the Passover which for the Israelites was the memory of their liberation from the slavery in Egypt. The very precise circumstances of celebrating the Passover, the smell and the taste of the roasted lamb, the unleavened bread and the bitter herbs should recall the whole history of their liberation. Still today, when the Jews celebrate their Passover, the youngest son has to ask the question after the meaning of the rite as it is written in the book of Exodus: “If your son should ask you later on, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall tell him, ‘With a strong hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, that place of slavery’” (Exodus 13,14). By eating the lamb they should taste and experience in a sacramental way God’s salvation.

The memorial of the New Covenant

6. Putting the institution of the Eucharist into relationship with the Passover and celebrating it a few hours before giving his life as the sacrificial lamb on the cross, Jesus has given us the memorial of the new covenant which has freed us from the slavery of sin and death. The first Christian communities experienced the risen Christ in the breaking of bread and drinking the cup, because it was Jesus himself, who transformed the bread and the wine into a new reality to be tasted by his disciples: “This is my body that is for you ... This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:24-25). By the Lord’s command and by the power of his Holy Spirit, each time, when the priest speaks Christ’s words over the bread and the wine, when we eat this bread and drink this cup, the Lord is really present: present in his death on the cross and in his resurrection, present with his infinite love for us sinners. In this sacrament he is really among us as the only Son who speaks to us about his Father and his Kingdom, as the doctor who cares for the sick and heals them, as the shepherd who gives his life for his sheep, as the suffering servant in Gethsemane who committed himself to the will of his Father, and as the Son who remains truthful to his Father even to death on the cross.

The breaking of bread can heal a divided community

7. “Breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42) was, from the very beginning of the Church, one of the terms used for the Holy Eucharist, and was the sign of communion and fraternity. Unfortunately the Christians – for example the community in Corinth – had difficulties in maintaining full communion among themselves. Saint Paul was informed that there were factions, jealousies, inequalities, injustices and divisions. How to overcome a situation, which had become a counter-witness to Christ’s will? Paul simply reaffirms the words he had received from the Lord and passed on to the community of Corinth. For the healing of a divided community starts from the core of the Christian belief: Jesus Christ himself, who died on the cross, gives himself in the

bread and wine, which become the body and blood of our Saviour. “For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). We can also add the words of Jesus in John’s gospel: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him” (John 6:56). The Lord is the guarantee of the unity.

The sacrament of charity

8. Pope Benedict XVI summarises this mystery right at the beginning of his Apostolic Exhortation entitled “The Sacrament of Charity” when he says: *“The sacrament of charity, the Holy Eucharist is the gift that Jesus Christ makes of himself, thus revealing to us God’s infinite love for every man and woman. This wondrous sacrament makes manifest that ‘greater’ love which led him to ‘lay down his life for his friends’ (John 15:13). Jesus did indeed love them ‘to the end’ (John 13:1). In those words the Evangelist introduces Christ’s act of immense humility: before dying for us on the Cross, he tied a towel around himself and washed the feet of his disciples. In the same way, Jesus continues, in the sacrament of the Eucharist, to love us ‘to the end’, even to offering us his body and his blood. What amazement must the Apostles have felt in witnessing what the Lord did and said during that Supper! What wonder must the eucharistic mystery also awaken in our own hearts!” (Sacramentum Caritatis 1).*

“I have given you a model to follow”

9. In the gospel of John, Jesus expresses his deep love in a very impressive gesture when he washes the feet of his disciples. There is no doubt about the love Jesus is showing but looking at the reaction of Peter there could be a doubt about our capacity to accept the love of Jesus. Isn’t it very often the problem even among us that we are not ready or able to accept the love of the others? Jesus, the Master, is acting as a friend. He is inviting us to do the same: “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do” (John 13:15). Jesus gave us the example of washing the feet of his disciples and he left us the Holy Eucharist as a memorial through which we should acquire a taste for his life. Whoever is in communion with Jesus and receives the gift of his body and his blood, should equally acquire a taste for the love Jesus showed. Celebrating the Holy Eucharist, receiving Holy Communion and staying in adoration before the Holy Sacrament should lead us to make Christ’s behaviour our own. Therefore, the Mass is not completed unless the Christ we have eaten becomes visible in our life: through fraternal service, through words able to build peace, through acts inspiring hope, through imitating Jesus washing the feet of the others, through gestures of reconciliation. In a few words: The Holy Communion will be accomplished when we live and love as he did.

Christ is the food of truth

10. Let us again read a few words of the Holy Father in his Apostolic Exhortation: “In the sacrament of the Eucharist, Jesus shows us in particular the truth about the love which is the very essence of God. It is this evangelical truth which challenges each of us and our whole being. For this reason, the Church, which finds in the Eucharist the very centre of her life, is constantly concerned to proclaim to all, *opportune importune* (cf. 2 Timothy 4:2), that God is love. Precisely because Christ has become for us the food of truth, the Church turns to every man and woman, inviting them freely to accept God's gift” (Sacramentum Caritatis 2).

Regular celebration avoids spiritual starvation

11. Whoever eats and drinks from these gifts, has to adjust his life to the life of Jesus Christ, and there begins the long pilgrimage we have to make. It will not be sufficient for our spiritual life to receive the body of Christ just a few times each year nor should any of you eat only on a few particular days of the year otherwise you would die of starvation. As we need regular food for our physical life so we need for our interior life the spiritual bread Jesus gives us. It is not sufficient to go to the sacraments only at Christmas and Easter. How can he be “one with us” if we are not longing for him and willing to be one with him regularly? I know that there are valid reasons and situations, when certain faithful are not able to join the Eucharistic celebration but where we have the possibility to go to Mass on Sundays (respectively on Fridays), we should make an effort to do so. The celebration of the Eucharist is the solemn proclamation of our faith in the risen Lord as we profess after the consecration: “We proclaim your death, O Lord, and profess your resurrection until you come again.” How many Christians in our Vicariate and in other parts of the world are longing for the bread of life, but cannot get it regularly because of various obstacles? As I mentioned at the beginning of this letter, I have seen people weeping for joy when, after many months and under difficult circumstances, they had the opportunity to attend the Holy Eucharist. Our young people, especially the children, need the good example of adults to become strengthened in their faith. I take this opportunity to thank all of you who are assisting the children: the parents, the priests, the catechists and sisters, all of you who through your personal witness help our young people to find the right way.

Spiritual communion for those who cannot go to Mass

12. For those who are not able to join the Holy Mass I would like to make a suggestion that is also associated with my childhood memories: Our home was far away from the church. It was impossible to go to the church every day, even on Sundays one of the family had to remain to look after the cattle. However, we prayed every morning in our family a prayer that helped us to be spiritually united to the Sacrament of the Eucharist. The prayer may be also helpful for those among you who for a valid reason cannot always go to Mass:

Dear Guardian Angel, go for me to the church, there kneel down at Mass for me. At the Offertory, take me to God, and offer Him my service: What I am, what I have, offer as my gift. At the Consecration, with your seraphic strength, adore my Saviour truly present, praying for those who have loved me, for those who have offended me, and for those now deceased, that the blood of Jesus may purify them all. During Holy Communion, bring to me the body and blood of Jesus uniting Him with me in spirit,

so that my heart may become His dwelling place. Plead with Him, that through His sacrifice all people throughout the world may be saved. When the Mass ends, bring home to me and to every home, the Lord's blessing. Amen.

We are still surrounded by the angels and by the saints who are glorifying God and protecting and assisting mankind. Why should we not make them our particular friends and allies in situations where we are touching limits that we cannot overcome?

Praise the one who is your food

13. In my mother tongue (German) we have a proverb: "I honour the one, whose bread I eat." It means that we do not speak and plot against the one who guarantees our income and daily life. We speak well of him and take care of keeping a good relationship. We may apply this proverb to Jesus: "I honour and praise the One, whose bread I eat." Singing the praises of Christ means first of all: to apply his words in our life and to undergo the necessary conversion. It means, to adore him in the Holy Sacrament praying before the tabernacle. It means to be respectful to Christ's Mystical Body — my brothers and sisters. There are many ways to express our respect for Christ who is "the bread of life". As my father used to say: "Never throw away the bread!" Apply this to the holy bread: "Never throw away Jesus!" He asks to take and keep his place in the midst of your life. He wants to dwell in your hearts.

A few practical rules

14. Dear brothers and sisters, I started my letter with the experience of my childhood that we had to take care of the daily food (bread) and to treat it with respect and reverence for the Creator who is the giver of all good. If already the "daily bread" deserves our respect how much more reverence is due to "the bread of life"! In the following I would like to call to mind a few elements that should help us to celebrate the Holy Eucharist in a worthy manner and to behave properly in the presence of the Lord.

Respect the particular significance of the Eucharist

15. The Second Vatican Council speaks about the Holy Eucharist as "the source and the summit of the Christian life" (*Lumen Gentium* 11). In the decree about the priestly ministry the same Council states: "The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis* 5). It is important to respect the particular significance of the Holy Eucharist in the life of our communities. Other devotions and activities although they remain important should not be mixed with the Mass, unless the Church herself has foreseen it as in the case of other sacraments administered during the Eucharist (baptism, confirmation, blessing of the marriage, ordination). Novenas and suchlike should be celebrated either before or after the Mass, the priest vested without chasuble. Other activities in the parish like meetings of the different associations and groups have to be scheduled in order that the priority of the Eucharist as "the source and the summit of the Christian life" is not confused.

Who can receive the Holy Communion?

16. Only baptised persons are in a position to receive Holy Communion; normally it is required that Christians live in full communion with the Catholic Church. However, the faithful of those Churches which have valid priesthood (e.g. the different Orthodox Churches) or those non-Catholics who are baptised and believe in the real presence of the Lord in the blessed sacrament may receive the body of Christ if they have no other possibility to do so in their own respective Church. During the solemn celebrations of Christmas, Holy Week and Easter it might be helpful to give a short instruction before the Holy Communion. For example: *“We remind the participants in this Holy Mass that only those who are baptised and in the state of grace and believe in the presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist may receive the Holy Communion. All the others, kindly remain where you are, until the distribution of the Holy Communion is completed.”*

“You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and of the table of demons”

17. Anyone who is aware of living in a state of mortal sin must not go to Communion before being pardoned in the sacrament of reconciliation. Saint Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians is very definite when he comes to the question of being faithful in our lives with what we are celebrating. “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and also the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and of the table of demons” (1 Corinthians 10:21). Although Paul speaks these words in the context of idolatry, it is easy to understand them in the wider field of giving in to the works of the devil. The apostle leaves no doubt that companionship with the devil is incompatible with partaking at the table of the Lord. He explicitly gives the admonition “Let us not indulge in immorality” (1 Corinthians 10:8). Later he blames the faithful in Corinth for “showing contempt for the Church of God” in allowing disunion and social discrimination within the Christian community: “In this matter I do not praise you” (1 Corinthians 11:22). For this reason we have carefully to examine ourselves if we are living immorally or treating our fellow Christians in a discriminatory way. “Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself” (1 Corinthians 11:27-29).

How do we receive the Holy Communion?

18. How do we receive Holy Communion? In our multinational Vicariate we are allowed to receive the body of Christ either into our hand or directly on our tongue. The priest raises the host before the communicant and announces “The body of Christ” who replies “Amen” (Yes, I believe) and then receives the host in his/her palm or on the tongue. The communicant immediately consumes the consecrated host before returning. (Especially during the big feasts it may be good to place ushers close to the ministers who distribute communion in order to make sure that everybody consumes the host). Those who receive the body of Christ into their hands form a kind of crib for the Lord putting one hand under the other. Do not pick the host from the priest/minister with thumb and forefinger as seems to be a practice in some places of the world. Those who receive the Holy Communion on the tongue first answer

“Amen” before the priest/minister puts the consecrated host on the tongue. Sticking the tongue out properly helps to place the host well. Both ways should always be done in a worthy manner. Whether you receive communion on the hand or on the tongue, you should always humbly remember that the tongue as well as the hand are not worthy to receive the Lord, both being too often instruments of sin. However, it is the Lord himself who has the power to cleanse us from our stains.

Our bearing during the Holy Eucharist

19. We are speaking not only with our tongue but also with our body. During the liturgy we worship not only with our mind and with the spoken words but also express our reverence with our bearing. When we enter a church or a chapel where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the tabernacle we genuflect. Those faithful who have problems with their knees or are coming from a cultural background where the genuflection is not known at all, should bow reverently. During the Mass we rise for the entrance of the celebrant until the prayer before the reading; we stand for the gospel, the creed, for the intercessions, for the preface and the Sanctus, again from the Lord’s Prayer until the distribution of the Holy Communion, and again for the final prayer and blessing. We sit during the first and the second Scripture reading, during the homily, during the offertory, and during the distribution of the Holy Communion. We kneel from after the Sanctus to the end of the Eucharistic Prayer where this praiseworthy tradition is kept (otherwise we stand). The same applies after the Agnus Dei when the priest shows the consecrated host inviting us “Behold the Lamb of God ...” It is good that we control from time to time the way we genuflect, bow, rise up, kneel, sit, or walk in the church. The language of our body reveals if we are really believing in the presence of our Lord and showing our reverence. The same is true regarding our dress. We should always be dressed in a way that is proper to a holy place. That does not mean in any way that we have to make a “fashion parade” which could easily end in a kind of social discrimination within the church. However, we should not forget the parable of the king who gave a wedding feast: “When the king came in to meet the guests he saw a man there not dressed in a wedding garment. He said to him, ‘My friend, how is it that you came in here without a wedding garment?’ But he was reduced to silence. Then the king said to his attendants, ‘Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth’” (Matthew 22:11-13).

“This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me”

20. During the liturgy and other common prayers we use our tongue for reciting and singing as Psalm 35 says: “Then my tongue shall recount your justice, declare your praise, all day long” (verse 28). There are moments of abundant joy as in Psalm 126: “Our mouths were filled with laughter; our tongues sang for joy. Then it was said among the nations, ‘The Lord had done great things for them’” (verse 2). However, we should never forget the ambiguity of our tongue as Saint James reminds us in his letter: “With (the tongue) we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. This need not be so, my brothers” (James 3:9-10). Besides the risk James is speaking about, there is another danger in our liturgies and common prayers. Jesus himself speaks about it, referring to the prophet Isaiah: “Hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy about you when he said: ‘This people honours me with their

lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts” (Matthew 15:7-9). A constant effort is needed that our heart does not go astray. There are among others two means that can help us to be more attentive in our prayers. One thing is the speed of our language. I noticed that in most of our churches we pray too fast. Very often I heard complaints from some faithful, especially from newcomers that they could not follow the speed of the assembly that very often is closer to a Formula 1 race than to a true prayer. Please, slow down! Another element that can help to improve the quality of our prayer is the silence. God does not expect continuous reciting and singing. At least short breaks of silence help to get back to the source of life. I once heard this wonderful comment about the short breaks in the psalmody of the monks in the monastery: “The short break in the verses of the psalmody is the space of the Holy Spirit.” How can the Holy Spirit enter, if we do not give him sufficient space in silent listening? Did not Jesus himself get up early in the morning to be in prayerful silent communion with his Father? It was one of the reasons for the power of his speaking, so differently of the Scribes and the Pharisees with their prayer routine and endless words.

Eucharistic adoration

21. Some of our parishes have an adoration chapel where the faithful have the possibility of silent adoration during the day. Wherever it is possible to have such an opportunity I am highly in favour of it. I refer to Pope Benedict XVI in the Apostolic Exhortation about the Eucharist: *“Great benefit would ensue from a suitable catechesis explaining the importance of this act of worship, which enables the faithful to experience the liturgical celebration more fully and more fruitfully. Wherever possible, it would be appropriate, especially in densely populated areas, to set aside specific churches or oratories for perpetual adoration. I also recommend that, in their catechetical training, and especially in their preparation for First Holy Communion, children be taught the meaning and the beauty of spending time with Jesus, and helped to cultivate a sense of awe before his presence in the Eucharist”* (*Sacramentum Caritatis* 67). However, there are a few things to observe and to take into consideration: The exposed Blessed Sacrament should never be left alone, i.e. without the presence of one or several people in adoration. The Blessed Sacrament has to be secured in a way that the risk of profanation is minimised. Nobody must touch the ostensory except the priest or the mandated person who is exposing and reposing the consecrated host at the beginning and at the end of the adoration time. – What I just said about the silent adoration should also be better observed during the monthly or weekly Holy Hour.

The new English translation in view

22. Another opportunity to deepen again our familiarity with the liturgy of the Holy Eucharist will be the introduction of the new English translation of the Missal on the First Sunday of Advent this year (at least if the liturgical books are available for us by that date). Most of the ordinary texts of the Holy Mass will have minor or major changes. I have already informed the priests during the last general meeting about the upcoming changes. Hopefully we shall be able to give some help by a period of introduction of the new translation. It will be important that we take the learning of the new texts as an opportunity to rediscover the beauty of the Mass liturgy and to deepen our spiritual knowledge of the texts we pray.

The Christ we eat in the sacrament has to become visible in our deeds

23. Brothers and Sisters, Jesus gave us the Holy Eucharist as a memorial in order that we develop the taste for his life. Whoever lives in communion with Jesus and gets the gift of his body and his blood, should equally develop the taste for the love Jesus showed during the last supper: “Do you realise what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do” (John 13:12-15). Celebrating the Holy Mass, receiving the Holy Communion and staying in adoration before the Holy Sacrament should have the result that we make Christ's behaviour ours. Therefore, the Mass is not completed unless the Christ we have eaten becomes visible through our deeds. That means: through fraternal service, through words able to build peace, through acts inspiring hope and imitating the humility of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. In a few words: The Holy Communion will be accomplished when we live and love as Jesus did. We cannot follow him without bearing his cross and living the same spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation. We cannot be close to him without serving our brothers and sisters. He gives us his body as the bread of life and therefore the necessary nourishment on our way to him.

If you receive worthily, you are what you have received: the body of Christ

24. Saint Augustine in his teaching about the Holy Eucharist says: “Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe.” And then he says to those who were just newly baptised: “... I promised you, who have now been baptised, ... I would explain the Sacrament of the Lord's Table, which you now look upon and of which you ... were made participants. You ought to know what you have received, what you are going to receive, and what you ought to receive daily. That bread which you see on the altar, having been sanctified by the word of God, is the body of Christ. That chalice, or rather, what is in that chalice, having been sanctified by the word of God, is the blood of Christ. Through that bread and wine the Lord Christ willed to commend his body and blood, which he poured out for us unto the forgiveness of sins. If you receive worthily, you are what you have received” (Sermon 272). In other words: You become the body of Christ.

Our Lady of Arabia – pray for us

25. How could I finish this letter without referring to the one from whom the Son of God has taken flesh: Mary, the Virgin Mother of God. On 15 January 2011, during his visit in Kuwait, the Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Cardinal Cañizares Llevara has proclaimed “Our Lady of Arabia” as the patroness of all the seven countries belonging to the two Vicariates in the Gulf region. We shall celebrate the solemn feast of “Our Lady of Arabia” every year on Saturday before the 2nd Sunday of the Ordinary Time, i.e. in January on the weekend after the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord. May “Our Lady of Arabia” intercede for us that we are filled with the same love for the body of Christ as she was! With her who “kept all these things (that happened with Jesus) in her heart” (Luke 2:51) we shall deepen our faith in him, the Son of God and the son of Mary, and in the wonderful gift he has given us in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life

26. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, although the liturgical celebration of the Mass ends with the blessing and the final greeting, the “Mass of our life” never should come to an end. When we leave the church after the Mass we should always be aware that then the implementation of the Word and the Sacrament truly begins. We all are called to continue the Eucharist glorifying the Lord by our life. “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love to all of you in Christ Jesus!” (1 Corinthians 16:23-24).

+ Paul Hinder OFM Cap
Vicar Apostolic of Arabia