

Via satellite video, pope urges Catholics to make world better

QUEBEC CITY - The Eucharist is the church's "most beautiful treasure" and introduces the faithful to eternal life, Pope Benedict XVI said in his homily during the closing Mass of the 49th International Eucharistic Congress June 22.

Speaking via satellite video in both English and French on two giant video screens that loomed over the historic Plains of Abraham in the city's Battlefield Park, Pope Benedict told more than 55,000 pilgrims that the Eucharist "is the sacrament par excellence" and contains the mysteries of salvation.

"It is the source and summit of all action and the life of the church," he said.

The pope said the Eucharist does not separate the faithful from their contemporaries, but as the supreme gift of God's love calls people to make the world a better place.

"We must not cease to fight so that every person is respected from conception to natural death, that our rich societies welcome the poorest and restore their dignity, that every person can live and feed his family, and that peace and justice radiate on all continents," he said.

The pope also announced that Dublin, Ireland, would host the next International Eucharistic Congress in 2012.

Pope Benedict urged participants to deepen their understanding of the Eucharist "so as to bear witness courageously to the mystery."

“We must go back again and again to the Last Supper on Holy Thursday, where we were given a pledge of the mystery of our redemption on the cross,” the pope said. “The Last Supper is the locus of the nascent church, the womb containing the church of every age.”

“In the Eucharist, Christ’s sacrifice is constantly renewed, Pentecost is constantly renewed,” he said.

The pope stressed proper preparation for receiving the Eucharist. As much as possible the Eucharist must be received with a pure heart, he said, especially through seeking the sacrament of reconciliation.

Sin, especially grave sin, opposes the action of the eucharistic grace in us, he said.

In addition to deepening the understanding of the Eucharist, he urged more eucharistic adoration to prolong communion with Christ.

The Mass took place in a park marking historic battlegrounds, where in 1759 the British defeated the French for control of Quebec. The giant screens showed not only close-ups of the liturgical celebration and wide shots of the massive crowd, but also glimpses inside the Vatican of the pope watching the proceedings on television.

Slovakian Cardinal Jozef Tomko, who acted as the pope’s representative throughout the weeklong congress, celebrated the closing Mass, known as the “Statio Orbis.” In his welcome, Quebec Cardinal Marc Ouellet, the congress’ host, explained the Latin words as “a kind of stopover, a prayer meeting to which all Catholics on earth are summoned.”

A gentle rain began to fall during the opening procession as hundreds of priests, bishops and cardinals made their way across the soggy grass toward the altar located on a raised wooden platform. Its design suggested the prow of a ship.

On a separate raised platform a choir and a brass ensemble provided the music for the liturgy that incorporated many prayers, including the Nicene Creed, sung in Latin.

The pope noted Quebec's celebration of the 400th anniversary of its founding, calling it an opportunity to recall the values of the pioneers and missionaries who founded the church in the French settlement.

He recalled St. Jean de Brebeuf and other Canadian men and women who played key roles in developing the life of the church and building Canada's social and cultural institutions.

He urged those present to learn from them and to follow their example without fear. God will accompany you and protect you, he said.