



## BISHOP *of* LISMORE

— GREGORY HOMEMING OCD —

### PASTORAL LETTER

#### GATHERING IN THE EXPECTATION OF THE EUCHARIST

When the Bishops of the world met in Rome from 1962 to 1965 at the Second Vatican Council they issued a document on the role of the laity in the life of the Church. By virtue of their membership of the Body of Christ through Baptism lay people are called to play their part in the Church's mission. In the liturgy they read Scripture and act as acolytes. In parish life they act as pastoral workers in collaboration with the priest.

Some ministries like the distribution of Communion, baptising and officiating at funerals are the normal function of the priest or deacon, but lay people may fulfil these functions as Extra-ordinary Ministers if there is a need.

Over recent years there has been a marked decline in the number of vocations to the priesthood. The effects of this decline are fast becoming evident. Parishes will have to be geared up to cope with fewer priests, and in some cases, without a priest.

At present lay people are being inducted as Extra-ordinary Ministers of the Holy Communion and are distributing Communion at Mass, taking Communion to the sick, and offering prayers at the bedside of the dying. It is possible that the laity will also be called on to baptise and officiate at funerals. However, by virtue of the sacrament of Orders the celebration of the Eucharist at Mass, the administration of the Sacraments of Penance and the Anointing of the Sick are reserved solely to the priest.

Parish churches may not be able to offer the same choice of Mass times on Sunday and those from outlying centres with easy access to the parish church may be asked to travel.

It is also inevitable that there will be occasions when a priest will not be available for Sunday Mass. This could arise when the priest is away on authorised leave and is unable to get a supply. It could also happen when there is an emergency and the neighbouring parishes are unable to help. There will be places where it is only possible to have Mass once a month or at some other interval. On those Sundays a lay person will preside over a Liturgy of the Word at which Communion is distributed.

In these circumstances, God does not abandon his own. Rather Jesus is present when the assembly gathers in his name, when his word is proclaimed, when the reserved Eucharist is distributed among the faithful and when the various liturgical ministries bring about full, active, and conscious participation in worship. The same is also true when the laity lead prayers and administer the Eucharist (Viaticum) at the bedside of the dying: the risen Lord is there.

It is important that designated lay people be trained to assume these various ministries, drawing on programs provided by the diocese. Further, norms governing these liturgical services will be issued.

For the present it is important to understand that these changes are inevitable and to be prepared for them. It is also important that there be no blurring of the differences between the full celebration of the Eucharist in Mass and Liturgies of the Word at which Communion is distributed.

All are asked to pray for an increase in vocations to the priesthood so that Catholic communities of the future may share in the unique blessings that come with the full celebration of the Sunday Eucharist at Mass.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "+Gregory Homeming OCD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a small dot at the end.

+Gregory Homeming OCD  
Bishop of Lismore

15<sup>th</sup> August 2023