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**Approaching the Eucharist without conversion is a crisis of love,
Bishop Samuel Aquila notes in Year of the Eucharist reflection**

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“A great crisis today around the Eucharist is not just a crisis of faith, but a crisis of love – of a love rooted in obedience to the love revealed to us by our God,” Bishop Samuel J. Aquila wrote in his column for the Diocese of Fargo’s newspaper, *New Earth*, to be published Oct. 15.

“Some people want to have the Eucharist without conversion; yet that is not the way of the Lord,” he wrote. “Some come to the Eucharist and receive Communion even in grave sin...Jesus duly warns us in the Gospel that there will be judgment, and that we risk being ‘cast into darkness.’ If we love the Lord we will keep his commandments and not try to have it both ways. We will put on the garment of charity no matter what the cost.”

Bishop Aquila noted, “Each of us must examine how lackadaisical we have become with the celebration of the Eucharist.” He addressed apathy about Mass attendance, a lack of knowledge about the Eucharist, and visible signs of irreverence for the Eucharist. These visible signs range from the clothing people wear to the cell phones answered during Mass by laity and religious leaders alike.

Lack of reverence for and knowledge of the Eucharist “is a tragedy,” he wrote, “because the Eucharist is about Jesus Christ and his saving works on our behalf.”

The full text of Bishop Aquila’s column follows:

The Eucharist without conversion is a crisis of love

Most Rev. Samuel J. Aquila, Bishop of Fargo

The month of October brings to a close the Year of the Eucharist. The year officially ends with the Mass of the Synod of Bishops in Rome on October 23. We were blessed throughout the year to have monthly articles on the Eucharist in *New Earth*. Hopefully our knowledge, understanding and love for the Eucharist have grown over the past year.

The readings for October 9, the 28th Sunday of Ordinary Time, provide the basis for this closing reflection on the Eucharist. In Matthew's Gospel (Mt 22:1-14), we hear the parable of the Wedding Feast in which a king invites guests to the feast. The invited guests find reasons not to attend and some go so far as to mistreat and kill his servants. The king then sends out other servants to invite to the wedding feast whomever they find, "bad and good alike." One of the guests does not put on his "wedding garment" and is cast into the darkness, "where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth."

In the first reading from the prophet Isaiah (25:6-10a), we hear of the vision of a feast provided by the Lord where death will be destroyed forever. This vision is long before the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "The Lord God will wipe away the tears from every face; the reproach of his people he will remove." And the people will cry out, "Behold our God, to whom we looked to save us...let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!"

How do these readings help us to understand the Eucharist more fully? First, Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of this vision of Isaiah. In his death and resurrection, death and sin are destroyed, and salvation, as a free gift, is given to those who will receive it. The Eucharist makes present the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ and is the sacrificial meal that fulfills the promise of Isaiah.

As Jesus made his life a total self-offering to the Father, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46), so too do we each time the Mass is celebrated. We too make the words of Jesus our words and become, with Jesus in the Holy Spirit, a total self-gift to the Father. Eternal life is bestowed on us and we share in the feast that the Lord Himself has prepared for us.

Second, the Gospel challenges us to look at how we approach the Eucharist. At times we hear some people make the statement, "I do not get anything out of Mass." Some view the Mass as one more event in a busy weekend—schedule everything and then, as an afterthought, look at where Mass can fit. Some complain that any Mass over an hour is too long. Some make excuses that they just can't make it to Mass.

Whenever Mass is perceived in this way, the persons involved are exactly like those in the parable who find excuses not to attend the feast. They may not fully understand the Eucharist or know who the Eucharist is truly about. This is a tragedy, because the Eucharist is about Jesus Christ and his saving works on our behalf.

As Catholics, we go to Mass to encounter Jesus Christ; to receive the gift of salvation he offers; to offer our lives to the Father; to be obedient to Jesus' command to "Do this in

memory of me;” to receive and enter into communion with Jesus Christ, and hence the Trinity, as we receive his body and blood; to offer thanksgiving, praise and adoration to the Father for the gift of his Son and all that he gives to us; to be in communion with the pope, the bishop, all the saints, “those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith,” and all those throughout the world who receive communion that day; and to be strengthened to go out into the world to bring Jesus Christ into the world. These are just a few of the reasons to go to Mass and to make it the priority of every Sunday or weekend. When we understand this truth of the Mass, we can never say, “I don’t get anything out of it.” We cannot comprehend how much we receive from the Mass, no matter how we perceive the experience at the moment we are there.

Finally, how does the man without the wedding garment speak to us? This is the most challenging of all. The early Fathers of the Church viewed the man as not having the garment of “charity,” the love of God above all things and the love of neighbor. Jesus tells us, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (Jn 14:15). A great crisis today around the Eucharist is not just a crisis of faith, but a crisis of love – of a love rooted in obedience to the love revealed to us by our God. Some people may only love the Lord with words and not with their hearts.

The man without the wedding garment fails to go through a conversion of heart and mind. He wants to receive the gift of the banquet without changing his life—without conversion. He wants salvation without the cost – without the Cross.

Some people want to have the Eucharist without conversion; yet that is not the way of the Lord. Some come to the Eucharist and receive Communion even in grave sin. They may miss Mass on Sunday, they may be taking money illegitimately, they may be engaging in sexual relations outside of marriage, they may vocally support abortion, euthanasia, homosexual activity and homosexual unions, they may fail in the just treatment of their neighbor by gossip or prejudice, or they may commit some other serious sin and go to communion. They are like the man without the wedding garment. Jesus duly warns us in the Gospel that there will be judgment, and that we risk being “cast into darkness.” If we love the Lord we will keep His commandments and not try to have it both ways. We will put on the garment of charity no matter what the cost.

The man without the wedding garment challenges us further to look at the reverence with which we approach the Eucharist. In August, when I attended World Youth Day, I was concelebrating Mass and seated with other bishops. I heard a cell phone ring, and a bishop answered the phone and proceeded to speak even while Mass was celebrated. My heart became heavy with sadness, for however unintentional it may have been, it showed a real lack of reverence for the Mass by a brother bishop. It happened not just during one Mass but also at another Mass.

Each of us must examine how lackadaisical we have become with the celebration of the Eucharist. While we may have no ill intention in our hearts, we need to look at how we dress for the banquet. In our dress for Mass, we can fall short in respect for the Lord and His mysteries, but also in the modesty that should guide our dress at all times. Shorts may be fine for children, but are they for adults, and if so, what types of shorts? Wearing short skirts and dressing with one’s midriff showing respects neither the proper dignity of the person of the young girl or woman clothed this way, or the Eucharist. It only serves to

distract. It is a responsibility for each man and woman to examine his or her dress for appropriateness and modesty before entering into this sacred act of worship.

Chewing gum may be fine for a sporting event, but does it show respect for the Eucharist, especially as a person pulls it out of their mouth to receive Communion? Cell phones and pagers are a part of life today, but when we give priority to them, let them become an addiction, what do they say about the Eucharist? As Catholics, we must examine how we reverence the Eucharist by our dress and actions during Mass and how we teach our children reverence.

As we close the year of the Eucharist, my hopes are many. I hope we have discovered more fully the sacrifice we participate in and the gift of salvation offered to us in Jesus Christ. I hope we understand better the real reasons for our participation in the Mass. I hope we understand more clearly the call to conversion—truly a life-long process, the call to bring the Gospel into the world, and the call to deeply reverence the Eucharist. I pray, my dearest brothers and sisters, that each of us has come to recognize more fully the depth of the personal love of the Father in the Eucharistic sacrifice—His Son, Jesus Christ. May we live more completely in that love each day!