

Leading the FLOCK

BY BISHOP DANIEL E. THOMAS



“A Revival. A Congress. What’s Next?”

Already for over two years’ time we have been engaged in our *National Eucharistic Revival!* The focus began on the diocesan level, then moved to the parish level, and recently culminated on the national level with the National Eucharistic Congress held this summer in Indianapolis July 17-21 at the Indiana Convention Center and Lucas Oil Stadium. Now some people are asking “So what’s next?” But before answering that question, allow me a moment to share with you my experience of the National Eucharistic Congress!

Over three hundred pilgrims from the Diocese of Toledo traveled to Indianapolis to participate in the Congress, 150 of us together on three buses, and 150 more on their own! We truly represented the richness of our diocese with laity younger and older, students, senior citizens, married couples, single persons, seminarians, consecrated religious, deacons, priests and this bishop! What a deep joy it was to pray with them, share meals with them, participate in the Congress events with them, kneel next to them in silent Eucharistic adoration, laugh and cry with them during the evening revival sessions, and witness with them the outpouring of Eucharistic faith in such an extraordinary event which will, please God, have a lasting impact on all who attended and indeed on our nation.

And as we “blended into” the over 65 thousand persons gathered, we recognized ourselves as a part of the whole, a representation of Catholics from across the nation, from so many races, languages and ethnic heritages. So many

bishops, priests, seminarians and religious sisters, and even more religious sisters! Most impressively, this was not primarily a group of white-haired folks like me! Thousands upon thousands of young people, young parents and families with babies and young children in arms and in strollers helped us all to recognize and celebrate the vibrancy of the Church in our nation, a Church alive in Christ, our Eucharistic Lord.



Throughout the days of the Congress, we were immersed in the power of Jesus’ love flowing from the Holy Eucharist and evident in each day’s theme: The Greatest Love Story, Into Gethsemane, This is My Body, and To the Ends of the Earth. There was a palpable sense of the presence of the Lord everywhere you went and everywhere you turned. There was a great exhibit hall where I couldn’t walk ten steps without joyfully encountering folks I knew from our own diocese and beyond! One of our pilgrims described the Congress as a massive family reunion! Another remarked that the Congress was the Second Vatican Council realized! It was nothing short of edifying to see endless lines of folks waiting for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or to enter the exhibits on the Shroud of Turin or Eucharistic Miracles, to visit the Relic Chapel or the Adoration Chapel, to participate in the several service opportunities for the poor, or to wait to enter the nearby local Church designated for 24/7 Adoration! And amid the waiting there was joy, not grumbling, where it was evident people were encountering each other with patience, respect and charity!

As a bishop, it was especially edifying to be in the company of so many brother bishops and priests in love with Christ and His people, to concelebrate Mass with them, and to walk with them in the Saturday afternoon Eucharistic procession through the streets of downtown Indy with the thousands of other pilgrims. Walking side by side with Bishop Robert Barron during the procession, how moved I was when I heard a man cry out from the sidewalk: "Bishop Barron, I'm Catholic because of you!" That public witness of faith had one focus, our Eucharistic Lord Jesus, and one purpose, to proclaim the Jesus who is truly present in the Blessed Sacrament, in His Church and in His people.



The keynote and countless other speakers who inspired us throughout the Congress were a veritable who's who of Catholics from across our nation, whose talks not only moved those present but are even now moving hearts and minds! (If you haven't seen it yet, don't miss Jonathan who plays Jesus on *The Chosen*, and don't miss the t-shirt he wore!). I know of several families and even parishes who have been hosting "watch parties" to be enriched by the presentations offered at the Congress, and invite you to do the same, as those talks are now available on several social media platforms.

Four encounters particularly struck me. Walking to the opening evening event we were stopped by a cordial evangelical Christian who asked us if we were in town for an event. We shared about the Eucharistic Congress, spent a few minutes in conversation, after which he offered his prayers and support for our time, and I offered our appreciation and prayers, inviting him to "come and see"!! Toward the end of the Congress, on the elevator of the hotel where we stayed, I found myself alone in an encounter with one of the staff who asked if I was at the Congress, and then commented that she had worked in the city for years but had never experienced such a positive, uplifting, enthusiastic, kind group of persons! Our pilgrims related that one of our seminarians was modelling how the Eucharistic Jesus moves us to love, by his stopping to encounter the homeless along the route to the stadium with warmth, humility and genuine concern. And at the last Revival Evening with some 65 thousand others in the Stadium, I experienced the grace of an intimate personal encounter with the Eucharistic Jesus who pierced my heart and called me to deeper love for him

and for those whom I am called to serve.

So "What's next?" The Eucharist Revival is not over (truth be told, it should never be over)! We're already into the third year: *The Year of Going out on Mission*. The Eucharistic Congress introduced what's next with the "Walk with One" initiative. Just as Jesus invited people one by one to follow him, each one of us is invited to follow him more closely, and to

"walk with one" person to a new or renewed experience of God's love. Walking with one is a simple four stage process of accompaniment: 1. Identify someone in a spirit of humility, 2. Intercede for that person in communion with the Holy Spirit, 3. Connect in Eucharistic Friendship and 4. Invite that person on a path most suitable for him or her. It's that simple! (You can find information on this nationwide initiative here: eucharisticrevival.org/wlk-with-one; and on our diocesan engagement here: toledodiocese.org/revival).

So what's next? We are! After the Congress, one of our pilgrim couples wrote to me: "The Congress (Revival) far exceeded our expectations. Our hearts were set on fire for the living Christ in the Blessed Sacrament and our call to share this good news with others. We find that we have this burning desire to share what we have received with others as we seek to walk with one." There is no doubt that each of us knows someone whom we could accompany: back to Catholic faith and practice, to first time attendance at Sunday Mass, into the Catholic faith, into deeper Catholic faith, into belief in themselves and in Christ who saves, accompanying someone thru doubts, questions, or old wounds to embracing Christ and His Church.

Please join me in prayer and in action that, for the spiritual and pastoral health of our diocese, we may each go out as Eucharistic missionaries, embracing the Vision of this *National Eucharistic Revival*: "A movement of Catholics across the United States, healed, converted, formed and unified by an encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist – and sent out on mission 'for the life of the world'."

+ Daniel E. Thomas

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