

The Year of the Eucharist

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In his homily on the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ this past June, Pope John Paul II announced a special *Year of the Eucharist*. It will begin with the World Eucharistic Congress in Guadalajara, Mexico, from October 10 to 17th, 2004. This *Year* will end with the next Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, to be held in the Vatican from October 2nd to October 29th, 2005. The theme of the Synod will be: “*The Eucharist: source and summit of the life and mission of the Church.*”

I am glad that Pope John Paul II has called us to devote this year to the Eucharist. It fits in with our plans to focus on the spirituality of our diocese. In the Book of Ecclesiastes, chapter three, we read: “There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens. A time to be born, and a time to die; A time to plant, and a time to uproot the plant; A time to scatter stones, and a time to gather them; A time to seek, and a time to lose; A time to keep, and a time to cast away.”

Timing is important! No matter what it is that we do, whatever the effort, the “right time” can make all the difference. And this is the “right time” to deepen our appreciation of the immense gift of the Eucharist. It is almost forty-one years since the promulgation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*CSL*). Although these forty-one years may seem like a lifetime for many of us, in terms of the 2000 years of history of the Liturgy, it is but a brief moment.

We have come a long way in our celebrations of the Eucharist in forty-one years. But it is now time to go beyond where we have been. Most pre-Vatican Council II American Catholics have adjusted to the obvious changes in the Liturgy, e.g., Mass celebrated in English, the variety of liturgical ministers, and the expectation that everyone present participate fully. It is now time to go beyond where we have been. It is time to look again at the Second Vatican Council’s vision as it is put forth in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*CSL*).

I have high hopes for this *Year of the Eucharist* in the Diocese of Memphis. Since it is a year devoted to the Eucharist, our first tendency might be to celebrate more parish and diocesan liturgies. We probably will. We might automatically expect pastors and parish liturgy committees to schedule more hours of Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. They probably will. But I would like our focus this year to be on celebrating better rather than on celebrating more – on the quality of our liturgies rather than on the quantity.

My hope for us as a diocesan people is that when we come together to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, the Eucharist, we will have a deeper grasp of what and whom it is we gather to celebrate. Across the entire Diocese of Memphis, on any given weekend, there are 141 celebrations of the Eucharist. One hundred forty-one!! My hope is that every person in our diocese who comes to any one of these celebrations will encounter the real presence of Christ in Word, in Eucharist, in the Assembly and in the Priest, just as the Church teaches. The Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy tells us: “Every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the Priest and of his Body, which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others. No other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree.” (#7)

My hope is that the everyday lives of all the people of the diocese will flow from the life they receive during their Sunday parish celebrations of the Eucharist. Again, as the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy tells us: “The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows.” (#10)

My hope for all of us is that we will raise the roofs of our church buildings with our wholehearted in word and in song. My hope is that priest, deacon, all liturgical ministers and all gathered will lead and respond conscious of the mystery we celebrate and grateful to be welcomed to the table of Word and Sacrifice.

My hopes for us will be realized if we each one does his/her part. This will be a worthy *Year of the Eucharist* only if it is a year of prayer for all of us. We must come to the Sunday Celebration of the Eucharist from our private prayer and from a week of conscious living with Christ at the center of our lives.

My hopes for us will be realized if we take seriously our responsibility to learn our faith. We are blessed in this diocese with many opportunities to grow in faith through retreats, days of reflection, classes, workshops and seminars. In addition to what our parishes offer, our Diocesan Institute for Liturgy and Spirituality offers a wide variety of courses. Also, Our Diocesan Religious Education Office has numerous offerings of classes in Adult Faith Formation. Our Diocesan Retreat Ministry provides opportunities for parishioners and groups to set aside one or two weekends each year to reflect on their relationship with God.

My hopes for all of us will be realized if every parish works at improving all aspects of their celebrations of the Liturgy. This can begin with renewed awareness of the priceless gift we have been given in the gift of the Eucharist, and with taking on the responsibility for the proper training of all liturgical ministers.

This week we begin a series of short articles on the Liturgy in our diocesan newspaper, *The West Tennessee Catholic*. These articles will also be available to parishes as bulletin inserts. Please read these articles and prayerfully reflect on our own presence and participation in our parish liturgy. Please use some of the articles for study and discussion groups, or for liturgy committee meetings to explore ways we can work together for improved parish Celebrations of the Eucharist.

Finally, in this *Year of the Eucharist*, it is my hope that we will grow into the realization of what it means to be a Eucharistic People. We come to our Sunday Mass to be nourished, but we are sent forth to be what we have received -- that is, to be the body of Christ on earth... in our homes, in our places of work and schools, in the streets, in the grocery stores and at the football games, and in our treatment of the poor. We go forth from the liturgy to be the people God has called us to be: "a holy people, a people whom God has made his own, a royal priesthood..." (*General Instruction on the Roman Missal #95.*)

-- From Bishop Steib's "This Far By Faith" column in the Oct. 7, 2004 issue of *The West Tennessee Catholic*