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The Eucharist: The Life of the Church

(First of three parts)
(EDITOR'S NOTE: The numbers appearing in parentheses at the end of various paragraphs in the Bishop Braxton's column correspond to the numbered sections of the full document, "Ecclesia De Eucharistia." They have been included here to assist the reader in finding the appropriate sections in the document for research purposes.)

Every year on Holy Thursday Pope John Paul II has written a special letter to the bishops and priests of the Catholic Church all over the world. This year, the 25th of his pontificate, the Holy Father has written a longer and more formal letter and addressed it to the entire Catholic world. It is on the subject of the Holy Eucharist, which was instituted by Christ on Holy Thursday at the Last Supper. The encyclical letter, "Ecclesia De Eucharistia," ("On the Eucharist and its relationship to the Church") is an important summary of Catholic beliefs about the living gift of divine love. The entire document is summed up in its opening sentence. "The church draws her life from the Eucharist."

I urge all priests, deacons, religious education coordinators and catechists to study this document carefully and to share its rich insights with the people they serve. The Holy Father's letter can be obtained from our diocesan web site - www.lcdioocese.org. In this column I wish to share with you some of the letter's key passages.

The Pope begins by stressing the need for us all to rekindle our sense of profound amazement over the great gift of the Eucharist. "By the gift of the Holy

Spirit at Pentecost the church was born. A decisive moment in her taking shape was certainly the institution of the Eucharist in the Upper Room. Her foundation and wellspring is the whole "Easter triduum," but this is as it were gathered up, foreshadowed and "concentrated" for ever in the gift of the Eucharist. In this gift Jesus Christ entrusted to his church the perennial making present of the paschal mystery. With it He brought about a mysterious "oneness in time" between that triduum and the passage of the centuries.

"The thought of this leads us to profound amazement and gratitude. In the paschal event and the Eucharist which makes it present throughout the centuries, there is a truly enormous "capacity" which embraces all of history as the recipient of the grace of the redemption. This amazement should always fill the church assembled for the celebration of the Eucharist. But in a special way it should fill the minister of the Eucharist. For it is he who, by the authority given him in the sacrament of priestly ordination, effects the consecration. It is he who says with the power coming to him from Christ in the Upper Room: "This is my body which will be given up for you. This is the cup of my blood, poured out for you..." The priest says these words, or rather he puts his voice at the disposal of the one who spoke these words in the Upper Room and who desires that they should be repeated in every generation." (#5)

The Pontiff stresses that the Church draws her life from the "living bread" of the Eucharist and shares his per-

sonal amazement at celebrating Mass all over the world.

"When I think of the Eucharist and look at my life as a priest, as a bishop and as the Successor of Peter, I naturally recall the many times and places in which I was able to celebrate it. I remember the parish church of Niegowic, where I had my



Bishop Edward K. Braxton

first pastoral assignment, the collegiate church of St. Florian in Krakow, Wawel Cathedral, St. Peter's Basilica and so many basilicas and churches in Rome and throughout the world. I have been able to celebrate holy Mass in chapels built along mountain paths, on lakeshores and seacoasts; I have celebrated it on altars built in stadiums and in city squares.

"This varied scenario of celebrations of the Eucharist has given me a powerful experience of its universal and, so to speak, cosmic character. Yes, cosmic! Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world. It unites heaven and earth. It embraces and permeates all creation. The Son of God became man in order to restore all creation, in one supreme act of praise, to the one who made it from nothing. He, the eternal high priest who by the blood of his cross entered the eternal sanctuary, thus gives back to the Creator and Father all

creation redeemed. He does so through the priestly ministry of the Church, to the glory of the most Holy Trinity. Truly this is the "mysterium fidei" (mystery of faith) which is accomplished in the Eucharist: The world which came forth from the hands of God the Creator now returns to Him redeemed by Christ." (#8)

John Paul reminds us that it is the risen Christ who is present in the Eucharist and that this presence is an awesome mystery.

"In giving his sacrifice to the Church, Christ has also made his own the spiritual sacrifice of the Church, which is called to offer herself in union with the sacrifice of Christ. This is the teaching of the Second Vatican Council concerning all the faithful: "Taking part in the eucharistic sacrifice, which is the source and summit of the whole Christian life, they offer the divine victim to God, and offer themselves along with it." (#13)

"Christ's Passover includes not only His passion and death, but also His resurrection. This is recalled by the assembly's acclamation following the consecration: "We proclaim your resurrection." The eucharistic sacrifice makes present not only the mystery of the Savior's passion and death, but also the mystery of the resurrection which crowned his sacrifice. It is as the living and risen one that Christ can become in the Eucharist the "bread of life" (Jn 6:35, 48), the "living bread" (Jn 6:51). St. Ambrose reminded the newly-initiated that the Eucharist applies the event of the resurrection to their lives: "Today Christ is yours, yet each day He rises again for you." St. Cyril of Alexan-

dria also makes clear that sharing in the sacred mysteries "is a true confession and a remembrance that the Lord died and returned to life for us and on our behalf." (#14)

"The sacramental representation of Christ's sacrifice, crowned by the resurrection, in the Mass involves a most special presence which — in the words of Paul VI — "is called 'real' not as a way of excluding all other types of presence as if they were 'not real,' but because it is a presence in the fullest sense: a substantial presence whereby Christ, the God-Man, is wholly and entirely present." This sets forth once more the perennially valid teaching of the Council of Trent: "The consecration of the bread and wine effects the change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood." Truly the Eucharist is a "mysterium fidei," a mystery which surpasses our understanding and can only be received in faith. "Do not see," St. Cyril of Jerusalem exhorts, "in the bread and wine merely natural elements, because the Lord has expressly said that they are His body and His blood: Faith assures you of this, though your senses suggest otherwise." (#15)

Because of this real presence, the Eucharist is a glimpse of heaven.

"The Eucharist is a straining towards the goal, a foretaste of the fullness of joy promised by Christ (cf. Jn 15:11); it is in some way the anticipation of heaven, the "pledge of future glory." In the Eucharist, everything speaks of confident waiting

"in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ." Those who feed on Christ in the Eucharist need not wait until the hereafter to receive eternal life: They already possess it on earth, as the first fruits of a future fullness which will embrace man in his totality. For in the Eucharist we also receive the pledge of our bodily resurrection at the end of the world: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn 6:54). This pledge of the future resurrection comes from the fact that the flesh of the Son of Man, given as food, is his body in its glorious state after the resurrection. St. Ignatius of Antioch rightly defined the eucharistic bread as "a medicine of immortality, an antidote to death." (#18)

"The Eucharist expresses and reinforces our communion with the Church in heaven. It is not by chance that the Eastern anaphoras and the Latin eucharistic Prayers honor Mary, the ever-virgin mother of Jesus Christ our Lord and God, the angels, the holy apostles, the glorious martyrs and all the saints. This is an aspect of the Eucharist which merits greater attention: In celebrating the sacrifice of the Lamb, we are united to the heavenly "liturgy" and become part of that great multitude which cries out: "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev 7:10). The Eucharist is truly a glimpse of heaven appearing on earth. It is a glorious ray of the heavenly Jerusalem which pierces the clouds of our history and lights up our journey." (#19)

(To be continued May 23)



The Good Shepherd

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them. This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep.

I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep.

I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd. This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again. This command I have received from my Father." John 10:11-18

Pope names two new bishops

WASHINGTON — Pope John Paul II recently made two appointments to the episcopacy in the United States, naming Monsignor Dominic Dinh Mai Luong, pastor of Mary, Queen of Vietnam Church, New Orleans, and Director of the National Center for the Vietnamese Apostolate, as Titular Bishop of Cebrades and Auxiliary Bishop of Orange, California and naming Monsignor George W. Coleman, Diocesan Administrator of the Diocese of Fall River, Massachusetts, as Bishop of Fall River.

Bishop-designate Dominic Dinh Mai Luong was born in Vietnam on December 20, 1940.

He attended France-Vietnamese elementary school

in Vietnam, Holy Family Seminary high school, Vietnam, diocesan seminary, Buffalo, New York, and St. Bernard Seminary, Rochester, New York, where he studied Philosophy and Theology.

He pursued post-graduate studies at Canisius College in Buffalo, earning an M.S.

Msgr. Luong was ordained a priest on May 21, 1966 in Buffalo, for the Diocese of Danang, Vietnam, but circumstances in that country prevented his returning there. Eventually he was incardinated in the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

Bishop-elect Coleman succeeds Most Reverend Sean P. O'Malley, OFM, Cap,

who was appointed Bishop of Palm Beach last September.

Bishop-designate Coleman was born in Fall River on February 1, 1939.

He attended Somerset public elementary schools, Monsignor Coyle High School in Taunton, and Holy Cross College in Worcester. He studied at St. John's Seminary, Brighton, and at the North American College and the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, where he earned a Licentiate in Sacred Theology.

Msgr. Coleman was ordained a priest on December 16, 1964.

(This page paid for by the Diocese of Lake Charles.)

Free Speech in Church

Fr. Frank Pavone, Priests for Life

There is a legitimate separation of Church and State. The Church cannot decide that there are 51 states instead of 50, nor can the State decide that there are 8 sacraments instead of 7. The mission of each is distinct, and as the Second Vatican Council teaches, "Christ did not bequeath to the Church a mission in the political, economic, or social order: the purpose he assigned to it was a religious one" (GS 42).

At the same time, the missions do overlap. "...At all times and in all places, the Church should have the true freedom to teach the faith, to proclaim its teaching about society, to carry out its task among men without hindrance, and to pass moral judgment even in matters relating to politics, whenever the fundamental rights of man or the salvation of souls requires it" (GS 76; cited in Living the Gospel of Life, US Bishops, 1998, n.18).

This "true freedom" corresponds well to the vision of religious liberty on which America rests. The First Amendment forbids Congress from establishing a religion, or hindering its free exercise. The Supreme Court has often indicated that debate on public issues should be unhindered, robust, and wide-open.

Yet the Church is not as free as it might be in commenting on politics, because of regulations which the IRS places on tax-exempt organizations. These regulations prohibit political advocacy. Yes, we may address issues; no, we may not participate or intervene, directly or indirectly, in any political campaign on behalf of, or in opposition to, any candidate for public office.

And the problem is that what this means, in practice, isn't always so clear. The IRS takes a "facts and circumstances" approach to determining what constitutes a violation. In other words, a pastor may find out he is in violation only after the fact. This makes many pastors over-cautious.

The ban on political speech was inserted by Sen-

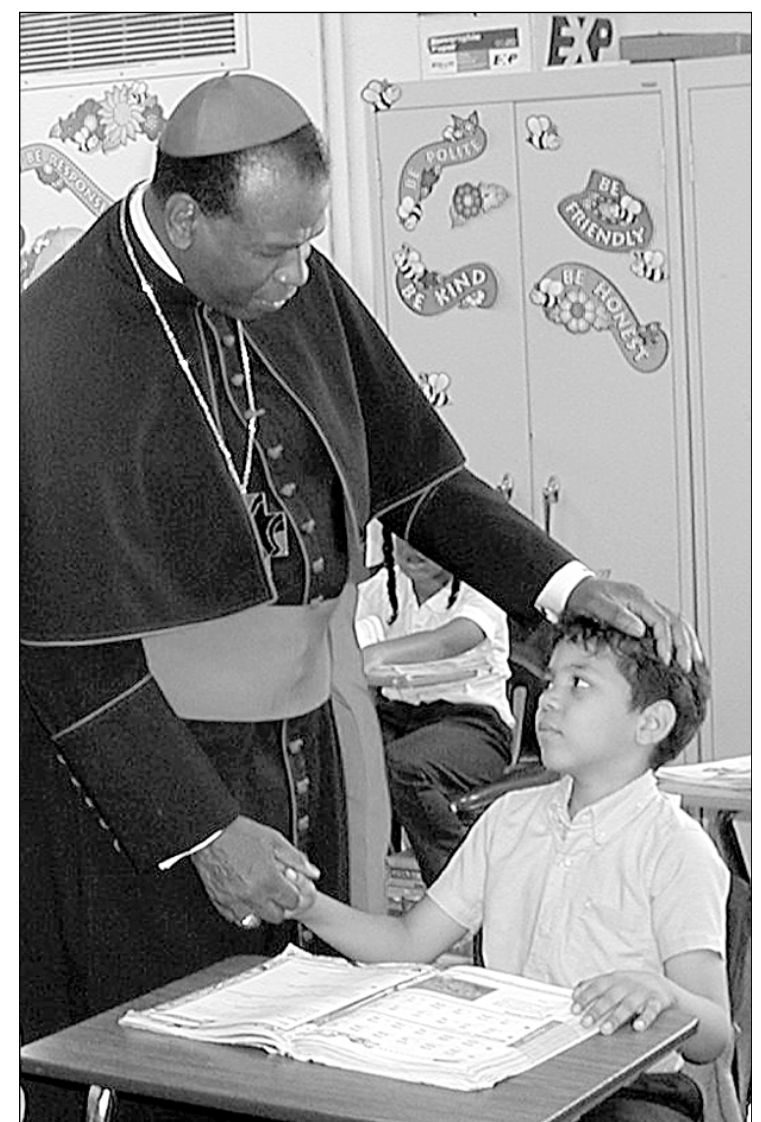
ator Lyndon Johnson as a floor amendment during debate on the 1954 Internal Revenue Code, order to silence certain organizations that were opposing him. Not a single hearing took place nor was any congressional record developed to explain the reasons for the ban. There is no legislative history to clarify its meaning. Nor is there any indication that Senator Johnson intended to target houses of worship.

A bill has been introduced in Congress that may remedy this problem. HR 235, the

Houses of Worship Free Speech Restoration Act, is simple straightforward legislation that will give back to

churches the freedom to speak however they feel led to speak, whether the issue is construed as political or not. It amends section 501 of the IRS Code to say that Churches cannot be punished for political intervention "because of the content, preparation, or presentation of any homily, sermon, teaching, dialectic, or other presentation made during religious services or gatherings."

It makes sense to me. Religious leaders should have the right to speak from their heart, without fear of governmental stipulations.



Bishop Edward K. Braxton talks with Dustin Guillory, a fifth grade student at Sacred Heart Saint Katharine Drexel Catholic School in Lake Charles, during his annual visit to the school. Every year the Bishop visits each Catholic school in the Diocese of Lake Charles, talking with the students in each class.