

CATHOLIC CALENDAR.

A page devoted to local Catholic interests

June 27, 2003

Vol. 29, No. 12

Lake Charles, La.

Internet Address: <http://lcdioocese.org>

The Eucharist: The Life of the Church

(Third of three parts)
(EDITOR'S NOTE: The numbers that appear in parentheses at the end of various paragraphs in this column correspond to the numbered sections of the full document, "Ecclesia De Eucharistia," ("On the Eucharist and its relationship to the Church"). Those numbers have been included to assist the reader in locating the appropriate sections in the document for further reading. The entire document can be downloaded from the Diocese of Lake Charles web site - www.lcdioocese.org.)

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.

In part two I noted that Pope John Paul II, who has often drawn strength from

his time of prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, invites us to do the same and that the Encyclical summarizes the Church's belief about the unique ministry of priests in the Eucharist and answers some ecumenical questions about Protestants and Catholics sharing the Eucharist. I also pointed out that His Holiness expresses a great concern for those communities, like our own in the Diocese of Lake Charles, that do not have a sufficient number of priests, recognizing that a growing number of parishes are not able to experience the celebration of Mass every Sunday and that this should cause us to strengthen our efforts to nurture vocations to the priesthood. I also pointed out that the Papal Letter gives serious consideration to the question of 'visible' and 'invisible' unity in the communion of the Church. And that in this context the letter recalls the Catholic teaching that those who know that they are in the state of grave sin should not receive the Eucharist without first participating in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Towards the end of the Encyclical Pope John Paul II examines the difficult ecumenical question of intercommunion. Some Protestant Christian communities invite all in their congregations to partake of their communion services without regard to their church affiliation or beliefs about the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. This 'open' communion is seen as a sign of the unity we hope to attain. For Catholics shares Eucharist is a sign of the unity that actually exists.

"In considering the Eucharist as the sacrament of ecclesial communion, there is one subject which, due to

its importance, must not be overlooked: *I am referring to the relationship of the Eucharist to ecumenical activity.* We should all give thanks to the Blessed Trinity for the many members of the faithful throughout the world who in recent decades have felt an ardent desire for unity among all Christians. The Second Vatican Council, at



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the beginning of its Decree on Ecumenism, sees this as a special gift of God. It was an efficacious grace which inspired us, the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church and our brothers and sisters from other churches and ecclesial communities, to set forth on the path of ecumenism.

"Our longing for the goal of unity prompts us to turn to the Eucharist, which is the supreme sacrament of the unity of the people of God, in as much as it is the apt expression and the unsurpassable source of that unity. In the celebration of the eucharistic sacrifice the church prays that God, the father of mercies, will grant his children the fullness of the Holy Spirit so that they may become one body and one spirit in Christ. (91) In raising this prayer to the Father of Lights, from whom comes every good endowment and every perfect gift (cf. Jas 1:17), the church believes that she will be heard, for she prays in union with Christ, her head and spouse, who takes up this plea of his bride and joins it to that of his own redemptive sacrifice." (#43)

"Precisely because the

church's unity, which the Eucharist brings about through the Lord's sacrifice and by communion in his body and blood, absolutely requires full communion in the bonds of the profession of faith, the sacraments and ecclesiastical governance, it is not possible to celebrate together the same eucharistic liturgy until those bonds are fully re-established. Any such concelebration would not be a valid means, and might well prove instead to be an obstacle, to the attainment of full communion, by weakening the sense of how far we remain from this goal and by introducing or exacerbating ambiguities with regard to one or another truth of the faith. The path towards full unity can only be undertaken in truth.

"I would like nonetheless to reaffirm what I said in my encyclical letter "Ut Unum Sint" after having acknowledged the impossibility of eucharistic sharing: "And yet we do have a burning desire to join in celebrating the one Eucharist of the Lord, and this desire itself is already a common prayer of praise, a single supplication. Together we speak to the Father and increasingly we do so 'with one heart.'" (#44)

"While it is never legitimate to concelebrate in the absence of full communion, the same is not true with respect to the administration of the Eucharist under special circumstances, to individual persons belonging to churches or ecclesial communities not in full communion with the Catholic Church. In this case, in fact, the intention is to meet a grave spiritual need for the eternal salvation of an individual believer, not to bring about an intercommunion which remains impossible until the visible bonds of ecclesial communion are fully re-established."

"This was the approach taken by the Second Vatican Council when it gave guidelines for responding to Eastern Christians separated in good faith from the Catholic Church, who spontaneously ask to receive the Eucharist from a Catholic minister and are properly disposed. This approach was then ratified by both codes, which also consider — with necessary modifications — the case of other non-Eastern Christians who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church. (#45)

"In my encyclical "Ut Unum Sint" I expressed my own appreciation of these norms, which make it possible to provide for the salvation of souls with proper discernment: "It is a source of joy to note that Catholic ministers are able, in certain particular cases, to administer the sacraments of the Eucharist, penance and anointing of the sick to Christians who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church but who greatly desire to receive these sacraments, freely request them and manifest the faith which the Catholic Church professes with regard to these sacraments. Conversely, in specific cases and in particular circumstances, Catholics too can request these same sacraments from ministers of churches in which these sacraments are valid."

"These conditions, from which no dispensation can be given, must be carefully respected, even though they deal with specific individual cases, because the denial of one or more truths of the faith regarding these sacraments and, among these, the truth regarding the need of the ministerial priesthood for their validity, renders the person asking improperly disposed to legitimately receiving them. And the op-

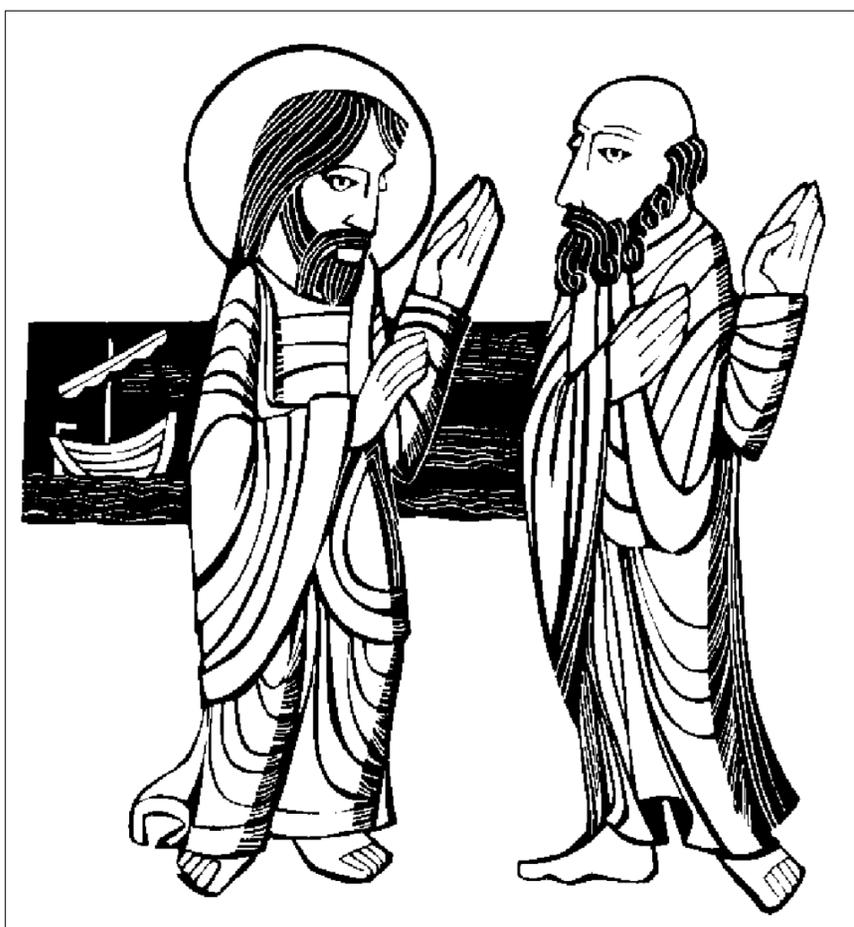
posite is also true: Catholics may not receive Communion in those communities which lack a valid sacrament of orders.

"The faithful observance of the body of norms established in this area is a manifestation and, at the same time, a guarantee of our love for Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, for our brothers and sisters of different Christian confessions — who have a right to our witness to the truth — and for the cause itself of the promotion of unity." (#46)

The Encyclical, the 14th in the Holy Father's 25 years as Bishop of Rome, ends with these beautiful words.

"Let us take our place, dear brothers and sisters, at the school of the saints, who are the great interpreters of true eucharistic piety. In them the theology of the Eucharist takes on all the splendor of a lived reality; it becomes "contagious" and, in a manner of speaking, it "warms our hearts." Above all, let us listen to Mary most holy, in whom the mystery of the Eucharist appears, more than in anyone else, as a mystery of light. Gazing upon Mary, we come to know the transforming power present in the Eucharist. In her we see the world renewed in love.

"In the humble signs of bread and wine, changed into his body and blood, Christ walks beside us as our strength and our food for the journey, and he enables us to become, for everyone, witnesses of hope. If, in the presence of this mystery, reason experiences its limits, the heart, enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, clearly sees the response that is demanded and bows low in adoration and unbounded love." (#62)



Feast of Saints Peter and Paul

When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.

And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Matthew 16:13-19

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

Bishop Speyrer will be honored on 50th anniversary of ordination

His Excellency, The Most Reverend Jude Speyrer, Bishop-Emeritus of the Diocese of Lake Charles, will be honored at a Mass of Thanksgiving in celebration of the 50th Anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood Friday, July 25, at 10 a.m. in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Bishop of Lake Charles, will be the

celebrant of the Mass and the priests of the diocese will concelebrate.

Attendance at the celebration of Mass for Bishop Speyrer's Golden Jubilee is by ticket only. The tickets are free and may be requested from Mrs. Mary Guillory at the Pastoral Center by calling (337) 439-7400, Ext. 22.

The American Muddled Association

By Richard M. Doerflinger

You may have seen the headline: "American Medical Association endorses cloning for research purposes." And you may have wondered: What new medical evidence has driven the nation's largest medical organization to this?

The answer is: None at all. Researchers remain unable to produce a healthy embryo from human cloning, or to cure any animal using cells from cloned embryos.

So what is the real news about the AMA policy?

First, this is not a new policy. The AMA has endorsed human cloning for research since 1995, when it endorsed the recommendations of the National Institutes of Health's Human Embryo Research Panel. That panel recommended using tax dollars to create human embryos (by in vitro fertilization and cloning) and destroy them in research.

Moreover, the AMA has belonged to the major political coalition promoting cloning for research (the "Coalition for the Advancement of Medical Research") for over a year. In 1999 the AMA even said that "assisting individuals or couples to reproduce" (so-called "reproductive cloning") would

be a "potentially realistic and possibly appropriate" use of cloning if it can be made safer. (At that time other groups favoring "cloning for research" said they opposed any use of cloning to make live-born babies.)

So after years of lobbying for this extreme political agenda, the AMA finally got its own Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs to rubber-stamp that agenda as ethical.

Second, the new AMA statement is, to say the least, muddled. It says cloning for biomedical research is "consistent with medical ethics," but "the pluralism of moral visions that underlie this debate must be respected" — so individual physicians can support or oppose it. Says AMA: "The conflict centers on the moral status of embryos, a question that divides ethical opinion and that cannot be resolved by medical science."

The next sentence should have been: "Therefore we as a medical organization have no competence to decide whether research cloning involves unethical killing." Or the Council could have recalled the oath of the World Medical Association, to which AMA belongs: "I will maintain the utmost respect

for human life from its beginning." Even the NIH panel whose conclusions the AMA praised in 1995 said that "the preimplantation human embryo warrants serious moral consideration as a developing form of human life."

Instead the AMA supports research cloning, because "physicians collectively must continue to be guided by their paramount obligation to the welfare of their patients."

In short, the embryo may be a person, and killing him may be homicide — that depends on your moral vision — but one thing we know: He is not a paying customer.

Of course cloning may never provide treatments. But even an imagined future patient outranks a live human embryo, to be killed here and now in the name of progress. Tragically, having long ago abandoned the Hippocratic oath on abortion, the AMA soon found another way to ignore the basic norm of Hippocratic medicine: "First, do no harm."

Mr. Doerflinger is Deputy Director of the Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The next Catholic Calendar will be published on Friday, July 25, 2003.