

Chrism Mass Homily

(Second of two parts)

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This homily was given at the Chrism Mass of Wednesday, March 23, 2005 in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception)

My Dear members of the College of priests of the Church of Lake Charles, Dear Deacons, Dear People of God:

On this day of the Eucharist I would like to speak, for a moment, more directly to you my brother priests. "Our lives are not our own." These were the last words I said to you at the end of our recent district day. I was aware then that in a few days you would learn just how true that is for me. At the recent press conference in Belleville one of the priests said to me, "Excellency, I had to come to see for myself what the "new Boss" looked like. After speaking with him for a while, I said I hoped that in time he would come to know that I do not think of the servant-leadership of a bishop as that of a "boss." In our years together I have never thought of my ministry in terms of the Chief Executive Officer of a company. A part of the ministry of a bishop is to lead, guide, govern, make hard decisions, and even to challenge and correct. But these are subordinate to prayer, reflecting on the Word of God, teaching, listening, and serving. Like their brother priests, bishops are ordained first and foremost to be pastors.

I recently asked to see one of our priests on a Sunday evening and somewhat out of character did not say what I wanted to see him about. When the priest arrived and before I could discuss a matter of great importance with him he said, "Bishop, I have been nervous all afternoon, racking my brain, wondering what you wanted to see me about. I almost called and asked to come early to find out what I had done wrong and what you were going to scold me about." I hastened to assure him that he had done nothing wrong. I asked him if I had ever called him in and scolded him? Had he ever heard of my doing that with any of our brother priests? I was comforted when he said no.

Just as the priesthood is not a job, the bishop is not your boss. He strives to be a fellow worker in the harvest as he exercises the ministry of oversight and governance. We all know that there are canonical, administrative, and obdiential bonds between a bishop and the priests of his diocese, which comes to an end when he is asked to assume pastoral leadership of another Local Church. However, the bonds of grace, the bonds of affection, the bonds of mutual respect, the bonds of love, and the bonds of unity in the Eucharist need never end.

As I have told you many times I believe that the best preparation for my ministry as your bishop was the five years I served as pastor of St. Catherine of Siena parish in suburban Oak Park, Illinois. It is the same ministry on a larger scale. You know from experience that if you are doing your work well as pastor, while the majority will support you and cooperate with you, everyone will not like you. Everyone will not agree with you. Some will not speak the truth to you. Others will undermine your efforts; a few may even say unkind things about you or speak to you with disrespect. This is inevitable because of the human condition and the complex challenges of contemporary ecclesial life. I know well that what is true for a pastor is true for a bishop.

Our spiritual challenge as pastors is to remind ourselves that in all things and in all circumstances we are called to act *in persona Christi*, in the person of Christ. This is what I have tried to do as the Second Bishop of Lake Charles. This is what I will try to do as the Eighth Bishop of Belleville. This, I am sure, is what the unknown person whom the Holy Father will appoint as your third bishop will try to do. It has been my goal each day to treat each of you with genuine respect and affection as brother priests, to be truly concerned about your well being and happiness, to compliment you on your good work, to remember your birthdays and anniversaries, to consult you on all matters that would effect your lives and ministry, to listen to you and actually hear your views, even when I have taken another course of action.

I have sought to be attentive to you when you have spoken of matters of importance, to be genuinely concerned about your family members, especially during times of illness and death. My goal has been to be consistent with you, never raising my voice or scolding you no matter what you may have done. When we have disagreed, I have attempted to do so with courtesy and politeness, never in anger or with harsh words. I have tried to be patient, not acting in haste even when I knew that at some point we would both have to face a specific challenge.

Obviously, I like you, like any other bishop, have not always succeeded in this. If have hurt you in any way, if I have failed you in any way, if I have disappointed you in any way, if I have been a source of scandal to you in any way, I apologize from my heart. I express my profound sorrow and ask your true forgiveness.

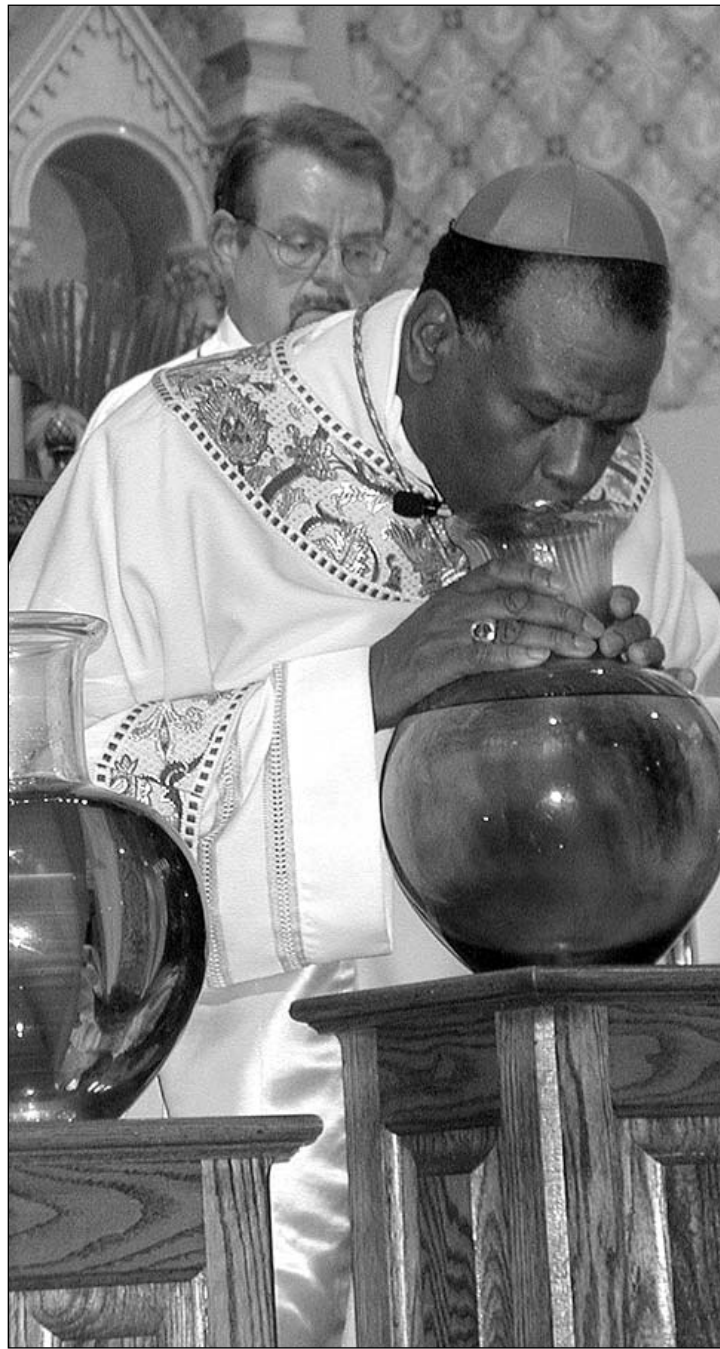
From our first days together whenever you have celebrated the Eucharist with me, the supreme manifestation of our unity in Christ, I have always exchanged the greeting of peace with you, the deacons, and our seminarians by means of an embrace, a kiss of peace, if you will. I do not do this because of nostalgia for some formalism from the past. I do it because of my personal conviction that this embrace expresses the unique bond between priest and bishop far better than a handshake, which has so many familiar meanings.

Know how I admire you! Know how I respect you! Know how I hope and pray for your fulfillment in ministry. Know how I will miss you.

Know how I love you!

I began this afternoon by reflecting on the Holy Father's letter on the Year of the Eucharist, *Mane Nobiscum Domine* (Stay With Us Lord). These are the words of the disciples to Jesus in Luke's unique account of their encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Emmaus, just before they recognize Him in the Breaking of the Bread. Then He vanishes, teaching us that when we see the Eucharist with eyes of faith we SEE the risen Lord.

When a bishop assumes pastoral leadership of a new diocese, the symbols of his seal, or coat of arms, change. While



On Wednesday, March 23, during the Chrism Mass, The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton blessed the Oils of Sacred Chrism, Catechumens and the Sick. Here Bishop Braxton breathes the Holy Spirit into the Oil of Chrism. The Chrism Mass is one of the most solemn and significant liturgies of the Church. During the Mass the priests of the Diocese renewed their commitment of service and received the prayers of support of the people. The Sacred Chrism is used for baptism, confirmation, the ordination of priests, and the consecration of altars.

the right side (the bishop's personal symbols) remains the same, the left side (the symbols of his diocese) are removed and replaced with the symbols of his new diocese. In my case the symbols of Belleville replace those of Lake Charles. The motto beneath the symbols may also change. I have decided to change my motto from *Gaudium et Spes* (the first words of the Vatican Council Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, "The joys and hopes of those who afflicted and in any way in need these are the joys and hopes of the followers of Christ.") to *Mane Nobiscum Domine*. It will be a reminder that I take up this new ministry in the Year of the Eucharist and that we recognize not only Christ in the breaking of the bread but one another as well. Even when we no longer see each other on a regular basis we will still be nourished by the Bread that breathes and the Wine that bleeds.

Once I am installed, as bishop of Belleville and the See of Lake Charles is vacant, that is when there is no bishop presiding in charity from his seat in this cathedral over this Local Church, three words will fall from the Eucharistic Prayer that will have deep significance to me and I hope to you. For more than four years our priests have prayed:

"We offer these gifts for your holy Catholic church. Watch over us Lord and guide us. Grant us peace and unity throughout the world. We offer them for John Paul, our Pope, for Edward, our Bishop, for Jude our Bishop emeritus and for all who hold and teach the catholic faith which comes to us from the apostles." "Edward our bishop" will be heard no more in Southwest Louisiana and it will be heard for the first time in southern Illinois. Our lives are not our own. I hope, however, that you will not cease to pray for me as one "who holds and teaches the Catholic faith which comes to us from the apostles." As for me I will pray for you and carry you in my heart each day!

As we believe, so let us live.
We pray that all people looking upon us,
The Church of Lake Charles
Will say to one another in all sincerity:
"See, see how they love one another."
And wherever we go, whatever we do
The report will go round about
That the poor are clothed,
The hungry are feed,
The sorrowful, comforted.
And all creation proclaims
The wondrous works of God!

Praise be Jesus Christ!

Mass of Thanksgiving today at 12:05 p.m.

LAKE CHARLES — The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton will be the celebrant and homilist at a Mass of Thanksgiving for His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI at 12:05 p.m. today, April 22, in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception.

The Cathedral is located on the corner of Kirby and Bilbo Streets in downtown Lake Charles. All are welcome to attend.

Bishop Braxton installation June 22

The Diocese of Belleville, Illinois and the Diocese of Lake Charles announced today The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton will be installed as the eighth Bishop of Belleville, Illinois at 3:00 p.m. on Wednesday, June 22, 2005 in the Cathedral of St. Peter. His Eminence, Francis Cardinal George, Archbishop of Chicago, will be the installing prelate. Belleville is in the ecclesiastical Province of Chicago. His Excellency, The Most Reverend Gabriel Montalvo, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, will also attend, representing the new Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI.

The people of the Diocese of Lake Charles and other friends of the Bishop are cordially invited to participate in a number of special farewell events.

- Special farewell Masses at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception where the Bishop will be the celebrant and homilist. These are scheduled for 4:00 p.m. Saturday, May 28 and 7:30 a.m., 9:30 a.m., and 11:15 a.m. Sunday, June 5. Visitors will be able to greet the Bishop after these Masses.
- Two informal Open Houses at the Bishop's Residence, 3835 Lake Street on

from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Sunday May 29 and Sunday June 5. Refreshments will be served. Anyone from the diocese or from the larger community who would like to say farewell to the Bishop would be most welcome at these times.

There are a number of other opportunities for the clergy and faithful of the diocese to greet Bishop Braxton, thank him for his ministry and wish him well.

These include:

- The regularly scheduled Confirmation celebrations at parishes throughout the diocese during April and May.
- The 25th Anniversary of the Diocese Mass at the Cathedral at 10:00 a.m. on Monday, April 25.
- The ordination to the priesthood of Deacon Romel Tolentino at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, May 13 at the Cathedral.
- St. Louis Catholic High School Graduation Mass (the Bishop will be the celebrant and homilist) at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, May 18. at Francis Bulber Memorial Auditorium on the McNeese State University campus.
- The Mass for couples celebrating their 25th and 50th wedding anniversary at 11:15 a.m. on Sunday, May 22 at the Cathedral.

A statement from Bishop Braxton

April 19, 2005

I rejoiced when I learned that the College of Cardinals had elected Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger as the new Supreme Pastor of the Universal Church. The brevity of the conclave indicates that there was an early consensus that he was a worthy successor of Pope John Paul II, whose remarkable pontificate still fills our hearts with wonder and gratitude. Because he assisted his predecessor for so many years and shared his essential interpretation of the Second Vatican Council, we can be confident that Pope Benedict XVI will bring continuity to the Petrine ministry as well as new ideas and initiatives based upon his unique interpretation of the "signs of the times" and the needs of the Church.

I have sent my personal greeting to our new Holy Father this afternoon. I have assured him of my complete fidelity to his pastoral leadership as the Successor of St. Peter. I assured him as well of my prayers and the prayers of the clergy, religious, and the Christian Faithful of the dioceses of Lake Charles and Belleville.

My first "meeting" with the future Pontiff took place when I was a doctoral student in theology at the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium (1973-76). Reading then Father Ratzinger's articles on theology and Christology was always a thought provoking and enriching experience. He wrote in a style that explored significant contemporary theological developments and at the same time deepened the reader's grasp of authentic Catholic teachings.

I first met him in person in 1983 when I was the Scholar in Residence at the Pontifical North American College in Rome. Though I was well aware of his keen intellect, my first impression was of his warmth, his gentle humility, and his ability to pay close attention to the person who was speaking to him. He is, as he said, "a simple, humble worker in the Lord's vineyard."

I have had a number of subsequent visits with him over the years. I last saw him in December, 2004 when the Bishops of Louisiana were at the Vatican for our Ad Limina visit. During our meeting at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith I was particularly struck by the Cardinal's patience in responding to all of the questions the bishops had. He and I had a particularly fruitful discussion about the importance of genuine dialogue with world religions without compromising our Catholic understanding of the unique universal mission of Jesus Christ as Savior.

Some commentators may employ inappropriate political categories in speaking of Pope Benedict XVI. They may suggest that he is or is not on "the side" of "liberals" or "conservatives" on some issues. But, like his predecessor, the new Bishop of Rome may not be on the side of any group in the political sense. He will be on the side of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He will be on the side of humanity, especially the most vulnerable.

With the election of the first German Pontiff in more than a thousand years and the second non-Italian, the Church has given a new expression to her catholicity. Perhaps one of John Paul's greatest gifts to the Church of the third millennium is a College of Cardinals large enough and diverse enough to look far and wide for the best person to fill the Shoes of the Fisherman.

It would be a great joy and privilege for me to join with my brother bishops from around the world for the Liturgy of the Solemn Inauguration of Pope Benedict as Supreme Pontiff on Sunday. However, the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Diocese of Lake Charles on Monday and preparations for my installation in Belleville make it impossible for me to do so. I will be joined with them in prayer. Perhaps my first occasion to greet the new Holy Father will be at World Youth Day in Cologne, Germany in August, if I am able to attend.

Millions of postcards sent to Senators

WASHINGTON — Millions of postcards have been sent to the district offices of U.S. Senators coast to coast as part of the "End Roe Litmus Test" campaign. The campaign, sponsored by the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment and the Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), invites Catholics to send a message to their Senators that support for Roe v. Wade

should not be used as a litmus test for judicial nominees.

"Abortion advocacy groups have pledged to spend \$10 million dollars every year to see that only judges who promise to endorse Roe are confirmed," said Cathy Cleaver Ruse, Esq., Director of Planning and Information for the USCCB Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities. "Yet even legal scholars who favor legal abortion have said Roe is not

good constitutional law."

In January Cardinal William Keeler wrote to all U.S. Senators urging them not to use a pro-abortion litmus test for nominees. "By any measure," he said, "support for the Supreme Court's 1973 Roe v. Wade decision is an impoverished standard for assessing judicial ability." Cardinal Keeler is Chairman of the USCCB's Committee for Pro-Life Activities.

The End Roe Litmus Test campaign also includes an e-mail component.

"Roe v. Wade is bad law, bad medicine, and bad social policy," said Ruse. "No Senator should make a litmus test out of what Justice Blackmun's former law clerk Edward Lazarus calls 'one of the most intellectually suspect constitutional decisions of the modern era.'"

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