

The Church Speaks

Summer District Deputies Meeting – State Deputy's Dinner

July 16, 2005

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A few weeks ago Cardinal George shared reflections on the priesthood by Cardinal ??? with the priests for our own reflection. In those reflections, Cardinal ??? alluded to Pope John Paul's annual letter to priests on Holy Thursday this year, just days before he died, and to Pope Benedict's address to the clergy of Rome in May shortly after his election.

Both talks dwelt on the fact that we are in the "Year of the Eucharist", citing frequently Pope John Paul's encyclical letter, "Ecclesia de Eucharistica" on how the church draws her life from the Eucharist, and the Apostolic Letter, "Mane nobiscum Domine" "Stay with us Lord" which announced the Year of the Eucharist.

And so this evening, I would like to share with you some of my own reflections based the apostolic letter inaugurating the Year of the Eucharist. Pope John Paul begins his letter with a meditation on the Emmaus narrative at the end of Luke's gospel. You will recall the narrative takes place two days after the crucifixion. Two of the disciples are somewhat dejectedly walking away from Jerusalem to a town

named Emmaus. The text tells us that it was sixty stadia i.e. about seven miles from Jerusalem to the north.

As they travel, they discuss “the things that had happened,” --- more than likely the events of the crucifixion, death and burial of their friend and master, Jesus. As with anyone who has lost a close friend, they are sad, mourning, questioning.

But as they walk, they are joined by a third person. The text allows us, the readers, to know his identity, but the two travelers do not recognize him. (Luke tells us “their eyes were kept from recognizing him”). It is Jesus who has now risen from the dead who is their companion on the way. He initiates the conversation with them with a question concerning what they were discussing. They stop short and wonder how he could not know what they were discussing; it seemingly was on the minds of everyone in Jerusalem.

In a rather ironic scene, the two disciples now begin to narrate to Jesus everything that had just happened to him. Their narration belies their mixed emotions and their confusion. It is almost a roller coaster like description. How this Jesus was a prophet, but he was handed over and crucified. How they hoped he would be the promised messiah, but now he is gone. How it was now the third day (the day when he said he would rise), but no sign. How some women came from the tomb, and his body was not there, and angels announced the he was alive. How

others went to check out the story, but they did not see him. And now they are walking away trying make sense out of it all. Pope John Paul saw us as akin to those two disciples loaded down with questions, disappointments, etc. Many times in our lives we seem to be walking on that road. And as with the disciples, we do not recognize the Lord present to us.

There is, and I am sure that many of you have heard this, a parable about the footprints in the sand. It tells of a person who, at the end of life, appears before the Lord and sees his whole life set before him as footprints in the sand. In the good times there were always two sets of prints, but when the times grew bleak, questioning, disappointments etc., there was only one set of footprints. Upon reflecting on life and seeing the footprints, the person asked the Lord why he had abandoned him in the times of trouble. The Lord's simple response was that he did not abandon him but rather he carried him through those difficult times. Just as the disciples on the road to Emmaus, that person did not recognize the Lord's presence. Upon reflection, we may be doing very much the same thing.

Jesus then takes the initiative again, and shows that it was necessary that the events of the preceding days in Jerusalem had to take place. And then he broke open the scriptures for them. He showed from the great writers of the Hebrew

Bible all that referred to him, and still they do not recognize him. But they will later recall, their hearts were burning within them as he explained the scriptures.

Finally, the disciples reach their destination, and they see that their fellow traveler is continuing on. It was late, and the demands of hospitality suggested that they invite him to remain, and so they say “Stay with us,” *Mane Nobiscum*. So they provide a place to stay for the night, and a meal. It is in the course of this meal that they discover who it was that was traveling with them. And note how they make the discovery. “he took bread,” Luke tells us, “and blessed it and broke it and gave it to them,” Those words sound so familiar, yes every time we attend Mass we hear them as the immediate prelude to the words of consecration in which the Lord Jesus becomes present to us in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Their eyes are opened and they recognized him. They came to know just who it was that was walking on the road with them—it was the Lord, he was risen, it was as the women had said, he is alive. But their joy was short lived as immediately he vanished from their sight. It was them alone again. But this time it was not in disappointment, confusion, and questions. But rather in the joy of the risen Lord. Luke ends the narrative with the disciples leaving Emmaus and rushing back to Jerusalem in order to tell the rest of the company what they had experienced, and “how Jesus came to be known to them in the breaking of the bread,”

Again a great message for us, it is in the Eucharist that we come to the presence of Christ, and come to recognize him. As the disciples reflected on the experience on the road, they began to see the hints of recognition “our hearts burned within us,” but it took the breaking of the bread, the Eucharist to make the recognition complete. So also with us, our attendance at Mass and the reception of the Eucharist make Christ intimately present to us, and allow us to see how he is active in all the other parts of our lives.

The Constitution on Sacred Liturgy from the Second Vatican council (Sacrosanctum concilium) put it succinctly when it said the Eucharist is “the source and summit of the life and Mission of the Church”¹ which, by the way, will be the theme of the Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops during which the Year of the Eucharist will come to a close next October.

The current year of the Eucharist is a natural outgrowth of the program that Pope John Paul put in place for the celebration of the great Millennium of 2000. He notes that the third millennium began “with events which were in tragic continuity with the past, and often with its worst aspects².” Despite the ever increasing

¹ Sacrosanctum concilium #

² Mane Nobiscum Domine #6

tragedies that mar the opening of the third millennium, Pope John Paul saw this Year of the Eucharist as a benefit to humanity “in the Long term.”³

In the apostolic letter, *Tertio millennio Adveniente* “at the outset of the third millennium,” Pope John Paul wrote “the year 2000 will be intensely Eucharistic; in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, the savior, who took flesh in Mary’s womb twenty centuries ago, continues to offer himself to humanity as the source of divine life.” This points to two foci of the millennium celebration that the Holy Father chose to highlight further, Marian devotion and the Eucharist. The first was highlighted in the Year of the Rosary 2002-2003, and the second in the Year of the Eucharist 2004-2005.

The Holy Father then meditates on the two phrases from the Emmaus narrative, “he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself,” and “they recognized him in the breaking of the bread.” The connection between Word and Eucharist is seen here. As Jesus interpreted the scriptures, he brought them through the word from “the darkness of sorrow and despair, awakening in them a desire to remain with him” leading to their invitation “Stay with us,” There is implicit here a summons to be more open to the word of Scriptures. The scripture proclaimed at Mass, many times we shrug off as having heard it before, or we

³ Ibid.

know what that is all about. I would suggest that we make (Notice I said “we”) a sincere effort to hear the scriptures at Mass, especially the Gospel readings, as though we were hearing them for the first time. Perhaps, even take a moment or two during the week to recall the gospel, place ourselves within the narrative, and come to know Christ a little deeper through that exercise. I have found of late that when I allow myself to, I see new insights in the gospel texts. There is always something new that we have not grasped if we clear our hearts and minds and let the text speak to us, rather than our preconceived notions speaking to the text.

Why pay attention to the word, because it prepares us to recognize yet another presence of the Lord, the presence in the Breaking of the Bread, the presence in the Eucharist.

IT is significant that the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, duly prepared by our Lord’s words, recognized him at the table through the simple gesture of the “breaking of bread.” When minds are enlightened and hearts are enkindled, signs begin to “speak.”

We need to be aware to hear the signs speak. We tend to down play the Eucharist, and that is precisely what Pope John Paul wanted to counter in this year of the Eucharist.

We have, in the Eucharist, something that no other has. We have our God, our loving brother, our savior present with us in a real way par excellence. If Bishop Kaffer were to walk into this room at this very moment, we would all stand and

greet him with the dignity that is due his office, similarly Cardinal George. If Pope Benedict were to come in we would be most likely in a state of awe. I know the first time I was in the presence of Pope John Paul II, there was an electricity in the room like nothing I had ever experienced. Last Year in Dallas for many of us, there was a profound sense as President Bush entered the room to address the Supreme convention.

But we have some one even greater than all of these present with us at every Mass, present with us in the tabernacles of our churches, present with us in Eucharistic adoration. We have the Lord Jesus himself. “The Eucharist is a mystery of presence, the perfect fulfillment of Jesus’ promise to remain with us until the end of the world.”⁴

This should be central in our lives for it is the foundation of our lives. We have the presence of the Lord within our midst, yet like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, as we walk along the road of our lives, we do not recognize it. Pope John Paul II saw this need and gave us this year to become more aware of that presence.

Our order has seen fit to highlight this year with the Eucharistic Congress that will take place at the end of the Supreme Convention in just a few weeks. That will be a great sign of the faith that is so dear to us. Imagine thousands of people

⁴ Mane Nobiscum #16

marching from the Hilton to Millennium park. It will have tremendous sign value and impact on the city of Chicago. And at Millenium park, benediction, the blessing of those thousands of people with the Lord Jesus himself. If at all possible, try to be a part of that great event.

Our state council has seen fit to highlight the year of the eucharist by adding a special segment into the KC Academy presentation on Eucharist adoration tracing the biblical and historical roots of the eucharist and giving some practical suggestions as to how council members and their families can make the Eucharist more central in their lives.

Among these are becoming more aware of the presence of Christ in our lives both within the context of the Mass and outside. Ask ourselves are we showing proper respect to the Eucharist when we receive communion. The latest norms suggest some form of reverence upon receiving the Eucharist, usually a slight bow. Are we doing that?

Eucharistic adoration outside Mass is also encouraged. "Let us take time," Pope John Paul said, "to kneel before Jesus present in the Eucharist, in order to make reparation by our faith and love for the acts of carelessness and neglect, and even the insults which our Savior must endure in many parts of the world." For years now the Supreme Council had a Eucharistic adoration chapel as a part of the

supreme convention, I suggest that maybe we might want to do similar at our state convention. We have successfully introduced the sacrament of Penance making confession available during the state convention thanks to the efforts of our State Chaplain, Bishop Kaffer, why not make available the possibility of Eucharistic adoration? That is my suggestion to our worthy State Deputy for next State Convention.

One final comment, as we saw in the Emmaus narrative, the disciples did not keep their experience to themselves. Upon recognizing Jesus in the “breaking of the Bread,” they set out immediately” to share their experience. Thus, “the encounter with Christ, constantly intensified and deepened in the Eucharist, issues in the Church in and in every Christian an urgent summons to testimony and evangelization.”⁵ That summons is embodied in the dismissal rite of every Mass. We don’t see it that easily as the English translation does not do justice to the original latin. The Latin phrase that ends the Mass is “Ite, missa est,” translated, “go, you are sent” from the Latin verb ‘mitto.’ The translation the “Mass is ended, go in peace” just missed the point.

The notion of sent implies a mission, it is a mission to witness more forcefully to God’s presence in the world. It is a mission to be a promoter of communion,

⁵ Mane Nobiscum #24

peace and solidarity in every situation we find our selves in. It is a mission to build a more just and fraternal society.

And so in their year of the Eucharist, we are challenged to come to know the Lord better, and to go forth and bring the Lord to others through charity, through unity, through fraternity.

And to close in the words of Pope John Paul II, “we cannot delude ourselves; by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognized as true followers of Christ. This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged.”⁶

Vivat Jesus!

⁶ Mane Nobiscim #28

