



Although she is shy in a serious manner, this little girl is open to the wonders of a new experience. (NC Photo)

Planning a Theme Mass:

By FR. JOSEPH M. CHAMPLIN

Last week we outlined three of the initial steps in planning a theme Mass — gathering representatives of the community together, selecting a theme, and choosing the biblical excerpts. Today we move on to discuss some additional efforts required for a successful eucharistic celebration with a predetermined motif.

4. Pick the other texts. This means deciding what eucharistic prayer, preface, introductory greeting, penitential rite, memorial acclamation and dismissal phrase best fits the special theme. It also entails determining which opening prayer, prayer over the gifts, and concluding prayer seems most satisfactory.

After the revised sacramentary with its 70 prefaces and 1,200 prayers has been issued by the Holy See (expected momentarily, although completion of an authorized English translation will take many months) this particular task will understandably be much easier.

Surely young people can do this. At least they did at the National CYO Convention in Denver last fall. Those responsible for the liturgy decided on a memorial celebration in honor of John F. Kennedy, then chose three scriptural texts (Ecclesiastes 3:1-11, Philippians 4:6-9, Matthew 5:1-12) which contained ideas associated with the late president and opted for the collect, prayer over the gifts and concluding oration from the traditional anniversary Mass for the dead.

They planned a unison recitation of Psalm 43 after the first reading to express anguish and hope, sentiments felt deeply after his death. "Why so downcast, my soul / why do you sigh within me? / Put your hope in God; / I shall praise him yet, / my savior, / my God." They selected as an introduction to the gospel (the beatitudes, "Blessed are the peace-makers...").

5. Arrange the musical program. Music carefully picked

and competently executed can powerfully influence people, set them in the proper mood, and open their hearts to the message or theme of a particular Eucharist. Liturgy designers, therefore, once the motif has been conceived, should think about the what, when, and how of a musical program for this Mass: what songs would be best, what instruments (guitar, organ, brass) most suitable, what occasions (antiphonal psalms after reading I, instrumental interlude at the offertory) most effective.

The revised Order of Mass makes the musician's role much easier. The entrance verse and communion antiphon may be dropped, if the congregation sings at these times; the offertory verse is optional; the alleluia may be omitted, if it is not sung; any chanted psalm with its antiphon may, in effect, replace the one assigned, if the latter does not correspond to what the planners have in mind.

6. Compose comments and prayers. It is highly desirable in a theme Mass, or on any other occasion for that matter, to have a specially composed prayer of the faithful and brief comments related to the message after the introductory greeting, before the readings and eucharistic prayer, and at the dismissal.

At the Denver convention, one or two sentence introductions by a commentator prior to each biblical proclamation greatly increased the Word's significance. To illustrate. Commentator: "This was John F. Kennedy's favorite scriptural passage. You heard it at his funeral. Listen." Reader: "There is a season for everything, a time for every occupation under heaven: A time for giving birth, a time for dying... a time for war, a time for peace. This is the word of the Lord."

7. Prepare banners, processions, personnel. Banners created by participants can highlight the theme, illustrate petitions in the general intercessions or prayer of the faithful,

and dramatize an offertory procession. So, too, use of the other visual arts, depending on the circumstances, may deepen a community's awareness of the Mass's theme.

Planning a theme Mass essentially means putting ample time and hard work into preparation for the Eucharist. But if, as Kung suggests, the Church primarily happens, occurs, becomes, when Christians gather around the altar, then it appears these hours and efforts could be placed to no better use.

I Wonder Where Wonder Went

By DOLORES CURRAN

I heard a speaker say, "Surely, one of God's greatest gifts to children is a sense of wonder."

I agree, but just to children? God gave it to humans across the board. We tend to reserve it for youngsters because we see so little of it in adults. Adults strive hard to overcome this awe and wonder which makes the soul soar, and what a pity this is. It divides us from children in a most important way.

Take the child, for example, when he first sees the ocean or the mountains. His eyes get big, there's a profound moment and he says, "Where does all that water come from?" or "How did the mountains get there?" He senses the Creator and the wise parent lets the experience lead into a spontaneous religion "lesson" on the spot.

The adult who sees a magnificent work of God for the first time feels the same sense of wonder but he struggles to overcome it. We talk about the Ice Age or earthquakes or some other act of God without quite getting back to God himself. It's uncomfortable for us to exhibit awe in front of others.

Yet, we teach wonder by example and without this sense of wonder, a child will never grasp the wholeness of God.

KNOW YOUR FAITH

Q. and A.

By FR. RICHARD P. McBRIEN

Q. My father still refuses to eat meat on Friday. He says that what he has done for 60 years he is not about to change now. How can we change such attitudes, or should we even try? And if we don't try, how is Vatican II to become a reality?

A. Vatican II can become a reality even when people eat fish on Friday. If your father continues this practice for the right motive (to identify himself with Christ's sacrifice on the Cross), then there is no reason why you should undertake a campaign to dislodge this habit from his life.

If, on the other hand, he really doubts that the Church could change such a law and that God would punish him severely if he dared to eat meat on Friday, then by all means you should try and liberate him from this terrible psychological prison. It would be helpful if your father were able to discuss the matter with an older priest whom he respects.

Q. My husband was a very devout Catholic for most of his life. He made retreats regularly, attended daily Mass, went to Confession monthly. Now he's made a complete turnabout. He has stopped going to Mass and dismisses everything about the Church as a lot of nonsense. He doesn't even believe in life after death anymore, although he still believes in God.

A. I should suspect that the fault lies with the kind of religious education which he received in early life, especially from his parents. Too often, Catholics were given the impression that every item in the catechism is absolute, unchangeable truth. What was essential (e. g., Christ is really present in the Eucharist) was not always distinguished from what was accidental (e.g., the use of Latin at Mass).

When the Church changed its views on certain accidentals, many Catholics interpreted this as a questioning of the essentials of faith as well. Their confidence in the teaching authority of the Church was proportionately undermined. If the Church admits error on one or more points, they argued, then it's probably in error on many more issues.

Counseling (for both of you) by a priest who understands, and is sympathetic with, the changes initiated by Vatican II would be helpful.

In the meantime, you might take new interest in the quality of religious instruction available to your own children. If religious attitudes which are formed in the early years of life can have such serious and disheartening effects on a person many years later, then it is of some urgency that our young people should be exposed to the best kind of religious education.

One of the advantages of the controversial new catechetics is that it exploits a child's sense of wonder.

It uses the everyday experiences of children, from a steaming teakettle (which is quite wonderful, if you think about it) to snow to space to new teeth to all those things which fill a child with awe, things which tell him that a loving Creator didn't forget a thing when He made the world and us.

When I work with parents on teaching religion at home, I begin by describing some of the most basic instances of wonder in a child's life — a baby discovering his feet, a child discovering that other children feel the same way, a teenager discovering he is liked — and I find the mothers nodding in agreement.

Eventually, in our discussion, some mother will ask, "Isn't there some way we can keep our children from losing this sense of wonder?"

Playing the devil's advocate, I ask, "Is there any value to their keeping it? Isn't it a hindrance to the reality of their daily lives?"

There's an immediate reaction from the listening mothers, an assurance that this sense of wonder is good, is valuable, is something we should con-

tinue to nurture in our families.

"Why?" I ask.

Gradually and somewhat uncomfortably, we work our way back to God. You see, parents sense that awe and wonder are part of belief but most of us don't know what to do about it.

Occasions for talking about the greatness of God's plan are under our halos daily. Just yesterday, our 8-year-old came home from school wide-eyed. "Do you know why they think the dinosaurs died out? Because some little animals ate their eggs. Boy, you just can't believe that little animals could kill off great big dinosaurs..." An occasion of wonder! We didn't let it pass.

"Why do you suppose God wanted to kill off the dinosaurs in the first place?" my husband asked, and we were off on a catechism lesson, whether our 8-year-old knew it or not.

Wonder abounds in the home. In addition to the obvious examples of caterpillars and cocoons, spiders and webs, and bulbs and flowers, there are rainbows, good books and home ceremonies to bring out the awe in a child. But, in order to nurture wonder, we parents have to recognize it and express it ourselves. It takes a bit of over-coming on our part, but it's worth it.