

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

# The Eucharist and the Hungers of the Human Family

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

PART I

[First in a series of articles on the themes of the 41st International Eucharistic Congress — introduced in last week's column.]

I have a beloved priest friend whose defensive reaction to his personal behavior is summed up in the words, "You just don't understand." He is only expressing the common human cry for personal acceptance and understanding.

There is in our society today a growing hunger for friends who understand and respect differences. It afflicts young and old, rich and poor, educated and ignorant.

We speak of a "generation gap" between parents and children who seem to live in worlds apart. The congress focuses on this alienation in a special celebration highlighting the contributions of youth to the life of the Church.

There is a dramatic rise in the disruption of family life, in the divorce rate — because communications have failed and husbands and wives have become strangers to each other.

There is alienation in the daily plight of the laborer — because employers have failed in understanding.

There is alienation from public life, because politicians seem to operate at a remote distance from those they are appointed to represent and serve.

There rests in the heart of each of us a lonely yearning for a friend. The Eucharist reminds us of the friend we have in Jesus — a changeless friend who knows more than anyone the nature, aspirations and longings, the weaknesses and the strengths of every member of the human family. For He who is the creator of all has

fashioned hearts to be restless until we are at home with Him.

He alone has shared our nature, our poverty, our love, our suffering and our sense of rejection. He has healed our misery by enduring it and has removed the hopelessness of our loneliness by sharing it.

As we receive Him in the Eucharist, we are strengthened by Him Who made us and we are received by Him Who redeemed us. If Jesus has loved us enough to create us individually, has died for us individually and gives Himself to us individually, then our love must extend to all whom He loves.

His Eucharistic presence offers us this challenge:

To those who are lonely, we must offer companionship; to those who are misunderstood, we must offer compassion.

If Jesus has communicated to us His life in the Eucharist, we must know and share the troubles of others so that, through Christ living in us, the hunger for understanding may be satisfied.

The Eucharistic Congress is involving itself in the awareness of the Church in the demands that our covenant with the Lord makes upon us. Many people feel excluded from the "we" and "us" pronounced by the priest in the Eucharistic liturgy. In the Eucharist our communal identity as members of one family who gather around the Lord's table is never more self-evident. It is here in the liturgy of the Word that we are reminded of what God's mercy has done and how he has called us to respond. And in the liturgy of thanksgiving we are in communion with what we must become. All Christian living and morality flow from this knowledge and self-understanding.

The purpose of the congress is to afford all of us an opportunity to examine how well we are responding to the call we receive in covenant with God through Jesus. Dare we confront the

possibility that down deep, Catholics and many other Christians do not know who they are and what sets them apart from non-believers? Dare we confront the fact that we have not made the significant contribution to the vitality of our country that the Eucharist challenges us to offer — a proclamation of the death of the Lord until He comes?

Indeed, there is a tragedy of estrangement in our times — "between nations, races, classes, churches and even generations. The need for reconciliation is clear. How better achieve it than at the Table of the Lord, for the liturgy in its turn inspires the faithful to become of one heart in love." (Pastoral Letter of U.S. Bishops in preparation for the Eucharistic Congress.)

Let us pray each day in the words of the official prayer of the Eucharistic Congress, and let us seek to be reconciled to one another and to heal the wounds of alienation and misunderstanding.

"Father in heaven,  
you have made us for yourself;  
Our hearts are restless  
until they rest in you.  
Fulfill this longing through Jesus,  
the bread of life,  
So that we may witness to Him  
Who alone satisfies the hunger  
of the human family.  
By the power of your Spirit  
Lead us to the heavenly table  
Where we may feast on the vision  
of your glory  
For ever and ever." Amen.



Religious Display

Father Elmer Heindl, left, pastor of St. Joseph's, Weedsport, and Seneca-Cayuga regional coordinator, and Msgr. Joseph J. Sullivan, right, pastor at Holy Family, Auburn, inspect a display of religious articles. The display at Holy Family is part of a region-wide Eucharistic celebration in conjunction with the International Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia. A Mass will be celebrated by attending priests at 3 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 8 at Casey Park Pavilion.

## The Church 1976



Fr. Andrew Greeley

The American Catholic church fears representative democracy as though it were an infectious disease.

I guess maybe it is.

There are three kinds of representation — competence, election, and random probability. Or, to put the matter differently, you can be represented by experts, delegates, and national samples. The church doesn't want part of any of them.

Take the frivolous catechetical directory on which so much time and money have been wasted. There have been endless "consultations" about it and there is apparently going to be one more. But as far as I can find, neither the committee nor those consulted by it include any competent theologians, any elected delegates or any national samples. In other words, the whole thing was a waste of time and money and the vast reams of computer output are worthless pseudo-science.

But then the hierarchy is protected from experts, from

elected delegates, and from knowing what the ordinary people really think. For that, apparently no cost is too high and no waste too unconscionable.

Of course the "directory" won't be read by anyone, but that doesn't much matter because Rome can be told that we have a directory and that there was massive "consultation" in its preparation.

Or the big bicentennial spectacular which Cardinal Dearden is throwing in Detroit this fall. It will be based on discussion of the "hate America" bicentennial workbook which, with one or two exceptions, treated competent professionals as though they had the bubonic plague. There will be a "study" of these discussions which will be of the same order of quality as the 1936 "Literary Digest" poll which showed Alf Landon was going to beat Franklin Roosevelt by a landslide. And there will be "voting" at the meeting — from an assembly of delegates appointed by the cardinal.

Of course, the Detroit "social action" spectacular is far superior to the tasteless and vulgar display of triumphalism we must endure this summer at the Philadelphia Eucharistic Congress. Such a parade of phony piety is hardly appropriate in a church which is losing members in droves and has only a third as many seminaries as it did a decade ago. It might have been a much better investment in time and money and energy to try to learn the reason for the massive losses in the church and to attempt to do something to reclaim those who have become lost sheep.

But big parades are much more fun — and much safer — than going out looking for the lost sheep.