

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

The Eucharist and the Hunger for Freedom and Justice

PART III

The II Vatican Council described the Eucharist as "at once the summit of the Church's activity and the source of all its power."

(Constitution on the Liturgy, 10) This simply translated means that the Eucharist is a grateful celebration of the primacy of God's grace. It is the mission of the Church to listen to His Word, both when it comforts us and when it judges our performance.

It is the Eucharist that provides us the strength to be His people in the world, and empowers us to be the sign and instrument of His mercy to the world. The liturgy, separated from the Church's mission to the world, is not celebration. It becomes an empty and meaningless ritual of which the Lord has warned us that He has no need. The Pharisees reveled in this and were chastised with His harshest words intended to unmask their hypocrisy.

Today there is a pressing need for the Church to address itself to the situation of the poor and the oppressed of the world. In the early Church it was understood that the communion in God's blessing celebrated in the Eucharist meant immediate responsibilities to come to the aid of the poor in the community. Even the distant poor are our neighbors. If God has spanned the abyss of our alienation from Him, we surely can cross the seas to rescue our needy brothers and sisters. The blessings we celebrate and receive in the Eucharist urge us to this task.

Jesus opened His ministry by appealing to the words of Isaiah. As he unrolled the scrolls of the Scriptures in the synagogue of Nazareth, he read:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, therefore he has anointed me.

He sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor,

to proclaim liberty to captives,

recovery of sight to the blind

and release to prisoners,

To announce a year of favor from the Lord."

Then He said: "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." Luke 4:21

This was the fundamental message of Jesus — the dawning of a new age in which the reign of God would be at hand.

To those of His day who hungered and thirsted for justice, Jesus proclaimed that God was about to satisfy them. Blessed are the poor, for the Kingdom of God is theirs. Blessed are the afflicted, for they will be consoled. Blessed are the famished for they shall be filled."

In our day countless people hunger for justice and freedom, for the right to an effective control over their own lives and to a decent share in the world's goods. Jesus proclaimed that man's hunger and thirst for righteousness was fulfilled in His ministry. But He also assures His disciples that they too must suffer for the sake of justice.

The Church discovers its responsibilities in the Eucharist. For if the solemn celebration of the Lord's death and resurrection fulfills the promises of God's feasts of blessings, then it also inherits the threats which God spoke against religious gatherings which ignore the needs of His people. Through the prophet Amos, He spoke the fiercest of these threats:

"I hate, I spurn your feasts,

I take no pleasure in your solemnities;

Your cereal offerings I will not accept,

Nor consider your stall-fed peace offerings.

Away with your noisy songs!

I will not listen to the melodies of your harps.

But if you would offer me holocausts,

Then let justice surge like water

And goodness like an unfailing stream."

Amos 5:21-24

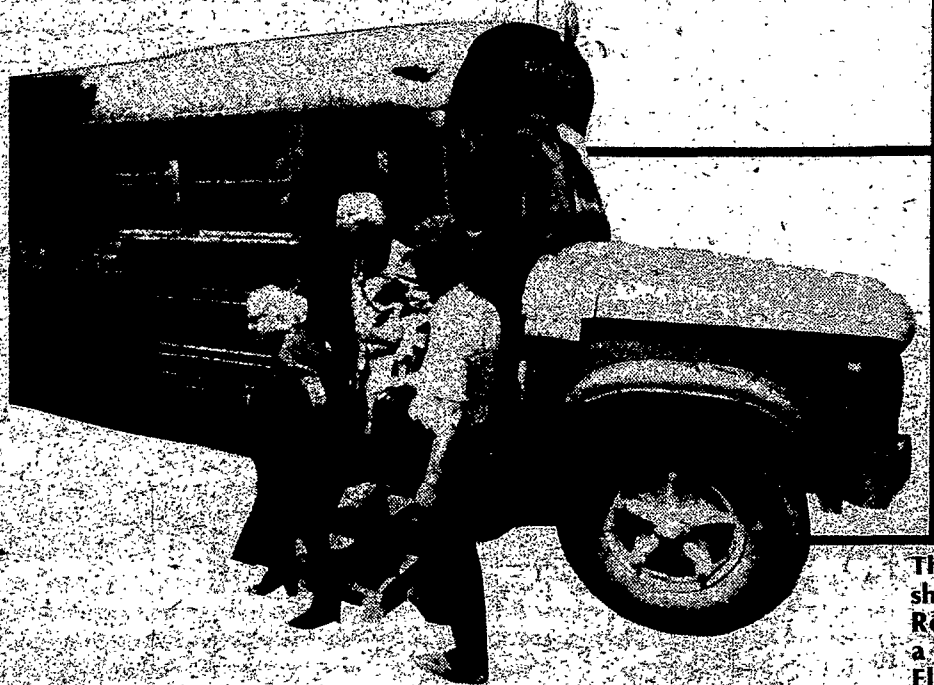
The community of faith, hope and love that gathers for the Eucharist must have its heart open to the needy of the world. As we recall God's favor of reconciling us, we accept the responsibility of reconciling — of overcoming all barriers between individuals and groups. Looking forward to the Kingdom of truth and life, of justice, of love and peace, it judges and criticizes all societies and struggles to improve them.

The Eucharist is the sacrifice of our praise to God. But it becomes a diminished worship if it does not promote His Kingdom among men. The royal priesthood of the Church is to be exercised in the world and not merely in the sanctuary.

St. John Chrysostom speaks of our priesthood whose altar is the poor whom he aids:

"His altar you may see lying everywhere, in street and marketplace, and you may sacrifice upon it at any time. When you see a poor brother, consider that you see an altar; when you see such a one begging, not only do not insult him — reverence him."

I pray that the Eucharistic Congress will forcefully remind all of us that it is impossible to accept Christ and not be committed to liberty and justice for all our brothers and sisters.



The bright Mariner House bus brings residents to the Fatima shrine at St. Francis of Assisi Church in Rochester. At left, Recreation Supervisor Don Knapp helps them off the bus. Saying a decade of the rosary at the shrine, are from left, Sister Rose Ellen Haefele, Palma Cosentino, Mike Pilato, Olympia Cullotti, and Caroline Marchese. At right: is the statue of St. Joseph in the garden of the Whitney Street church.

Religion Flourishes at Mariner House

"Oh, isn't that beautiful!" exclaimed Leo D'Haeniens when he first saw the shrine of Our Lady of Fatima in the garden of St. Francis of Assisi Church.

With other Catholic residents of Mariner House, a domiciliary care facility in downtown Rochester, he was on a field trip. The group, organized by resident Mike Pilato, meets at 7 every night to say the rosary.

Sister Rose Ellen Haefele, SSJ, led the expedition. She is activity director at Mariner House.

The house Rosary Hour, started four years ago, was Pilato's idea. "My helpers, Mary Klos and Dave Peterson, and I set up the radio and the (statue of) the Blessed Mother every night of the week," he said. About 25 people recite the rosary during Msgr. Cirincione's Family Rosary program on WSAY.

Religious activities at Mariner House have flourished. The rosary group grew too big for an 11th floor chapel and moved to the larger meeting room-auditorium. Nine priests take turns celebrating Mass Friday afternoons in a section of the spacious activity area. The bright blue chapel serves residents of various faiths who live at the house.

Pilato suggested the bus trip to the Fatima shrine because "I thought it would be wonderful for the people to see it." He and the other residents frequently pass up scheduled trips to movies because "we have the rosary here at 7. I think the rosary is more important than a movie."

Priests hear confessions at the Mariner House before Friday Mass.

Pilato boasts that there have been three converts to Catholicism since he has been at the house.

A highlight of the year was a large Catholic wedding last month for two of the residents.

At the Fatima shrine, Sister Rose Ellen led a decade of the rosary "for everyone at the Mariner House, and especially for us."