

Insights in Liturgy

Eastern Catholics Ignored

By FATHER BENEDICT EHMANN

In our diocese, there are six churches of the Eastern Catholic Rites - three in Rochester, one in Elmira Heights, one in Bath, one in Auburn. Five are of the Ukrainian Byzantine Rite, one is of the Melkite Byzantine Rite. They are not Roman Catholics, but even so they are no less Catholic than are the Roman Catholics. They are not

under the jurisdiction of the Rochester Bishop: they have their own bishops.

The bishop of the five Ukrainian parishes is Joseph M. Schmondiuk, of Stamford, Conn., whose jurisdiction covers all the New England states and New York, with 87,820 Ukrainian Catholics. The Melkite bishop is Joseph Tawil, of West Newton, Mass., with 20,116 Melkite Catholics in 17 states from Massachusetts to Florida

and cross country to California.

These people practice their faith in a strange and un-Christian segregation from Roman Catholics. The fault is only partly theirs. It is far more with us Roman Catholics. Most of us know hardly anything about them; and I'm afraid many of us are too intra-parochial in outlook even to care about it. And yet the Sign of Peace at our Eucharists is only a limp, anemic gesture unless, in intention, it is alert to reach out to these Eastern Catholics of our eucharistic community.

As I write this, I'm remembering the annual Octave of Prayer for Unity, which begins in another week. How can we put enough heart's blood into our prayer for unity, if we ignore or overlook the many thousands of our Eastern Rite brethren so close to our homes and already in union with us?

One of the 16 documents of the second Vatican Council deals with the subject of the Eastern Catholics. It is not meant to gather dust on the shelf. Here are some of the urgent things it says:

"The Catholic Church holds in high esteem the institutions of the Eastern Churches, their liturgical rites, ecclesiastical traditions, and Christian way of life. Distinguished as they are by their venerable antiquity, they are bright with that tradition which was handed down from the apostles through the fathers, and which forms part of the divinely revealed and undivided heritage of the universal Church.

"That Church, Holy and Apostolic, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit through the same faith, the same sacraments, and the same government; and who, combining into various groups held together by a hierarchy, form separate churches or rites. Between these, there flourishes such an admirable brotherhood that this variety within the Church in no way harms her unity, but rather manifests it. For it is the mind of the Catholic Church that each individual Church or rite retain its traditions whole and entire, while adjusting its way of life to the various needs of time and place."

The mind of the Church is clear, the mandate imperative. But I see very little "brotherhood," hardly worthy of the designation

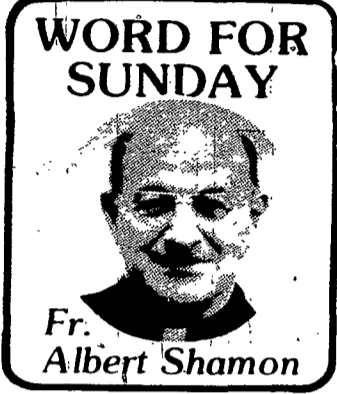
Galilee, which is 676 feet below sea level. From the slopes of Hermon to this point, a distance of 25 miles, the Jordan drops 2,275 feet.

Then the Jordan turns and twists, like a fleeing serpent, for some 200 miles over a distance of 60 miles (as the crow flies) until it reaches the Dead Sea - 1,280 feet below sea level, the lowest spot on earth.

Don't you think the Lord meant to teach us something by this arrangement? Sodom is a proverb for wickedness, its inhabitants lived in the lowest spot on earth, Jerusalem is a name of glory and it is a city on a mountaintop. Is there no symbolism here?

The one river in Israel is as crooked as a serpent. It rushes on muddy and foaming, like a maddened sinner. It loses itself utterly in the sea of a-death - a sea without outlet, without a city on its shore, without boats or traffic on its surface, no fish, no seaweed, no coral. Its banks are bare and desolate. The air is filled with sharp acrid odors. Only patches of asphalt - the Bible calls it "slime" (Gen 14:10) - float on its waves, giving the Dead Sea the name also "Lake of Asphalt."

What does this geographical phenomenon stand for? This Jordan which parted to let the Hebrews into the Promised Land? This Jordan that cleansed the leprosy of Naaman? This Jordan is the emblem of the sinner in the world. The sinner goes down, down, and the end of his way is death. Die he must if sin drives him on. Dead is he unless something stops this seaward rush. So John came baptizing at the Jordan to reveal the Lamb of God who can stop this onward flow of sin and can plant the sinner like a tree near the running waters to bear fruit in due season - if he look to Him!



Sunday's Readings: (R3) Jn. 1:29-34. (R1) Is 49:3, 5-6. (R2) 1 Cor. 1:1-3

Sunday's gospel is very interesting, for there is more to it than meets the eye. John the Baptizer proclaimed, "Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." This proclamation has to be understood from two viewpoints that of the Baptizer and that of the Evangelist who recorded the event over 60 years later.

The Baptizer very likely was not thinking of the Lamb of God as one led to slaughter, weak and helpless, but rather of the horned lamb, which in Jewish thought symbolized the champion of God who would vanquish evil and sin in the world (Rev 17:14). This interpretation fits in well with the Baptizer's preaching of the Messiah coming as a wrathful judge.

John, the writer of the gospel, however, added another dimension to this theme of the Lamb of God. John could look back on the life of Jesus, whereas the Baptizer could only look to the life of Jesus. John had stood by the cross and had seen the redemption of blood. So John naturally identified the Lamb of God with the suffering servant of Isaiah 53:7, 10, who is likened to a lamb led to slaughter for the sins of the world. Thus John situated the Baptizer's activities near the Jewish feast of the Passover, that celebrates redemption through the blood of a lamb, at a time when shepherds were herding their lambs to Jerusalem.

The Baptizer conducted his ministry around the Jordan River. As kids, we used to "help" the janitor at St. Aloysius School. To watch him stoke the boilers fascinated us. He'd bank the coals cleverly. We'd ask him why. He'd say the coals would burn better. Can we suppose that God who made the world did not have a purpose in the way He arranged things, like the Jordan River?

Do you know that Jordan means "the descender"? The sources of the Jordan are in Mt. Hermon over 2,000 feet above sea level. When the river reaches Lake Huleh 12 miles away, the river is six feet above sea level. Then the river rushes down the next six miles to the Lake of

Charismatic Mass Set
A charismatic Mass with the theme of ecumenism has been scheduled at St. Paul's Church at 783 Hard Road in Webster at 8 p.m., Friday, Jan. 20.
Sponsored by the Glory of the Risen Lord Prayer Group, the Mass will be celebrated by Father Edward Golden. During Mass the 28-minute movie on the 1977 Conference on the Charismatic Renewal in the Christian Churches will be shown.
Anyone wishing further information should call 671-6090.

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