

importance and it should ever be our desire to develop and improve the ways in which we carry it out. So much depends on the way in which God's Word is proclaimed. Paul says, "Men and women will not ask God's help unless they believe in him, and they will not believe in him unless they have heard of him, and they will not hear of him unless one is sent So faith comes from what is preached, and what is preached comes from the word of Christ (Romans 10:14-17).

64. Even now, within the norms of the Church, there is room for lay persons who preach well to do more public preaching than they do, or than we encourage. Qualified lay persons may explain the Word of God at Eucharistic liturgies for children, and at para-liturgical worship services. In addition, all those who serve as Readers are asked to explain the Word of God to catechumens and others who hunger for its nourishment. Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist who bring Holy Communion to those not able to leave home appropriately comment on and explain the Scripture proclaimed on that occasion.

65. The Eucharistic liturgy, itself, offers occasions for lay persons to participate in acts of proclamation and sharing which can enrich the prayer of the assembly: the call to worship, the offering of a communion meditation, or a brief reflection prior to the final blessing.

66. I recognize that for some the question of preaching by lay persons, and particularly by women, has been a sensitive one in our diocese. Two years ago, in obedience to the reaffirmed liturgical norms of the Church governing the matter, I directed that only ordained persons should preach the homily at the Eucharistic liturgy.

This I did with the realization that some of our laity, the great majority of whom were women, had been preaching regularly at Eucharistic liturgies and that their efforts had been appreciated by those who heard them.

My intention was then and is now to be in concert with the whole college of bishops as we are called to be "governors, promoters and guardians of the entire liturgical life of the Church" entrusted to us.¹⁹

My action was in no way meant to signal any derogation of the skills or love for the Church of the persons involved. I do realize, however, that I caused some hurt through insensitivity in communicating the directive and for that I do sincerely apologize.

67. We know that the holy People of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office, when as a whole people "it shows universal agreement in matters of faith and morals," sustained and aroused to this faith by the Spirit of Truth. But, as Vatican Council II pointed out, "It is not only through the sacraments and Church ministries that the same Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the People of God and enriches it with virtues." The Spirit of God also "distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank."²⁰

The gift of prophecy is present in persons of all stations and vocations in the Church. Its purpose is to inspire the People of God. In the words of a contemporary writer, a prophet is "a person who has a personal spiritual mission, that is, to be a witness to the strength of God, to the love of God for his people."²¹ The way of life of a prophet is ordered and directed by an extraordinary gift of God.

Vatican Council II carefully affirmed that God may give such gifts "to everyone according as he will" (I Corinthians 12:11) for the renewal and upbuilding of the Church:

These charismatic gifts, whether they be the most outstanding or the more simple and widely diffused, are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation, for they are exceedingly suitable and useful for the needs of the Church. Still, extraordinary gifts are not to be rashly sought after nor are the fruits of apostolic labor to be presumptuously expected from them. In any case judgment as to their genuineness and proper use belongs to those who preside over the Church, and to whose special competence it belongs, not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to that which is good (I Thessalonians 12:19-21).²²

68. It is entirely possible that the Spirit of God is even now granting to the Church at large and to our local Church true prophets, men and women through whom the Spirit of God will inspire and renew us. No one of us can claim on personal authority that he or she does not possess this gift of prophecy, nor can any one of us claim from God's hand this extraordinary power. But all of us — bishop and housewife, priest and lay person, monk and religious woman — can and must be open to its advent among us. It remains to those who preside over the Church to decide the presence of true prophecy and even they must be extremely careful not to make premature, unprayerful judgments and so to "extinguish the Spirit."

69. Therefore, it is possible that the voices of many women and men now heard in the Church will in time be discovered to be voices of true prophecy through whom the Spirit has spoken to and reformed the Church. This has happened in the past. It is altogether likely that the future will hold similar gifts for us. We need to be alert to this possibility as we face the difficult tasks of reading the signs of the times.

70. As part of their participation in the prophetic mission of Christ, women, as well as men, also have the obligation to proclaim the Word of God from the pages of Sacred Scripture, in public worship and in private gatherings. Men and women in all of our parish communities should be encouraged to proclaim God's Word from the lectionary.

71. Finally, all men and women have the obligation to proclaim the Word of God by the powerful example of their lives. Many men and women who live in the ordinary dwellings of the world and engage in work beyond the obvious structures of the Church have a special opportunity, and, therefore, a special responsibility to make God's Word known to others, "especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity."²³ Generations of women in this diocese have proclaimed the Gospel in this most effective way and proclaim that word splendidly today by the penetrating example of their lives, work, sufferings and prayer.

VII
B

THE CHURCH AS PRIESTLY WORSHIPING AND SANCTIFYING COMMUNITY

72. The entire liturgical life of our faith community revolves around the sacraments and expresses the priestly office of Jesus Christ in our behalf. Through the Sacred Liturgies of Baptism, Holy Eucharist, Confirmation, Penance, Holy Orders, Matrimony and the Anointing of the Sick, Jesus worships his Father; with us and in us he renews the perfect praise of his passion, resurrection and ascension.

73. Whenever and wherever we gather to celebrate the sacramental liturgies of the Church, Jesus Christ is present as Priest with his people. As Vatican Council II reminds us "Christ indeed always associates the Church with himself in the truly great work of giving perfect praise to God and making men and women holy."²⁴

74. The sacraments are the most holy and mysterious events in the life of the Church. Each sacrament is "an action of Christ the priest and of his Body the Church" and is "a sacred action surpassing all others. No other action of the Church can match its claim to efficacy, nor equal the degree of it."²⁵

The liturgy of the sacraments is "the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fountain from which all her power flows."²⁶ It is our unceasing and common vocation to comprehend and honor this most sacred action of Christ in our behalf, trying to enter as deeply as we humanly can into these sacred mysteries of Christ's incomparable love for us.

75. In this we need the selfless ministry of one another, for as the Fathers of Vatican Council II knew so well, a faith community must prepare itself for the celebration of the sacraments:

In order that the sacred liturgy may produce its full effect, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their thoughts match their words, and that they cooperate with divine grace lest they receive it in vain. Pastors of souls must, therefore, realize that when the liturgy is celebrated, more is required than mere observance of the laws governing valid and licit celebrations. It is their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part knowingly, actively and fruitfully.²⁷

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