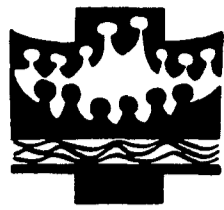


Insights
In Liturgy



By Sister Nancy Burkin, SSJ

Benediction

For those of us who can remember what it meant to be Catholic before Vatican II, benediction holds a special place in that memory. On Sunday evenings or Mondays after the novena, we knelt in clouds of incense, sang "Tantum Ergo," recited the Divine Praises, and were blessed by our God who was present with us in the Eucharistic bread, enthroned in the large gold monstrance.

Today one might assume that benediction went the way of the Latin Mass. Most churches never schedule it; some people don't know what it is; younger priests don't know what to do should they be asked to officiate at a benediction service. The fact is that benediction is still part of our Eucharistic devotion. Its focus, however, has changed.

In the past, before the reform of the liturgy, benediction was the opportunity for the people to encounter Jesus present in the Eucharistic bread. This need to see the Lord was part of the tradition which began in the Middle Ages when the participation of the people in the celebration of the Eucharist was simply that of spectator. Few people received communion and those who did, did so very seldom.

The Eucharist was perceived as an object to be looked at rather than a mystery to be celebrated by all. Benediction and other forms of devotion to the reserved sacrament was the laity's experience of God in Eucharist. Since the Council, we have gone back to an older tradition in which all participate in the dynamic word and action, including communion, that we call Eucharist. Thus there is no need today for benediction as seen in the Middle Ages.

There is, however, a need for communal prayer outside of the Eucharist, a communal prayer which draws us to a deeper participation in the paschal mystery and nourishes us to celebrate the memorial of the Lord as fully and authentically as possible.

Benediction offers us one opportunity for that type of prayer. Any devotion to the Blessed Sacrament is bound up inextricably with the celebration of the Eucharist: an encounter with the Lord in the reserved sacrament is an encounter with him and with the action of his people.

Even though the presence of the Lord appears to be a static one, it is the fruit of the community's liturgical action. Though prayer before the exposed sacrament may appear to be intensely personal and intimate, there is always the social dynamic at work uniting the praying Christian with the assembly.

For that reason,

exposition of the Eucharist exclusively for giving benediction is forbidden. Instead prayer, songs and scripture readings, as well as silent prayer, should be interspersed throughout the period of exposition. Morning or evening prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours may be used as a source for these prayers. Then at the conclusion benediction is given, taking its rightful place as a concluding blessing which in fact was the original use of this devotion.

Readers interested in more information on this prayer form are encouraged to read the third chapter of "Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass," published in 1973 by the Congregation for Divine Worship.

Elmira Native Gets Papal Title

Camden, N.J. — Father Robert B. Ervin, son of Mrs. Catherine Ervin of Elmira, and a native of that city, has been given the title of Reverend Monsignor by Pope John Paul II.

The title comes with his appointment as "Prelate of Honor of His Holiness." The appointment was announced

recently by Bishop George H. Guilfoyle, Bishop of the Diocese of Camden.

Msgr. Ervin attended St. Patrick's School and Elmira Catholic High School, St. Bonaventure College and Christ the King Seminary.

He was ordained for the Diocese of Camden in 1951.

For the past 14 years, of St. Casimir's Parish in Woodbine, N.J. Msgr. Ervin has been pastor

Cenacle to Offer Retreats

The Cenacle Renewal Center will offer eight-day directed retreats Aug. 19-27, during which time the sisters will be available for spiritual direction on a one-to-one basis.

Scripture passages for prayer are chosen day by day as the retreat progresses.

According to Cenacle spokesperson Rosemarie Schaeffer, "This time has been especially set aside to help you leave the cares of the world and rest awhile — be refreshed, relaxed, reinvigorated and renewed in God's love."

Directed retreats may also be scheduled by individuals at any other time except the last two weeks in July, she

said. Further information and reservations are available by contacting the Cenacle Ministry Office, 693 East Ave., Rochester, N.Y. 14607; (716) 271-8755.

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