

THE POPE

Sunday Mass Is at Heart of Catholicism

Vatican City (NC) — Following is excerpted from the Vatican text of Pope John Paul II's English-language talk July 9 at the Vatican to 14 U.S. bishops. The bishops were making their "ad limina" visits to the Vatican, required every five years to report on the status of their dioceses.

In examining the many relevant topics which the episcopal conference offered to my consideration, and for which I thank you, I have noted one that concerns the celebration of Sunday — the strengthening of the Lord's Day. And I am pleased to reflect briefly with you on this issue of such capital importance, and in particular on the Sunday eucharistic celebration. I pray that you in turn may confirm your people in a matter that profoundly touches their lives as individuals and as a community. Throughout the United States there has been a superb history of eucharistic participation by the people, and for this we must all thank God.



In the whole tradition of the Church, the Sunday Eucharist is a special expression of the Church's faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is by virtue of the Holy Spirit that the Church calls the faithful together to proclaim their faith in this mystery, as well as in the mystery of their "birth unto hope which draws its life from the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pt. 1:13). The liturgical assembly built up around the Eucharist has always been, from its apostolic origin, the special mark of the Church's celebration of the Lord's Day, and the Second Vatican Council has reiterated the importance of Sunday Mass (cf. "Sacrosanctum Concilium," 106). It is in fact the whole paschal mystery that the people of God are called to celebrate and to participate in each Sunday, the passion and the resurrection and the glorification of the Lord Jesus.

The vitality of the Church depends to a great extent on the Sunday eucharistic celebration, in which the mystery of salvation is made present to God's people and enters into their lives. In the expression of "Lumen Gentium," God wills to save and sanctify us as a people (cf. no. 9), and there is no moment in which we are more intimately united as a community than during Sunday Mass.

It is at this moment that the Eucharist builds the Church and is, at one and the same time, the "sign of community

and the cause of its growth," as you yourselves pointed out some time ago in your pastoral message "To Teach as Jesus Did" (no. 24).

The whole life of the ecclesial community is linked to the Sunday Eucharist. It is here that Jesus Christ prays with his people, who become with him a people of worship, adoring the Father "in spirit and in truth" (Jn. 4:23). The aspect of worship is central to an understanding of the full dignity of the people of God. Jesus Christ presents his brothers and sisters to his Father as a worshipping people, a liturgical community. And in this role they fulfill the purpose of all liturgy, which the Second Vatican Council powerfully describes as being "above all the worship of the divine majesty" ("Sacrosanctum Concilium," 33).

I am convinced, venerable and dear brothers, that we can render a great pastoral service to the people by emphasizing their liturgical dignity, and by directing their thoughts to the purposes of worship. When our people, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, realize that they are called to be "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (1 Pt. 2:9), and that they are called to adore and thank the Father in union with Jesus Christ, an immense power is unleashed in their Christian lives. When they realize that they actually have a sacrifice of praise and expiation to offer together with Jesus Christ, when they realize that all their prayers of petition are united to an infinite act of the praying Christ, then there is fresh hope and new encouragement for the Christian people. Young people have shown themselves particularly sensitive to this truth.

Essential to the whole liturgical renewal of this century, and confirmed by its experience, is the principle that the full and active participation by all the people in the liturgy is the "primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit" ("Sacrosanctum Concilium," 14). And from our own experiences — yours and mine — we know how much our people are capable of doing, how great their Christian contribution to the world is, when the Lord Jesus touches their lives, when they themselves enter into his sacrifice. Let us continue, dear brothers, to strengthen the understanding of the faithful and their appreciation of their role in eucharistic worship. And let us continue to work to bring about that full and active participation, which the Church wills for everyone, but always according to the differing roles of the various members of the one body of Christ.

In these differing roles of eucharistic participation the unity of the whole body is ensured, and the dignity of each one respected. For the laity it is a question of actualizing the call to worship inherent in their baptism and confirmation. For priests, it is also a question of performing the irreplaceable service of making Christ's sacrifice present in the Church. For all the members of the Church, the Eucharist, and especially the Sunday Eucharist, is the source and summit of all Christian living. All the activities of our people — all their efforts to live the Gospel, to bear witness to Christ, to put his word into practice in their family life and in society — all of these efforts are ennobled and supported by the power of the Eucharist, in particular at the Sunday celebration.

In promoting the participation of the faithful in the liturgy of the word and of the Eucharist, we are rendering an eminently pastoral service and contributing to so many aspects of the Church's life. Marriage and the family are fortified; evangelization is fostered; human rights find their confirmation in the liberating message of Jesus, which is fully proclaimed in the sacramental renewal of the paschal mystery. Through the proclamation of God's word, zeal for catechesis is nurtured in the Christian people; vocations are offered by Christ; and light and strength are given to the faithful to meet human problems, even the most vexing and difficult ones. And all of this spells out the relevance of the eucharistic mystery and its celebration for God's people. All of this confirms the importance of the Sunday liturgy in the life of the community.

It is also extremely useful to recall that the Second Vatican Council, in its treatment of Christian education, emphasizes as one of the purposes of Christian education "that the baptized may learn to adore God the Father in spirit and in truth" ("Gravissimum Educationis," 2). Education, too, like other Christian activity, is oriented to the worship of God.

I wish at this time to support you in all your efforts to help the faithful celebrate worthily their Christian dignity in the Sunday liturgy. May the people of God in America be led to an ever greater conviction of the sacredness of the Lord's Day. Despite changes in society and different types of pressures, as well as various difficulties, may they continue to the full extent of their power to maintain that great tradition fostered in your land of sanctifying the Sunday and the holy days of obligation. May each of the faithful realize the privilege that is his or hers to be part of the praying Church, to be able to say to God, "By your gift I will utter praise in the vast assembly" (Ps. 22:26). Besides the eucharistic liturgy, the other aspects of the Sunday celebration — the Liturgy of the Hours, rest and freedom from work, the performance of charitable works and the broadcasting of religious radio and television programs where possible — contribute to the Christian dimension of society and help lift up people's hearts to God the creator and redeemer of all.

Dear brothers, be assured that, in the charity of Christ, I am close to you and to all your brothers in the priesthood, who share with you the pastoral service of making God's people ever more conscious of their dignity as a people of worship.

United with each other, and with the other bishops in America, and together with the universal Church, let us work with all our energy to encourage our people in their generous efforts to maintain unaltered that apostolic tradition of participating in the Sunday Eucharist. There are many other considerations that could complete these reflections. Let us, however, as pastors united with our people, proclaim without ceasing the faith of the Church that is at the basis of every Sunday Eucharist: the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ from the dead. It is he whom we await in joyful hope; and it is in the name of the risen Jesus that all our episcopal, pastoral and collegial ministry is exercised. Praised be Jesus Christ!

More Opinions

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Write to Halt Arms Race

EDITOR:

In May, the House of Representatives passed (278-149) a resolution calling for immediate negotiations with the Soviets for a bilateral, verifiable freeze on testing, producing and deploying nuclear weapons and their delivery systems.

The freeze is now in committee in the Senate. Debate and action in the full Senate could begin early in July.

At least three forms of resolutions will reach the Senate floor. The Hatfield-Kennedy Freeze Resolution, SJ Res. 2, is similar to the House Freeze. (This is a good, true freeze. It would halt the nuclear arms race and lead to viable arms reduction negotiations.) The two others, Nunn-Cohen, S. Res. 57, the nuclear weapons "build-down" resolution, and Dole, S. Con. Res. 46, would both permit the current buildup of new weapons to continue. The nuclear arms race would not be halted. More sophisticated, "first strike," provocative weapons like MX, Trident, Cruise and Pershing II would replace or supplement existing weapons. The nuclear hair trigger would be filed finer

Any true freeze faces an extremely hard fight in the Reagan dominated Senate. Reagan, Weinberger, the military, the arms makers and the PACs funded by the arms makers will pull all stops to defeat a freeze. There is too much to be lost in the way of ideological fanaticism, power, glory and money if the arms

race is stopped; self-serving interests are not given up easily.

Only palpable pressure from the grassroots constituency will force the Senate to treat the freeze objectively and without bias and to courageously resist self-interest lobbying.

If you want to help halt the nuclear arms race you must ACT NOW. Write (the Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510) or telephone Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (202-224-3121) and urge him to support the Hatfield-Kennedy Freeze, SJ Res. 2 and to oppose any substitutes or weakening amendments. He may be a swing vote if he can feel the pressure from his constituency.

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Reader Confused

EDITOR:

In Father Paul J. Cuddy's article, "Keeping Reverence in the Mass," the paragraph, "Every priest knows that the Church's regulations in rubrics and liturgy are safeguards to keep the commemoration of the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord from banality and cheap exhibition."

Question: Then why are the Sisters or Liturgy Committee in there directing the priest on how to enter for the Processional?

Thanks to the generous charitable spirit of some members I am now a thoroughly confused ex-convert.

Helen R. Milton
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