

Practice could help close gap in the church

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

This week's column suggests an exercise that might help, in some very modest way, to close the gap between contesting parties in the church.

Catholics who regard themselves as conservative, traditional or orthodox — the adjective doesn't really matter — should make a list of everything they like most about the post-Vatican II church. Catholics who regard themselves as progressive, liberal, or conciliar — again, the adjective doesn't really matter — should make a list of everything they liked most about the pre-Vatican II church.

Of course, many younger Catholics have had no personal experience of the pre-Vatican II church, so they will have to base their answer on information they are secondhand.

I offer my own entry below in order to stimulate others to "take the test."

It will come as no surprise that my list is that of a Catholic entirely sympathetic with Vatican II and very much at home in the post-conciliar church.

What I liked most about the pre-conciliar church:

- The strong sense of communal identity, both at the parish and universal levels, where, in the latter case, the pope functioned as a powerful symbol of the worldwide unit of the church.
- The central importance of the Mass, and the growing success of the liturgical movement in encouraging and bringing about increased lay participation in the Mass.
- The sacramental view of reality that was reflected not only in the seven sacra-

ments themselves but in our sense of God's presence and activity in the saints and in the ordinary persons, places and things of this life.

- The church's strong commitment to social justice and peace as embodied in the great social encyclicals and major papal addresses, and the church's remarkable works of charity and justice on behalf of the poor, the sick and the alienated, through its vast network of hospitals, nursing homes and social service agencies.
- The growing strength of Catholic biblical and theological scholarship, and of Catholic higher education generally.
- The ministerial generosity and motivational influence of nuns and priests.
- The seemingly easy access to God through prayers and rituals of the most ordinary and immediate kind.
- The increasing recognition of the importance of lay involvement in the church.
- The dedication, commitment and even heroism of missionaries to non-Christian lands and cultures (captured, for example,

in a film of a few years ago entitled, "The Mission").

• The realism of the church; specifically, its acceptance of human weakness and its readiness to accommodate itself to it by means of dispensations, exceptions, commutations and absolutions.

What is striking for me is that what I liked most about the pre-conciliar church for the most part I also like most about the post-conciliar church.

Parish life flourishes in a different way now. It no longer relies so heavily on the work of priests and nuns. Although practice may differ widely from place to place, the laity are now much more fully engaged in parochial ministries of every kind than they were before Vatican II.

The Eucharist, even more than before the council, is at the heart and center of the church's life, and, because of the changes brought about by the council, it is a Eucharist that people can more easily understand and in which they can more fully participate.

Banquet awaits those who heed God's invitation

By Cindy Bassett
Courier columnist

One day, just after Jesus had finished preaching, John said to him: "Master, the crowds keep growing in size every day. Soon, everyone will be joining with the others to become one of your followers."

John and the other apostles were surprised when Jesus shook his head and said, "The Kingdom of my Father is open to all. However, even though many are called, few will be chosen."

When Jesus saw how worried his



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apostles were at these words, he told them this story:

The Kingdom of God is like a huge banquet feast that was planned by a ruler. First, he carefully prepared his guest list and sent invitations out to all of his friends. The invited guests seemed happy to receive the invitation.

For his part, the ruler spared nothing to prepare for the elaborate feast for his invited guests.

At last, the day of the banquet came. And the ruler said to this same servant: "Make haste, go tell the guests that all is ready for them. The celebration will begin."

But when the servant went to see these invited guests, he discovered that this time the invitations of his master were refused.

"I just started my own business," one of the invited guests said. "There is much to do. I have no time for your master's ban-



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

The church at every level has intensified its commitment to social justice and peace — Pope John Paul II no less than Pope John XXIII, and the U.S. Catholic bishops no less than any of their predecessors in the pre-Vatican II years.

The quality and reputation of Catholic higher education have improved significantly, while Catholic theological and biblical scholarship has come of age.

The post-conciliar church is more ecumenical, more open, more self-critical, more democratic and more pastorally realistic than before.

Which is not to say that it is without problems. But to list those problems would be to defeat the purpose of this exercise. It is to help build a bridge, not to open the gap more widely.

quet.
"My job keeps me so busy with its responsibilities," another invited guest said. "I must attend to that first."

Others had excuses concerning their families and their friends so the servant returned sadly to his master's house alone.

When this servant told all to his master, the master said: "Go out to the streets of the city and bring the poor and beggars back with you. Find the unfortunates who are crippled and handicapped. Invite these people to come and enjoy the banquet."

The servant did as his master requested. Soon the entire banquet hall was filled. The great celebration was held. Not one of the original guests who had been invited was sitting at the table with the others.

"And so it will be with my Father's kingdom," Jesus explained. "There are many who say they want to be my followers. But saying and doing are two different things.

"It is a normal thing to be concerned with your work and your families," Jesus added. "But when they become more important than being my follower, that is how you will order your life. Put me first in your life. The rest of these things will be taken care of."

Jesus concluded, "The kingdom of my Father is open to everyone. But not everyone who says, 'Lord, Lord,' will share in eternal life."

Scripture reference: Matthew 22:14; Luke 14:15-24.

Meditation: What is your number one life goal? "I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken." (Psalm 15:8).

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