

# Archbishop leaves legacy of fairness

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

It was just a few days after Christmas, 1968, when I learned of the appointment of the new archbishop of Hartford.

At the time, I was on the faculty of Pope John XXIII National Seminary in Weston, Mass., and was at home in Hartford for the Christmas vacation. My former pastor at Our Lady of Victory in West Haven, Conn., the late Father Thomas McMahon, telephoned with the news.

I was stunned. John Whealon, then bishop of Erie, Pa., was one of the names a friend and I had placed on an imaginary list of bizarre possibilities to succeed Archbishop Henry J. O'Brien, who had retired.

Bishop Whealon had the reputation in Erie for being a stickler for detail. The biretta was always to be worn for Mass and the celebrant's shoes had to have laces.

It was only three years after the adjournment of the Second Vatican Council. By the standards of those days, John Whealon was an ultraconservative. We couldn't believe that anyone so far to the right would be imposed on Hartford.

But he was, and when I called my friend at The Catholic University of America, he thought I was joking. It was no joke.

After so many years of quiet, compassionate, and fair-minded pastoral leadership from Archbishop O'Brien, we wondered what the Archdiocese of Hartford had done to deserve this.

At first, the new archbishop came across as scholarly and aloof. I would hear reports that he was ill at ease with people, even with his clergy.

But there was another side to the man that began to show itself. Bishops and the staff people who worked with Archbishop Whealon at the national level found him to be a stickler for detail, to be sure, but always honest and fair.

It was the latter word — fair — that was to grow almost exponentially in significance for the archbishop's remaining years in Hartford. John Whealon was a fair man.

There are perhaps a few people in the Archdiocese of Hartford and elsewhere who will see this as a form of poetic license. One never says anything ill of the deceased, and so they will let it pass.

I cannot account for those instances when the archbishop may have spoken or acted in ways that others regarded as unfair. I can only account for my own experience with him.

Even though he and I were at different points on the theological spectrum, never

once in our 22 years of association did a harsh or unfriendly word pass between us — or behind our respective backs, as far as I can tell.

Whenever anyone would report some remark he had made about me, it was always a positive and supportive one. He did not fully agree with my writings, including this weekly column, but he told others that he regarded them as balanced and orthodox.

Never once in those 22 years did he ever ask me to change a word, and never once did he interfere with its weekly publication in *The Catholic Transcript*.

That bothered some of the fire-eaters inside the archdiocese and beyond, but he never yielded to their pressure. And it was constant.

But so, too, was his loyalty.

The archbishop was for several years chairman of the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Doctrine. With graduate degrees in Scripture and theology in hand, he enjoyed widespread respect and credibility as a traditional interpreter of the faith.

His fidelity to the Scriptures he loved so much, and the integrity of his theological and doctrinal views were simply above reproach.



## ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

It was all the more remarkable and humbling to me, therefore, that he should have been so consistently supportive, so steadfastly loyal — even when it meant on occasion standing firm against forces seemingly mightier than he.

I admired Archbishop Whealon from afar for his simplicity of life, for his modesty, for his self-discipline, for his perseverance, even in the face of serious illness.

But I admired him most, up close, for his loyalty and his fairness.

When I told him that to his face not so many months ago, he seemed taken aback by the frankness and directness of my compliment. A truly humble man, he probably absorbed criticism more easily than praise.

In 1968 some of us had worried about the impact of his appointment on the Archdiocese of Hartford. Today we hope and pray for a successor as good as he.

# Receive the Eucharist worthily and live

By Father Albert Shamon  
Courier columnist

**Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 6:51-58; (R1) Proverbs 9:1-6; (R2) Ephesians 5:15-20.**

"Wisdom hath built her house" (R1). God's wisdom is the Word of God. The Word of God made man build the house of His church. He set her on "seven columns;" that is, he entrusted her with seven sacraments.

The greatest of these sacraments is the most holy Eucharist, which is more vital to man's spiritual life than are food and drink for his bodily life. So wisdom calls to all of us: "Come, eat of my food, and drink of the wine I have mixed! Forsake foolishness that you may live..."

Everybody wants to live — not just for a day, not just for a year, but for always. And Jesus, God's wisdom, said, "I myself am the living bread come down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread he shall live forever."

There you have it! The guarantee for

eternal life is as simple as receiving holy Communion frequently and worthily. Therefore, "Stop the nonsense. Stop acting like a fool," says Wisdom. "Forsake foolishness that you may live" — always.

Still many people, such as the rebellious Jews, question this. "How can He give us His flesh to eat?"

The Lords have published a book, entitled *The Miracles of the Eucharist*. The great humility of God! To convince those who deny the reality of his presence in the Eucharist, God has worked many miracles. In my little booklet, *Let Holy Mass Be Your Life*, (which ought to be used in every high school religious-education class), I have recorded four eucharistic miracles.

The oldest eucharistic miracle occurred at Lanciano, Italy. In the 8th century, a priest, who doubted the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist, was celebrating Mass. When he raised the Host during the consecration, it suddenly changed from the appearance of bread into that of bleeding flesh. When he consecrated the wine, it became blood.

In 1970 the local archbishop authorized an investigation into this miracle, revealing that "the flesh is real Flesh. The Blood is real Blood. The Flesh consist of the muscular tissue of the heart (myocardium). The Flesh and Blood belong to the human species and have the same blood-type (AB). The Flesh and Blood have remained incorrupt for twelve centuries without any preservatives, even though exposed to the action of atmospheric and biological agents — an extraordinary phenomenon."

In a word, science testifies to the authenticity of the miracle.

I like the story of St. Anthony and the mule. When the saint was preaching on the Eucharist in 1225, an Albigensian heretic named Boniville denied the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

Boniville challenged the saint to a test. He did not let his mule eat for three days before taking it to the public square. While he stood on one side of the piazza with a bushel of barley, St. Anthony stood on the other side holding a consecrated Host.

The mule was let loose. Without hesitat-



## A WORD FOR SUNDAY

ing, the mule ignored the barley and went to the saint. The mule lowered its head and kneeled before the consecrated Host.

Boniville and a great number of his followers were converted. To commemorate the miracle, a chapel was built on the piazza.

Many other miracles have been recorded, such as St. Clare and the Saracens, or the Angel of Portugal and the three little children at Fatima.

How sad the words of Jesus to Josefa Menendez: "I live in the midst of sinners that I may be their Life, their Physician, and the remedy of the diseases bred by corrupt nature. And in return they forsake, insult and despise Me!"

Don't you be among these. Know the gift of God. "Forsake foolishness that you may live."

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