

# Eucharist centers faith communities

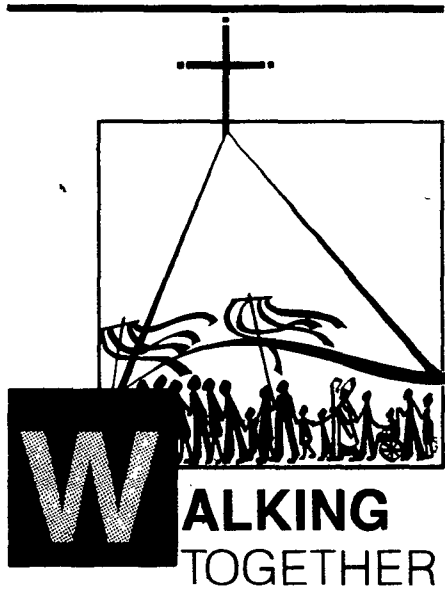
**Father Robert J. Kennedy**  
Guest contributor

*Eucharist is the center of Catholic life. ... When we take the pulse of a parish the Sunday liturgy is where we start, because it is here that the wonderful variety and faith of all our people is evident.*

The truth of these words from the synod discussion paper for week two is so obvious that we may miss its impact and importance. For when the Eucharist is celebrated, especially on Sunday, Christ is present in his word, in the living bread we eat and saving cup we drink, in the one who presides, and in the people who pray and sing.

The Sunday Eucharist is the central meeting place of the risen Christ and the people formed in his Holy Spirit; it is the church gathered, head and members. Thus the Eucharist is the heart of the parish, the energy and nourishment for all its activity, the engine of faith-filled, celebrating communities.

The Eucharist's primary role in the parish is to express and deepen faith. Parishioners bring with them all their joys and sorrows, hopes and longings, questions and doubts, successes and failures; they bring their work and play, their sins and holiness. They make the "stuff" of their lives an offering of thanksgiving to God, and ask that their lives be consecrated anew by their Communion with Christ and his Holy



Spirit.

In response God in Christ gives these parishioners — us — a community of brothers and sisters to be encouraging companions in life's journey. As the Scriptures are proclaimed and preached in the assembly, God speaks a word of comfort and challenge that renews hope and holds out to us the vision for living. The prayer and song of the community inspires faith. And in the act of Communion, God nourishes us with Christ and empowers us to "go forth to live and serve the Lord."

If we are going to "take the pulse of a parish," we first have to ask ourselves how well this central action is done. Fifteen years ago the U.S. bishops made the startling statement: "good celebrations foster

and nourish faith; poor celebrations weaken and destroy faith" (*Music in Catholic Worship*, #6). The quality of our celebrations is a crucial factor in just how fully God's people have access to what God so generously offers them.

Are the Scriptures proclaimed with understanding and care? Is there enough silence to allow God's Word to find a place in people's hearts? Is the preaching alive with God's Spirit and related to people's lives today? Does the music express and inspire faith? Do all the liturgical ministers exercise their ministry as though it was the most important thing in the world for them? Are the rituals performed fully and with reverence, especially the Communion rite?

We need to answer these questions truthfully. Without quality celebrations of Eucharist, parishes have no center, no heart, no vision.

A eucharistic community is also a ministering community. By baptism all are called to minister in the name of Christ, and by our sharing in the Eucharist we are empowered to do so according to the gifts God's Spirit has given each one of us. Ministries of making the Gospel known, of caring for one another, of social justice, of prayer — all these and more are the ways in which God's people live their faith responsibly in the world.

The tone and pace for baptismal ministry is set by those entrusted with the roles of leadership and ministry for the parish. Their spirit

of collaboration, their enthusiasm for a post-Vatican II church moving into the 21st century, their prayerfulness and their genuine care for the people they serve will bring the parish to a deeper level of joyous life. How can we support the pastoral ministers of our parishes and call forth the many rich gifts the Holy Spirit has given our parishes and diocese?

In and through the Eucharist we are the Christ who had no hesitation about associating himself with the young and the old, the grieving and the celebrating, the healthy and the desperately ill, and all those considered outcast by everyone else. Jesus' behavior was a scandal to those who did not understand that such inclusivity is the way to salvation.

Who is missing from our eucharistic table? Who is feeling excluded from its nourishment and vitality? Who feels broken off from its unity? And what can we do as a parish and a diocese to make a place for them at the table?

As our diocese gathers in synod next week, our discussions will provide us with opportunities to explore some answers to these probing questions — answers that both celebrate our successes and recommend ways to help us grow stronger as faith-filled celebrating communities. Come join!

Father Kennedy is assistant professor of liturgical studies at St. Bernard's Institute.

## Fate decided by what we don't do

**By Father Albert Shamon**  
Courier columnist

**Sunday's Readings:** (R3) Luke 16:19-31; (R1) Amos 6:1, 4-7; (R2) 1 Timothy 6:11-16.

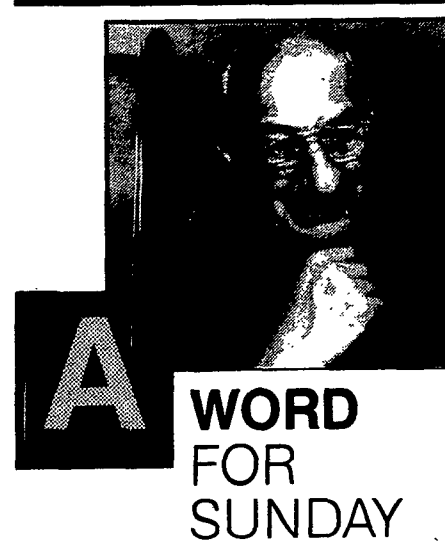
When I was a kid, all Amos meant to me was a comedian — one of the radio stars of "Amos 'n Andy." Only later did I learn of the prophet Amos.

He was a shepherd in Judah, sent by God around 750 B.C. to Israel's northern kingdom to preach social justice and to warn the people there that they would be destroyed by Assyria unless they reformed.

Amos spoke of classes of people: the rich and the poor. In the Gospel, however, Jesus spoke of individuals: a rich man and a poor man, Dives and Lazarus.

Amos was angry with the rich, not because they were wealthy, but because they spurned the needy. They sprawled on beds of ivory, dined on lamb and beef to the accompaniment of music, anointed themselves with the best oil, and swilled wine by the bowl. All the while "they are not made ill by the collapse of Joseph!"

Their brothers' needs did not



bother them any more than Joseph's slavery into Egypt bothered his half-brothers. For their callousness and lack of charity, Amos foretold that they would be the first to go into exile.

Our Lord particularized the situation described by Amos in the parable of Dives and Lazarus. Dives was rich, very rich. His clothing indicated this, for only the very rich wore linen and purple. His daily eating showed it, for in a country where

one was lucky to get one full meal a week, he feasted daily.

On the contrary, the beggar, Lazarus, was very poor. In addition to having sores from malnutrition, he was so weak from starvation that he could not even chase away the scavenger dogs that licked his sores. He waited for scraps, for the bread with which Dives wiped his hands and discarded on the floor.

Such was the scene in this world. Then it abruptly switched after both men died. In the next world Lazarus is banqueting, resting on Abraham's bosom. The rich man is tortured in flames, pleading for a drop of water to refresh his tongue.

The sin of the rich class in Amos' day and of Dives in Our Lord's day was not something they did, but something they did not do. It was a sin of omission, not commission: they refused to help a brother in need. They saw someone in hunger and pain and they did not care, it did not bother them in the least.

How do people become calloused, hard-hearted, focussed solely on their own pleasures and pursuits, oblivious to the needs of all others? The answer is simple: their religion meant nothing at all to them. They

forgot God and the end of life.

Dives, for instance, was a Sadducee. He spoke of Moses, but, like the Sadducees, he just ignored an after-life and concentrated only on this life: he feasted daily. He ate, drank and was merry, for tomorrow he would die and, he thought, that would be it — period.

But Christ and religion teach us that the end of this life is not the end. Rather it is the beginning of a life of happiness as in the case of Lazarus or of unhappiness as in the case of Dives. Which it shall be will depend on our attitude toward people and things. Do we ignore people and love things? Or do we love people and use things? Life is the opportunity to do one or the other.

Consider this poem by Marguerite Wilkinson:

*I never cut my neighbor's throat;/My neighbor's gold I never stole;/I never spoiled his house and land;/But God have mercy on my soul.*

*For I am haunted night and day/By all the deeds I have not done;/O unattempted loveliness!/O Costly valor never won.*

The rich class went into exile and Dives, into hell — for what they had not done.

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