

Book draws attention to Eucharist's centrality

The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World, by Monika K. Hellwig; second edition, revised and expanded (Sheed & Ward, 1992); 86 pages; \$8.95.

By Dr. Christine M. Bochen
Guest contributor

When Monika K. Hellwig, professor of theology at Georgetown University, first published *The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World* in 1976, the book was well worth reading. It still is and so the publication of a second, expanded edition — with two additional chapters — is certainly welcome.

Written in a clear and concise style (the book is only 86 pages), Hellwig challenges us to rethink our understanding of the Eucharist.

"Does the Eucharist mean anything in our lives?" Hellwig asks in her introduction. It is a disturbing question and it is meant to be. After all, we believe the Eucharist to be at the center of our religious observance.

Hellwig means to startle us with her question and to focus our attention on

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the connection between the celebration of Eucharist and the whole of our lives. We have, she rightly notes, the tendency to relegate the Eucharist to life's "religious dimension" and to see liturgical celebrations as "highly ritualized and formal" acts, set apart from life.

That will not do. We need to enlarge our vision of what Eucharist is and means. The Eucharist should be a "peak or summit in the lives of believers, to which everything leads and from which everything flows, a high vantage point from which everything could be seen clearly and in its true relationships." To restore the Eucharist to centrality in our lives, we need to think anew.

Toward that end, Hellwig invites us to reflect on the human experience of hunger, beginning with our basic hunger for food, and to remember that

— if unsatisfied — this hunger is painful, brutalizing, and utterly devastating. This is the experience of millions of people in the world who experience hunger daily, many of whom eventually die of starvation.

The hunger for physical sustenance — warmth, shelter, safety — also exists. And there are those who hunger for less tangible realities such as love, freedom and dignity, and peace. Mindful of the many ways in which humans experience hunger, we become aware of our dependence on each other for the satisfaction of all these hungers. We are called to share what we have and provide for those who have not. In so doing we become aware of what it means to say that the Jesus, who is savior of the world, is the "Bread of Life."

"Jesus becomes the food of life for his followers when they come into a new life and discover that by living for others they find fulfillment of their own being," the author writes. Hellwig helps us to see that Jesus is the "Bread of Life" in a communal sense, i.e., we who receive life from Christ, in turn, share that life with others. This is what happens when we are nourished by Jesus.

In similar ways, Hellwig breaks open the meaning of the Eucharist as blessing, sacrament and sacrifice, al-

ways showing us how the Gospel challenges us to celebrate the Eucharist as a community called to feed the hungry, free the oppressed, and work for peace.

Each chapter ends with some good questions, equally suitable for discussion or personal reflection. Suggestions for further reading, one or two books for each chapter, are also included.

The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World makes good Lenten reading and good synod material precisely because it reminds us that there must be a relationship between "what we do in the Eucharist" and "what we do in our public and private lives."

Dr. Bochen is a professor at Nazareth College of Rochester.

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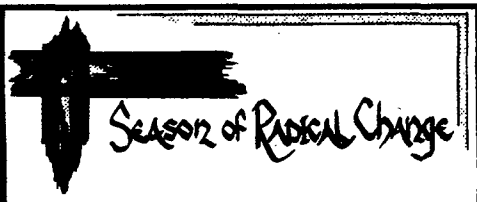
Journey to mountain peak permits look into our lives

By Jura Litchfield
Guest contributor

Our stop this Sunday in our Lenten journey takes us to the peak of a mountain. In this place of remote beauty, with Peter, James, and John, we witness the physical transformation of Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Their bodies become dazzlingly white and like the disciples, we, too, are filled with awe at the radiance of God's presence on the mountain. We tremble because we know that we, too, will be transformed in glory.

Just last week ago we were preoccupied with a more somber glimpse of our future: "Dust we are and to dust we shall return," said the priest as he distributed ashes on our foreheads. "Turn from sin and believe in the Gospel."

From dust to brilliance, from nothingness to glory, that is our life's journey. God fashions us from the earth's clay, breathes life into us and makes us human. To give us a share in a life that can only be called divine, God summons us to be a holy people and seals this covenant with the waters of baptism. We become God's cherished sons and daughters and embark on the long path to holiness. Having lived and loved and died in Christ Jesus, we know we will one day rise with him in the glory of the resurrection. That is the hope and promise of this holy



season.

We climb the mountain to view the big picture of our lives. We see the beginning and end clearly: dust and brilliance, clay and eternal glory. In between lie our days and years, our struggles and victories, our deeds and our dreams.

In the solitude of the mountain top, see what is essential, and resolve to pattern ourselves more closely after Christ Jesus. We pray, we fast, we care for the poor. We accept our mortality, our human limitation, we shoulder the cross. We have seen the glory of the transfigured Christ and know that glory will be ours.

Every time we celebrate Eucharist we rededicate ourselves to our transformation from dust to glory, from humanity to divinity, from nothingness to holiness. Every Eucharist, every Lent, every Easter we embrace the paschal mystery and bond ourselves to the One who says, "See, I make all things new ..."

Litchfield is associate for liturgical music for the diocesan Office of Liturgy.

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