

Holiday reminds us of Eucharist's meaning

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

In the United States, Thanksgiving is second only to Christmas as a time for festive gatherings and grateful remembrance of the blessings we have received as a nation, as families and as individuals.

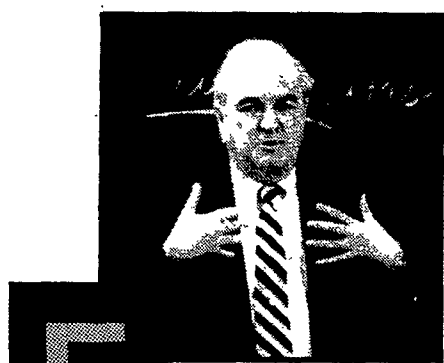
But while the Christmas holiday consists of several different elements (the parish liturgy, the tree, the wreath, the crib, the lights, the carols, the exchange of gifts, the family dinner), Thanksgiving has, for all practical purposes, only one central element: Thanksgiving dinner.

Perhaps it is fitting that this should be the case because Thanksgiving, although a secular holiday, is essentially about giving thanks, and giving thanks is what the Eucharist is about.

The point is that the Eucharist, like Thanksgiving dinner, is a meal patterned after the last supper that Jesus had with his apostles. At this meal, we give thanks for all that God has done and continues to do for us in Christ. Indeed, the very word Eucharist means thanksgiving.

Accordingly, while most Americans are looking forward to next week's holiday as a time for family reunions and festive dining, Catholics should also see in it an opportunity to reaffirm the importance of the Eucharist in their lives.

The Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy reminded us that the Eucharist is "the



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summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fountain from which all its power flows" (n. 10). Our coming together at the Eucharist is "the goal of apostolic works."

Perhaps we can come to an even fuller appreciation of the Eucharist by exploring its links with ordinary family meals.

For example, we know that family meals — and holiday meals in particular — are for more than satisfying hunger and keeping the body alive. They are a means of socialization and an expression of solidarity.

So, too, with the Eucharist. We don't participate in the liturgy and receive Holy Communion merely to satisfy a spiritual obligation or to acquire

more grace for the soul, as if one could quantify the saving presence of God within us.

We gather at the Eucharist as families gather at the dinner table, because the Eucharist is a communal meal, just like the Last Supper.

We gather, therefore, not simply to receive Christ in Holy Communion and to intensify our personal union with him. We gather as well to express our solidarity with one another in Christ and to give thanks, as a family, for all that God has done and continues to do for us.

Consequently, when we approach the altar at Communion time, it is not as if we were picking up an order at the take-out window of a fast-food establishment.

We approach the altar always with others — our sisters and brothers in Christ. And we are not just eating; we are partaking of a family meal the Lord has prepared.

But something else also must be taken into account.

We are living at a time when many deplore the breakdown of the family. One of its symptoms is the growing infrequency of evening meals at which all members of the family, still living at home, are present.

One is working late. Another has a game. Another is at a meeting. Another is with friends. It's a wonder sometimes that anyone is at home.

For too many family members, eating has become something like the so-called private Mass of years gone by,

where a priest would celebrate the Eucharist alone, sometimes even without a server.

The Church came to recognize the problem and addressed it in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy: "it is to be stressed that whenever the rites ... make provision for communal celebration involving the presence and active participation of the faithful, this way of celebrating them is to be preferred, as far as possible, to a celebration that is individual and quasi-private" (n. 27).

If our Thanksgiving dinner together this year proves once again to be a genuinely rewarding and unifying family celebration, we might remind ourselves that this is what the Eucharist is supposed to be like as well.

In a sense, every Sunday is supposed to be Thanksgiving, because every Sunday is a time for the gathering of the family around the dinner table to give thanks for all that God has done and continues to do for us.

The eucharistic family, of course, is larger than our own. It is the parish family bound together by common faith, hope and love.

If we could consistently experience the Eucharist in that way, as a festive family gathering in Christ, perhaps some of those lately absent from the family table might even consider coming back.

Given the council's urgent call for the ongoing renewal and reform of the liturgy, the burden is more on us than it is on them.

God's kingship must supersede earthly powers

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

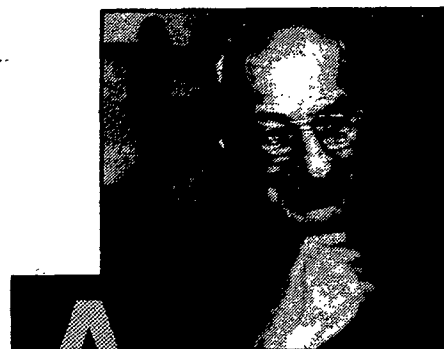
Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 15:31-46; (R1) Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17; (R2) 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28.

On the last Sunday of the church year, the church celebrates the Feast of Christ the King. The Feast is meant to teach us that Christ must be king not only of our hearts but of the nations of the world. Unless Christ becomes King of nations and politicians, the world will continue to go from bad to worse.

In A.D. 313 the Roman Empire became Christian through the direct intervention of God when Constantine marched to engage Maxentius in battle at the Milvian Bridge.

In 496 God intervened in political history a second time: at the baptism of Clovis, King of the Franks. At that time, St. Remy prophesied that God was raising up the Frankish nation to bring Christian civilization to Europe.

When France's existence was threatened by the invasion of Henry V of England, God intervened in political history for a third time in 1429 by sending Joan of Arc.



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

But France fell from grace. In the 18th century, Jansenism, Gallicanism and Rationalism undercut her religiously, politically and philosophically.

So God intervened a fourth time: through St. Margaret Mary, God promised Louis XIV victory over his enemies if he would consecrate France to the Sacred Heart. Louis ignored her. The French Revolution followed.

As a last resort God sent His mother to save France. In 1831 she appeared to Catherine Laboure, in 1846 to the children of La Salette, in 1858 to St. Bernadette, in 1871 to the children of Portmain. At Portmain our Lady appeared with 43 stars: she gave France 43 years to put her act together. It did not. 1871 plus 43 is 1914 — World War I.

The war precipitated the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. Atheism became a worldwide threat. So the Mother of God left France and appealed to the Western world at Fatima, May 13, 1917, to restore the Kingship of her Son over all nations.

Again, man turned a deaf ear. World War II followed. So our Lady is now appearing for the last time in the East, at Medjugorje. Her message is that we not only make Christ King of our hearts, but of all nations.

Two powers have been struggling for world control: in the East, communism; in the West capitalism. The East would have the world controlled by a party; the West would have the world controlled by secular law. Both will lead to destruction.

The only hope for the world stands in the lands between the East and the West: middle Europe — Catholic Poland and Catholic Italy. Christ alone by His words and sacraments can bring unity and harmony to all nations and make of mankind one family.

God must not be put out of nations and politics. Until Christ is acknowledged as King of all nations, above them and to be obeyed by them, the world situation will be hopeless.

The feast of the Kingship of Christ means we must re-evangelize the United States and Europe. It means we must work and pray for statesmen who are God-fearing; we must work and pray for jurists who realize there is a law higher than the Constitution; we must work and pray that all peoples will come to realize man was not made for the state, but that the state exists for man.

We must work and pray, for our destiny in this world is to set the hearts of all on fire with love for the Sacred Heart, the King of kings and Lord of lords, and thus bring peace to the world. May His kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

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