

## Church needs another Benedict XV

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

About five years ago I did a column on Pope Benedict XV, who is not exactly a household name among Catholics, not even among Catholics who pride themselves on their loyalty to the Holy Father. I return to the subject this week because the parallel between Benedict's time and our own has become even sharper than it was when I wrote that earlier piece.

Although best known for his well-intentioned, but largely unsuccessful, efforts to serve as a mediator for peace during and immediately following the World War I, Benedict's most lasting contribution as pope may have been his first encyclical, *Ad Beatissimi*, released on Nov. 1, 1914, less than two months after his election to the papacy.

The pontificate of Pius X (later canonized a saint) had just come to an end. In spite of Pius's many positive pastoral accomplishments (he is remembered for his encouragement of frequent Communion and for lowering the age of first Communion to 7), his 11 years in the Chair of Peter were marked by bitter intramural conflicts.

Pius X began his pontificate at the dawn of the 20th century (Aug. 3, 1903). It was a period of extraordinary opportunity and risk.

The opportunity was one of offering leadership to a newly industrialized, more technologically advanced, and more broadly educated world. The risk was one of subverting the



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core of Catholic faith in the course of dialogue with modern ideas and scientific developments.

Those who emphasized the opportunity more than the risk were known as Modernists. Those who emphasized the risk more than the opportunity were known as Integralists.

The atmosphere in the church was truly poisoned. Many scholarly works were placed on the Index of Forbidden Books. Sixty-five propositions, labeled as Modernist, were condemned in a papal decree and a subsequent encyclical. All the clergy were required to take an oath against Modernism.

Worst of all, an official spy network, known in Italian as the *SapiniSre*, was established, probably with the encouragement of the pope himself. In-

dividual Catholics were encouraged to report on fellow Catholics whom they suspected of Modernist tendencies. The expression, "delated to Rome," became commonplace.

I can recall stories told by elderly priests about their seminary classroom experiences during those years. Professors would collect student notes after each class to make certain that they had not misquoted their teachers. The professors would constantly repeat for the seminarians the points they were trying to make in their lectures, lest a perfectly orthodox statement be interpreted to be heretical. And then delation!

Various church historians have observed that Catholic scholarship was set back 50 years by the anti-intellectual spirit fostered during that period.

Enter Cardinal Giacomo Della Chiesa, Archbishop of Bologna, who had been made a cardinal only three months before his election as pope on Sept. 3, 1914.

He had been elected by a largely conservative conclave even though he himself had been a close associate of the relatively progressive Cardinal Mariano Rampolla, who had served as secretary of state under Pope Leo XIII.

But the war clouds were already gathering over Europe, and the cardinal-electors were looking for an experienced diplomat to assume the church's leadership. Benedict XV was their choice.

Within two months of his election, the new pope issued *Ad Beatissimi* in

which he called a halt to the civil war in the church.

There was to be no more name-calling. There was to be no more spying. There were to be no more claims that one body of Catholics was more truly Catholic than others.

"There is room for divergent opinions," he wrote, "and it is clearly the right of everyone (in the church) to express and defend his or her own opinion."

"But in such discussions no expressions should be used which might constitute serious breaches of charity; let each one freely defend his or her own opinion, but let it be done with due moderation, so that no one should consider himself or herself entitled to affix on those who merely do not agree with their ideas the stigma of disloyalty to faith or to discipline" (n. 23).

"It is, moreover, our will," he continued, "that Catholics should abstain from certain appellations which have recently been brought into use to distinguish one group of Catholics from another. They are to be avoided ... because they give rise to great trouble and confusion among Catholics ..."

"There is no need of adding any qualifying terms to the profession of Catholicism; it is quite enough for each one to proclaim 'Christian is my name and Catholic is my surname,' only let them endeavor to be in reality what they call themselves" (n. 24).

The church will need another Benedict XV in due course.

## Christ sealed second covenant with his blood

By Father Albert Shamon  
Courier columnist

**Sunday's Readings:** (R3) Mark 14:12-16, 22-26; (R1) Exodus 24:3-8; (R2) 9:11-15.

Two words appear in all readings for Corpus Christi: covenant and blood.

A covenant is an agreement between two parties. Agreements can be bilateral — both parties stipulating the terms — or unilateral — one party stipulating the terms while the other is free to accept or reject them. The unilateral agreement is called a contract of adherence.

An alien comes to the United States, for example, and decides to become an American citizen. The government says OK, but you must agree to do this and this. The alien looks at the terms and agrees to adhere to them. A covenant is like that. God stipulates the terms and man is asked to adhere to them if he wishes to be on God's side.

The first reading describes the covenant God made with the Hebrews through Moses on Mt. Sinai. God took the initiative and stated the terms. Moses "related all the words of the Lord" which were chiefly the 10



### A WORD FOR SUNDAY

Commandments.

The people answered, "We'll do everything the Lord has told us."

Today, people sign a contract or shake hands.

Agreements were made in blood in Moses' days.

Thus Moses took 12 pillars, symbolizing the 12 tribes of Israel. The Levitical priesthood had not yet been established so Moses had certain young Israelites kill the victims for the

sacrifice. He took half the blood and splashed it on the altar, which symbolized God. Then he reread the agreement. When the people reaffirmed their consent, he sprinkled the rest of the blood on them.

Blood has a twofold significance: kinship and life. Blood makes men relatives, blood-brothers. The relationship is so close we say, "Blood is thicker than water," making one closer than mere acquaintance.

Blood is also necessary for life. How many lives have been saved by a blood transfusion. Throwing half the blood into the fire on the altar symbolized God's taking away sin's life. Throwing the rest on the people symbolized a new relationship with God, a life of friendship closer than a blood-relationship.

The new covenant also was ratified in blood; but not by animal blood, but the blood of Christ shed on the cross. "This is my blood, the blood of the new covenant." That is why this covenant far surpasses the old. Only the Hebrews were made God's chosen people by animal blood; but the blood of Christ makes all people God's people. The old covenant promised a land flowing with milk

and honey for fidelity; the new promises an eternal inheritance.

Sunday is the feast of Corpus Christi — Body of Christ, as present in the Eucharist.

The Eucharist forges a bond, a link stronger than that of blood between the receiver and Christ and between the receiver and all other receivers. Too often we do not see the incongruity of going to holy Communion and continuing to harbor hate, anger, bitterness and revenge.

The best sermon I've ever heard on the Eucharist was one my mother used to preach to us as kids. Whenever we'd come home after Sunday Mass and begin scragging — as kids often do — mother would say, "Stop that fighting, you just went to holy Communion." "Where love is, there is Christ;" and conversely, "Where Christ is, there should be love."

Of the cure of Ars, St. John Vianney, the devil said that three such men would have destroyed his kingdom in France. Whence his zeal? His flaming love? It was the Eucharist. The cure of Ars said that he needed only three things: the altar, the confessional, and the pulpit. Of these three, the really important one was the altar.

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