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COLUMNISTS

Worship expresses true doctrine

There is an ancient ecclesiastical axiom, attributed to a fifth-century lay theologian, St. Prosper of Aquitaine, "Lex orandi, lex credendi" (Latin: "The law of praying is the law of believing").

Prosper, a staunch defender of the theology of St. Augustine, was writing against certain Pelagian heretics who did not believe in the need for God's grace.

Prosper pointed out that the church prayed for the needs of people in the prayers of the faithful. Authentic worship, he argued, is an expression of true doctrine.

Although the axiom needs to be explained more fully than is possible in this limited space, it can serve a practical purpose in helping us better understand some of the basic changes that have occurred since Vatican II in the church's thinking about itself and its ministries.

First, the church is primarily a community rather than an institution to which we belong. We are the church.

This important change is clearly reflected in the way the Eucharist has been celebrated since the council. Instead of being experienced as something Catholics "attend" or "hear," by way of obligation, the Eucharist is a communal meal (and a sacrifice, to be sure) in which everyone actively participates.



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

Thus, the prayers, the responses, the hymns, and other activities (such as the presentation of the gifts) are no longer recited or performed by the priest-priester and the altar servers alone, with the congregation looking on as passive observers. The whole worshiping community participates, because the Eucharist is the affair of everyone present.

Second, the laity are as integral a part of the church as the clergy. The church is not the privileged preserve of the priests. It is not always up to "Father" to decide who will do what, how they will do it, and whether they will be allowed to keep doing it.

At a properly celebrated Eucharist, the priest-priester does not determine what everyone else does, nor does he himself do what others should rightly do. There is a structure to the liturgy that operates independently of the per-

sonal preferences of the priest.

Thus, it is the lector, not the priest, who proclaims the Word of God in the first two readings before the Gospel. It is the lay ministers of the Eucharist, not the priest alone, who assist in the distribution of Holy Communion. And it is the congregation as a whole that prays aloud, responds to prayer and sings.

Third, the church is a dialogical community. The people do not simply receive the Word of God from on high. They actively assimilate and respond to it. Nor do they simply listen to the prayers of a chosen few acting on their behalf. The whole church is a praying community.

No one could participate in today's Eucharist and conclude that it is essentially an affair of the priest, with minor involvement by an altar server or two. For the same reason, no one can regard the church today as if it were exclusively an affair of the hierarchy and the clergy — theirs to govern and theirs to shape and direct, as they see fit.

In an older, pre-Vatican II model of church, the so-called lay apostolate was defined as the participation of the laity in the work of the hierarchy and clergy.

According to the council, however, the lay apostolate is "a participation in the saving mission of the church itself." And it is not something exercised at the sufferance of the hierarchy and clergy,

such that the laity's ministerial responsibilities can be withdrawn just as easily as they can be granted.

On the contrary, the lay apostolate is communicated sacramentally, not juridically. Laity are commissioned to it by baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist itself ("Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," n. 33).

That dioceses are governed by a single bishop, for example, is a pastoral accommodation to changing historical circumstances. It is not something necessarily determined by the will of Christ.

That parishes are governed and administered entirely by a priest, subject only to the bishop who appointed him, is similarly a pastoral accommodation to changing circumstances. As those circumstances change, so too can the church's pastoral accommodations change.

Vatican II's "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" insisted that historical circumstances have indeed changed, and that the church must respond to those changes accordingly (nn. 4-10).

The changes that we have all experienced in the church's worship are reflective of the changes Vatican II brought about in the way we are to understand the nature of the church and the roles of its various ministries.

Lex orandi, lex credendi.

Advent calls us to wake up, let God in

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 24:37-44. (R1) Isaiah 2:1-5. (R2) Romans 13:11-14.

The first Sunday of Advent begins the church year and cycle A. Cycle A means that the Sunday Gospels this year will generally be from the Gospel according to St. Matthew.

Advent means "coming." The theme of Sunday's readings is that of "coming." Isaiah speaks of "days to come"; he was looking forward to the coming of the Messiah. Our Lord speaks of "the coming of the Son of Man"; he was looking forward to the coming of the Son of Man at death.

St. Paul, on the contrary, did not look to the future but to the present. He says, "Wake up!" because it's later than we think. He calls this life "night." "The night is far spent," he says. And he calls eternity "day." "The day draws near"; that is, eternity is just around the corner.

So our time is precious. Wake up, use it, don't abuse it; for soon there will be a time when time will be no more for us. The night comes when no man can work for eternity. Now is the acceptable time; now is the hour of salvation.

So Paul says, "Wake from sleep." And Jesus says, "Stay awake!" The implication is that we are all asleep. Sleep is a blessed thing; as Coleridge put it, "O Sleep! It is a gentle thing, beloved from pole to pole." Shakespeare said sleep



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

knits up the raveled sleeve of care. We all hate alarm clocks. But it is not good to be asleep when we are supposed to be awake. A guard asleep on duty can cause a city to fall. A driver asleep at the wheel can cause a terrible accident. People asleep are not aware of what is going on.

We are on trial for our eternal lives. What are we doing about it? Are we asleep — totally unaware of why we are here? Are we just drifting? Indifferent to the future life?

Isaiah said, "Beat swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks." In other words, turn to farming instead of to fighting, hating, warring, with one another. Turn to fishing instead of spearing others with your tongue with gossip, unkind remarks, slander, detraction, rash judgments.

The church invites us in Advent to cast off the deeds of darkness enumer-

ated by St. Paul. He lists four such deeds: first, carousing, overeating (more graves are dug by knives and forks than by auto accidents); drunkenness, overdrinking (for some, the preparation and the celebration of Christmas will be a time of hell, just because some father or husband overdrinks); sexual excess and lust — that is, artificial contraception in marriage, sex outside of marriage, abortion and divorce; quarreling and jealousy — the devil is hate and hate is divisive, quarreling and jealousy are the works of the devil that we were supposed to have renounced at baptism.

Paul calls these the works of darkness, because they are so shameful that they are often done under cover of darkness and are inspired by the prince of darkness, and are contrary to the light of reason and of faith.

Jesus tells us to wake up, because there is going to be a judgment after the sleep of death. To wake up means not to let your work, your busy-ness, crowd out God or the things of eternity.

Of two men working in a field, one is found worthy and one unworthy: One goes to heaven, the other goes to hell. Why? It was not the work, for they were both doing the same work. The difference was that one person was too busy to let God in his life. He had time only for his work.

The same was true in Noah's day. The people weren't doing anything wrong;

They ate, drank and married. But they were totally unconcerned about the coming of God in judgment.

Noah tried to wake up the people by building a boat on dry land. Imagine building a boat on dry land. The people saw it. But instead of waking up, they only laughed at him. They just couldn't believe in a flood. There never had been one. Poor Noah was crazy. But the flood came.

So, every Advent the church warns us to wake up: There's more to life than eating, drinking, marrying and working; there is the coming of the Lord in judgment.

Daily Readings

Monday, Dec. 4
Is 4:2-6; Mt 8:5-11

Tuesday, Dec. 5
Is 11:1-10; Lk 10:21-24

Wednesday, Dec. 6
Is 25:6-10; Mt 15:29-37

Thursday, Dec. 7
Is 26:1-6; Mt 7:21, 24-27

Friday, Dec. 8
Gn 3:9-15, 20; Eph 1:3-6, 11-12;
Lk 1:26-38

Saturday, Dec. 9
Is 30:19-21, 23-26; Mt 9:35-10:1, 6-8

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Coloring Book will
appear in the
December 7th
issue.