

COLUMNISTS

True presence comes from eucharistic prayer

Last summer the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, with the full agreement of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith and the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, issued a series of guidelines for eucharistic sharing between the Chaldean Church (which is in communion with Rome) and the Assyrian Church of the East (which is not).

The guidelines are revolutionary in character. For the first time in modern history, the Catholic Church has recognized the validity of a eucharistic prayer (the Anaphora of Addai and Mari) without the words of institution ("This is my body ... This is my blood."), commonly referred to as the words of consecration.

In the popular Catholic mind, especially before the Second Vatican Council, these words have had an almost magical quality. When a validly ordained priest utters them over a large host (oftentimes over a ciborium full of smaller hosts as well) and then over a chalice containing wine, Christ immediately "comes down" from heaven, taking the form of bread and wine to be received by the faithful as Holy Communion, that is, his very "body and blood, soul and divinity."

There was so much focus on the words of consecration that Catholic students



essays in
theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

were sometimes asked to consider what to do if, let us say, a drunken priest stumbled into a bakery shop and pronounced the words over cases full of bread and pastry products. Some proposed that the local parish should purchase everything in the store and send it to a Catholic orphanage for reverent consumption. Few doubted that the bread and pastries were now the eucharistic body of Christ.

In Latin, the words of consecration included the key phrase: "*Hoc est enim corpus meum* ..." ("For this is my body ..."). Anti-Catholics dismissed the rite as "hocus pocus," a word play on the Latin, still employed to characterize something as nonsensical or a form of trickery.

For many Catholics, the priest's power to change bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ through these

words of consecration constituted the very basis of his dignity and status within the church.

At Mass, everyone — even the ushers — would grow solemn and silent as the celebrant approached the point in the canon (the old name for the eucharistic prayer) when he would bend over the host and then the chalice to utter the sacred words. The priest genuflected after doing so, then raised the host, and later the chalice, high over his head for the adoration of the congregation, and then genuflected after each elevation.

When the ritual of consecration was over and the final genuflection and ringing of the bells had been completed, one could actually hear the release of tension within the congregation, in the form of coughing and the squeaking of kneelers as the worshippers shifted their weight to again become comfortable.

If someone had suggested then — or now — that even without the words of consecration, Christ could become really and truly present in Holy Communion, they would have been scoffed at and dismissed as frivolous or heretical.

In recognizing the validity of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, proclaimed since the earliest centuries in portions of the East and still used today

by the separated Assyrian Church of the East, the Catholic Church now officially acknowledges and teaches that Christ can become sacramentally present at Mass without the traditional words of consecration.

In the end, there are no "magic words." It is the church's whole eucharistic prayer that makes Christ really and truly present for us in Holy Communion.

The Vatican's ruling received little or no notice among Roman Catholics in North America. That's not surprising. The word "Chaldean" must sound to many like something out of the Old Testament. And "Assyrian" probably evokes memories of courses in ancient history.

Although the new Vatican guidelines suggest that the words of institution are at least implied in other parts of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari (a bit of a reach, perhaps), the bottom line is that, under certain pastoral circumstances, Catholics may now receive Holy Communion in an Assyrian liturgy in which an anaphora is used that does not include the words of consecration.

This is a long way from the case of the drunken priest in the bakery shop.

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Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Grace is needed to put one's life in order

3rd Sunday of Lent (March 3): (R3) John 4:5-42; (R1) Exodus 17:3-7; (R2) Romans 5:1-2, 5-8.

Jesus and his disciples came to a Samaritan city called Sychar. Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by Jacob's well. The disciples had gone to buy food.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water. Most women drew water early in the morning when it was cooler. Also, the drawing of water at the community well was a time of socializing for the women. We are given a hint that something was wrong in this woman's life that she came at the hottest time of the day, when she was sure no one else was around. She was trying to avoid contact with others.

Jesus' behavior toward this woman was unusual — in fact, unthinkable. She had two strikes against her: she was a Samaritan and she was a woman. These were two strong cultural taboos to Jews. Yet, Jesus asked her for a drink. Even the woman was shocked, "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" Jesus answered her, "If you knew who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

The woman said, "Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep;



a word
for
sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

where then can you get this living water?"

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst ..." She replied, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus said to her, "Go call your husband and come back."

The woman said, "I have no husband." Jesus answered, "You are right in saying, 'I do not have a husband.' You have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband."

Her words were true. She had no husband and was living with a man to whom she wasn't married. Many people would see her as beyond hope. But not Jesus.

Jesus said, "Believe me, woman, the

hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem." The word "woman" is significant here. John uses the Greek word *gune*, a term of endearment meaning "special lady." This woman is a village outcast, yet Jesus calls her "special lady," the same word he used for his mother at the wedding in Cana and on the cross.

Then he shares with her a secret that he had shared with no one else: that he was the Messiah.

The disciples return. They are astonished that Jesus is speaking with this woman, but they say nothing. The woman goes into her village and tells others about Jesus. The people come out to the well and they invite him to stay with them. This is what the Gospel is all about. It is about people who make a mess of their lives, but they receive the grace of God and turn their lives around. They become so excited about what Christ has done for them, they share their remarkable experience with others and bring them to Christ.

As Jesus offered the water of life to this woman, so he offers it to us. We must ask him to give us the water of life, praying for any change that is needed to bring us close to God. Then we need to

receive the gift of God's grace. Grace precedes works. By receiving God's grace, anyone is able to put one's life in order.

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Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, March 4

2 Kings 5:1-15A; Psalms 42:2-3, 43:3-4; Luke 4:24-30

Tuesday, March 5

Daniel 3:25, 34-43; Psalms 25:4BC-5AB, 6-7BC, 8-9; Matthew 18:21-35

Wednesday, March 6

Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9; Psalms 147:12-13, 15-16, 19-20; Matthew 5:17-19

Thursday, March 7

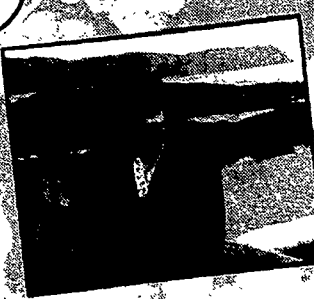
Jeremiah 7:23-28; Psalms 95:1-2, 6-9; Luke 11:14-23

Friday, March 8

Hosea 14:2-10; Psalms 81:6C-11B, 14, 17; Mark 12:28B-34

Saturday, March 9

Hosea 6:1-6; Psalms 51:3-4, 18-21B; Luke 18:9-14



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