

Be thankful — while considering reforms

Although a secular holiday, Thanksgiving seems more spiritually meaningful than most of the feasts on the church's liturgical calendar. This may be so because it is so explicitly expressive of what is at the heart of the church's sacramental life, namely, the Eucharist, derived from the Greek for "thanksgiving."

Like the Eucharist itself, Thanksgiving is an occasion for counting our blessings, for reflecting with gratitude on the good things in our lives: the love of a devoted spouse; our children; the support and encouragement of parents, grandparents, and extended families; our friends, health, and livelihoods; our creative outlets; and opportunities for rest, relaxation, and sheer enjoyment.

On the other hand, we are reminded almost every day of life's vulnerabilities and of the fragility of its blessings. A sniper's bullet can cut someone down while engaged in ordinary activities: mowing a lawn, pumping gas, waiting for a bus.

Nevertheless, we do have much to be grateful for — not least, our faith, our hope and our capacity to give and to receive love. Thanksgiving is a traditional time for expressing that gratitude.

Catholics in particular should be mindful of their blessings, in spite of the worst crisis the church has faced in modern times, in spite our frustration with many pastoral leaders and the process by which those



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

officials are appointed to their posts, and in spite of a continuing series of developments which have the effect of stalling or even reversing some of the teachings and reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

Catholics should be especially grateful for what are still the church's greatest assets, the sacraments. At the center of its sacramental life is the Eucharist itself.

The faith community is nourished not only by the Word of God and the body and blood of Christ sacramentally present in the consecrated elements of bread and wine, but also by the palpable experience of solidarity and mutual support one draws from the worshiping community itself.

The spiritual fullness of that sacramental event can be, and too often is, diminished when the presider is liturgically inept, when the lectors are poorly prepared or simply without basic reading skills, when the music is banal or poorly rendered, when the environment distracts from rather than enhancing the experience of worship, and when there is little or no ac-

tive participation within the assembly itself.

Vatican II insisted in its Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy that the Eucharist is the summit, the source of the whole Christian life. But it does not become so automatically, simply by making the sacrament present through the priest's performance of mandated rituals and his recitation of prescribed words.

We know, for example, that the quality of meals differs greatly because some are prepared by creative cooks, while others are thrown together by those with no sense of imagination, taste or presentation.

But a meal is only a meal, is it not, and food simply fuel for the body? Why should one care how it is prepared and presented, so long as those at table are nourished in some way?

That makes about as much sense as the opinion one sometimes hears from Catholics regarding the quality of the eucharistic experience. For them, the Mass is the Mass, no matter how, by whom or in what circumstances it is celebrated.

We give thanks this Thanksgiving not only for the spiritual and physical blessings we have received, but also for the grace and the courage to reform those church structures which in any way inhibit and diminish those blessings.

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

Thankful for coverage

To the editor:

In the October 31 *Courier*, a Catholic News Service article "Bishops strive for healing" included the issue of how the pedophilia problem was handled by the U.S. press. In a *Los Angeles Times* poll of U.S. priests, "nearly three quarters categorized the U.S. news media's treatment of the Catholic Church as negative, while 22 percent rated it as fair and 2 percent said it was positive."

If another poll were to be taken among all Catholics, I think we'd be reading of a great "Thank You!" to the U.S. press for bringing this issue out into the open. Also a hearty "Thanks be to God!" for our free press without which we would still be ignorant of the pedophiles and ephebophiles, who would still be in our midst.

Josephine Lavin
South West Street
Geneva

'EWTN is out of date'

To the editor:

From the "boondocks" of the Rochester Diocese, have you listened to the words of the "NEW" songs. I have heard "O Lord I Am Not Worthy" just twice in over 40 years at this church. Why does it bring tears to my eyes? And yet "On Eagles Wings" does too. When guitar Masses began my kids participated and because they could not drive I was the chauffeur

and so I learned the songs. Singing should be joyful. "When you sing you pray with your heart and voice," where did I hear that? Latin is marvelous. No one can translate the words to fit the music. It is dignified and awesome especially in procession. At daily Mass we sing a cappella. Not always on key but fervent. Try it. You don't know what you're missing. I was brought up to follow the Mass with a missal. A "High" Mass always was different and the Latin responses with music a thrill to sing. Did you? Would you? EWTN is out of date. Sorry. Like shaking hands in church. Let's all say hello in passing in the grocery store.

Dolores Vasilow
Glenmary Drive
Owego

We sing very old songs

To the editor:

In the November 7 issue of the *Courier*, Bill Kehoe of Auburn decried the use of the "new hymns" we have created with their "awful lyrics." May I suggest that Mr. Kehoe and others who prefer the "old hymns" begin to read the Psalms and the prophets of the Old Testament. You will discover that "Taste and See" comes from Psalm 34. "Sing a New Song" can be found in Psalm 98. Much of the current music is based on the works of the Old Testament. Our music is not new but very, very old.

Jane E. Greiten
Phelps Road
Honeoye Falls

Songs rooted in Scripture

To the editor:

I'm sorry that Bill Kehoe is so unhappy with the songs sung by the Church of today which he finds "to be so inferior to earlier church music," and "actually loathsome." But, maybe I can help him. If he looks in his hymnal at the footnote for each song he will find from whence it came.

Catholic Courier

©2002 Rochester Catholic Press Assn.

1136 Buffalo Road
P.O. Box 24379
Rochester, NY 14624
585/529-9530

800/600-3628 outside Rochester
<http://www.catholiccourier.com>
e-mail: info@catholiccourier.com

President
Bishop Matthew H. Clark

General Manager/Editor
Karen M. Franz
kfranz@catholiccourier.com

Editorial Department
Assistant Editor
Jennifer Ficaglia
jficaglia@catholiccourier.com

Staff Writers
Rob Cullivan
rcullivan@catholiccourier.com
Mike Latona
mlatona@catholiccourier.com

Staff Photographer
Karin von Voigtlander
kvonvoigtlander@catholiccourier.com

Photo Intern
Jason Rearick
Editorial Assistant
Louis Litzenberger
llitzenberger@catholiccourier.com

Business Department
Office Manager
Mary DiPonzio
mdponzio@catholiccourier.com
Administrative Assistant
Arlene S. Gall
agall@catholiccourier.com
Circulation Manager
Donna Stubbings
dstubbings@catholiccourier.com

Graphics Department
Graphics Manager
Kim Parks
kparks@catholiccourier.com
Graphic Artist
Linda Jeanne Rivers
lrivers@catholiccourier.com

Advertising Department
Display Advertising Executives
Tracy Moses
tmoses@catholiccourier.com
Donald P. Wilson
dwilson@catholiccourier.com

Meml
Scho
ate a

Usi
"Sing
98, as
the Ea
is Ps
Bless
sure
Table
is a
Feast
from
Proph
these
sic h
"Irish
they a
Himse
the pu
sing
praise
import

Sin
old
To the
Rega
letter
Cathol
ing eld
singing
in chu
tend
"Holy
Name"
dozen c
includi
at our M
"Sing a
were ap
Mr. K