

Pope celebrates Holy Week liturgies

Proclaims the hope in the risen Jesus Christ

Cindy Wooden/CNS

VATICAN CITY — Proclaiming hope in the risen Christ, Pope John Paul II prayed for peace in Iraq and the Holy Land, for understanding among believers of different faiths and for a renewed awareness among Catholics of the gift of the Eucharist.

In the April 17-20 liturgies of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil and Easter morning, the 82-year-old pope repeatedly referred to his concerns about Iraq and to his new encyclical letter, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, on the importance of the Eucharist.

Using a new chair equipped with wheels, the pope celebrated the liturgies almost always seated. But he knelt on a prie-dieu as the Blessed Sacrament was carried in procession to the altar of repose at the end of the Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper, and knelt for the adoration of the cross on Good Friday.

Greeting pilgrims in St. Peter's Square from his apartment window Easter Monday, he said the church has never stopped proclaiming that "the crucified Christ is alive, he is risen," and those who accept the Good News "open their hearts to that true joy which makes human existence new, beautiful and rich in hope."

Pope John Paul maintained his practice of entering St. Peter's Basilica unannounced just before midday Good Friday to hear confessions. He spent more than an hour hearing the confessions of 10 people.

After celebrating Easter morning Mass in a St. Peter's Square carpeted with flowers and flowering trees April 20, the pope offered his blessing *urbi et orbi* (to the city of Rome and the world) and read Easter greetings in 62 languages, including Mongolian, Arabic and Hebrew.

"May the grace and joy of the risen Christ be with you all," he said in English.

Reading his Easter message, the pope called for "peace in Iraq. With the support of the international community, may the Iraqi people become the protagonists of the collective rebuilding of their country."

In the prayers of the faithful during the Mass, a prayer was offered for all soldiers, "that they would nourish in their minds and hearts thoughts of peace and not vengeance" and that they work for "reconstruction and life."

The pope also prayed for an end to



Reuters/CNS

Pope John Paul II baptizes a man during the Easter Vigil at St. Peter's Basilica April 19. The pontiff celebrated the resurrection of Christ asking Catholics for renewed awareness of the gift of the Eucharist.

the "forgotten wars and protracted hostilities" bringing suffering, death and destruction to various parts of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caucasus region of the former Soviet Union.

"Without profound grief, I think of the wake of violence and bloodshed, with no sign of ceasing, in the Holy Land," he said.

Pope John Paul called on the followers of all religions to promote understanding, forgiveness and dialogue and to build together "a new era of justice and peace."

No matter how "dark the horizon" may seem, he said, Christians must go forward filled with trust in the promise of God's reign of peace.

"Christ is alive in our midst; truly present in the sacrament of the Eucharist, he offers himself as the bread of salvation, bread for the

poor, the food of wayfarers," he said.

Seated on a hillside terrace overlooking Rome's Colosseum April 18, Pope John Paul presided over the Way of the Cross.

Those chosen to carry the cross for the 14 stations included people from countries marked by war or civil strife: a woman from Colombia, men from Sierra Leone and Liberia, Franciscan friars from the Holy Land and an engaged couple and a woman and her daughter who fled Iraq before the war began.

The pope asked God to look upon "the blood which flows from the pierced side of the Savior; look upon

the blood shed by the many victims of hatred, war and terrorism."

Ignoring his prepared remarks for the end of the nighttime service, the pope spoke of the Good Friday phrase, "Behold the wood of the cross," and the eucharistic phrase, "This is my body."

In both phrases, he said, Jesus says to believers, "Here is my heart, my body, which will be given up for you ... the body of Christ crucified."

At the Easter vigil Mass in St. Peter's Basilica, Pope John Paul welcomed seven adults — from Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Italy, Tunisia, Japan, Burundi and the United States — into the Catholic Church, baptizing and confirming them and giving them their first Communion.

The pope told the seven, "You will be consecrated with the oil of happiness and can feed yourselves with the bread of heaven. Sustained by the power of the Holy Spirit, you will persevere in your faith in Christ and courageously proclaim his Gospel."

During the Thursday evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, the pope signed his new encyclical, the 14th of his papacy.

The encyclical reaffirms church teaching about the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, encourages eucharistic adoration and emphasizes the importance of following the church's liturgical rules, including the restrictions on sharing Communion with other Christians.

"The Eucharist is a truly great mystery," he said in his April 17 homily. It is the living memorial of Christ's "sacrificial offering to the Father out of love for humanity."

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