

Churches enjoy degrees of unity

Pope John Paul II's new encyclical on the Eucharist, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, states: "It is not possible to give communion to a person who is not baptized or to one who rejects the full truth of the faith regarding the Eucharistic mystery" (n. 38).

From this statement, some mistakenly may infer that non-Catholic Christians are in the same relationship to the Catholic Church as are non-Christians.

Yet the Second Vatican Council rejected a then-common assumption that all non-Catholics — Christians and non-Christians alike — are wholly outside the church and equally removed from it. Against this view, the council insisted that "those who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are brought into a certain, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church" (Decree on Ecumenism, n. 3).

Moreover, "varying degrees" of communion exist between individual non-Catholic churches and ecclesial communities, on the one hand, and the Catholic Church, on the other. Thus, the Russian Orthodox churches and the churches of the Anglican Communion have a much greater degree of union with the Catholic Church than Methodists or Baptists. The variations are rooted in differences of doctrine, discipline and structures.

"Little by little," the council declared, "as the obstacles to perfect ecclesiastical



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Essays in Theology

communion are overcome, all Christians will be gathered, in a common celebration of the Eucharist, into that unity of the one and only Church which Christ bestowed on his Church from the beginning" (n. 4).

The phrase, "little by little," reaffirms the conciliar principle that there are, in fact, degrees of communion within the Body of Christ. Consequently, it is possible for individual non-Catholic communities gradually to move closer to the Catholic Church over time.

This also implies that ecumenism is not a matter of "all or nothing," but of baby steps taken haltingly and intermittently. Accordingly, there are many points on the ecumenical spectrum between "all" and "nothing."

To take it a step further: The new encyclical insists that only a validly ordained priest can celebrate the Eucharist. For that reason, liturgical celebrations outside the Catholic Church cannot be regarded as valid and Catholics may not receive communion from non-Catholic ministers — and vice versa.

At the same time, the encyclical acknowledges that there are simply not enough priests today to provide for the full sacramental life of the church, especially the celebration of the Eucharist (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 32).

The encyclical does not say how the Catholic Church should deal with this problem but commends the practice of noneucharistic celebrations led by nonordained religious and lay people, referring to it as a "merely temporary" solution.

In the meantime, we can do apparently little except to pray for vocations with "greater fervor," to quote the encyclical. No reference is made to lively discussions that have been conducted within the church about married clergy — not even to reject it as a possible solution. The rule of celibacy in the Roman Catholic Church is regarded, at least implicitly, as more important than making the Eucharist available to every Catholic.

In the end, however, this encyclical should be read as a moving, personal testament of the pope's own deep faith in the mystery of the Eucharist, born of a lifetime of religious experience. Whatever questions some may wish to raise about the document, it provides a luminous window into his overarching theological and spiritual perspective.

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

Many events not recorded by Scripture

To the editor:

This is with reference to James R. Blake's criticism of Father Shamon for implying that the resurrected Jesus appeared first to His Mother Mary. Mr. Blake insists, "nowhere in Scripture does it teach that."

It is impossible to "confirm" all things from Scripture. John 20:30 reads, "Jesus performed many other signs as well, signs not recorded here." Also John 21:25 states, "There are still many other things Jesus did, yet if they were written about in detail, I doubt there would be room enough in the entire world to hold the books to record them."

Does Mr. Blake think that Jesus, for one minute, would leave His sorrowing Mother in the dark while appearing to others? Surely, after His resurrection, Jesus would definitely have first appeared to His Beloved Mother. Just imagine an encounter too profoundly personal to be detailed and recorded.

All of Sacred Scripture is truth. However, Scripture does not hold all of truth that is. Jesus did not hand down a printed Scripture. He appointed the apostles whose word-of-mouth did teach and preach "truth." Eventually the printed Scripture form evolved, as it was, with protective scrutiny, compiled by the established Church.

From the very beginning

of Christianity, in the apostolic tradition, the foundation was being laid for what is now the Catholic Church. No place in the Bible is it stated that Scripture is the "pillar and foundation of truth." However, Scripture does confirm that, "the Church of the living God is the pillar and bulwark of truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). As such the Catholic Church, which is the herald of truth, protects the treasury of belief and rich traditions, one of which is that after His resurrection, Jesus' first appearance was to His Mother.

Joanne Lepkowski
 Ross Street
 Owego

Latin Mass group marks anniversary

To the editor:

Readers who enjoyed your May 29 article on the recent Pontifical High Mass in Rome in the traditional Tridentine Latin Rite should be reminded that our own Latin Mass Community of the Diocese of Rochester celebrates the traditional Latin Mass every Sunday at 1:30 p.m. at St. Stanislaus Kostka Church, located on Hudson Avenue at Norton Street in Rochester.

The Community will celebrate the 10th anniversary of its foundation with a High Mass on Trinity Sunday, June 15. Our moderator, Father Dennis Bonsignore, will be the celebrant, with a homily by Father Ronald Antinelli. They, together with Fathers Robert Meng and Gerard McMahan, celebrate our Masses in rotation. Our polyphonic choir and Gregorian chant schola will sing.

During the past 10 years the Community, with a current average Sunday attendance of 150 to 200, has celebrated 43 infant baptisms, two adult baptisms, five adult confirmations (converts), 21 children's and five adult communions, eight nuptial Masses and 15 Requiem Masses. Two young men recently active in the community are currently

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