

'Year of Eucharist' begins

John Thavis/CNS

VATICAN CITY — After an intense quarter-century of teaching, writing and traveling, Pope John Paul II is going back to the basics with a renewed focus on the Eucharist.

He has convened a special eucharistic year that begins this month. Last year he wrote an encyclical extolling the Eucharist as the source and culmination of the church's life. He has convened a Synod of Bishops on the same topic for the fall of 2005.

And more frequently he speaks of the importance of the Eucharist in the life of each Catholic.

The Eucharist has a "transforming power" that provides the courage to live the faith and to spread the Gospel, the pope said in June before leading a eucharistic procession through downtown Rome.

"There's a very close connection between the Eucharist and announcing Christ," he said.

In fact, said Cardinal Jozef Tomko, who heads the Vatican's committee for international eucharistic congresses, the pope is convinced that

unless Catholics have a firm understanding of the Eucharist the church's many missionary and social activities lose meaning.

"More and more, the Holy Father is turning back to the central mysteries of the faith," Cardinal Tomko said in an interview Sept. 8.

"He is focusing now on the Eucharist as the special presence of Jesus Christ among us. But this is a mystery — the idea that Christ has given his own body for us to eat. It is a very hard language for people to accept," he said.

Cardinal Tomko will be the pope's personal representative at the International Eucharistic Congress in Guadalajara, Mexico, Oct. 10-17, when the eucharistic year is inaugurated. The pope would have liked to go, but his poor health makes the trip impossible. Instead, he'll speak to the assembly via a TV link.

In the United States, most discussion of the Eucharist this year has revolved around the controversy over Catholic politicians who disagree with church teaching on abortion. Some bishops have said they would refuse to give Communion to such politicians.

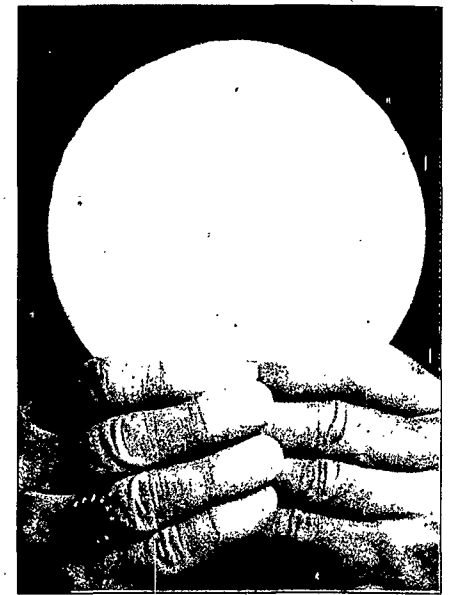
Despite the risk of politicizing the

Eucharist, many observers in Rome and at the Vatican are not unhappy the Communion issue has been raised.

"The whole question of being in a proper disposition to receive the Eucharist is something that's been practically untouched for decades in many parts of the world," said U.S. Father Thomas D. Williams, a member of the Legionaries of Christ who teaches at Rome's Regina Apostolorum University.

After reading blogs — Web journals — full of people slamming the church on this issue, Father Williams said, "There's a lot of ignorance out there, and I think this will be a year of instruction."

The pope is most concerned that Catholics understand how the Eucharist embodies fundamental truths for the church, including Jesus' redemptive sacrifice and his continued presence in the world.



CNS photo illustration

"It's part of his continual hammering of the theme: 'The world needs Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ comes to us in an exceptional way through the Eucharist.' I think he sees this as essential," Father Williams said.

Black Catholic event Oct. 15-16 at Immaculate and St. Bernard's

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

The dioceses of Rochester, Syracuse and Buffalo are cosponsoring the Black Catholic Convocation in Rochester Oct. 15-16.

The convocation's theme is "Created in God's Image: The Black Catholic Experience in the United States," and the event will begin at 7 p.m. on Oct. 15 with prayer, reflection and music at Immaculate Conception Parish, 445 Frederick Douglass St., Rochester.

The convocation will continue Oct. 16 from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. at St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry, 120 French Road, Pittsford.

On Oct. 15, Sister of Notre Dame de Namur Teresita Weind, director of the Notre Dame Spirituality Center in Cincinnati, Ohio, will give a talk on "The Lord's Promises to Us Have Been Fulfilled."

On Oct. 16, Father Bryan Massingale, professor of moral theology at St. Francis Seminary in Milwaukee, Wis., will give the keynote address at 9:30 a.m. on "Cultural Divide in the United States: Moral and Theological Implications."

The day also includes interactive exercises, as well as workshops. Workshop presenters include Daughter of Divine Love Sister MaryPaul Asoegwu, coordinator of ethnic ministries for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops; musical experts Kim and Reggie Harris; and

Ralph Jones, director of African-American Catholic Ministry for the Syracuse Diocese. Workshops will cover such topics as the historical roots of African-American Catholicism through music; the diversity of Caribbean peoples and the migration of African people; strategies for addressing cultural diversity in parishes; and defining African-American spirituality.

The convocation will conclude with an Oct. 16 Mass celebrated by Bishop Matthew H. Clark at 4:45 p.m.

All African-American, African and West Indian Catholics, as well as others, are invited to attend the convocation, said Father Michael Upson, the Rochester Diocese's director of the Office of Black Ministry. The office operates under the auspices of diocesan Parish Support Ministries.

"It's not just for black Catholics," he noted. "It's for whoever wants to attend to come to a better understanding of diverse communities."

Registration costs \$15 per person, which includes refreshments and a light lunch on Oct. 16. Checks, made payable to "Diocese of Rochester," may be mailed to Deacon Tom Driscoll, St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry, 120 French Road, Rochester, NY 14618.

For information, contact Father Upson at 585/328-3210, ext. 1236, or e-mail him at upson@dor.org.

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