

Homily for October 31, 2004
31st Sunday of the Year of the Eucharist

By Father Charles Bowes

Wisdom 11:22 – 12:2
2 Thessalonians 1:11 – 2:2
Luke 19:1 – 10

Together, we pray the prayer of praise that is the Mass.

As I said two weeks ago, Our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, has declared the period from this October until next October as the Year of the Eucharist.

Consequently, I'm attempting to provide some reflections on the Eucharist roughly every other week or so throughout this special year. It is hoped that these reflections will provide a bit of information about the Mass and a bit of inspiration that will help us live the Eucharist all week long. Two weeks ago I asked the question, "What brings us here?" And I answered it by saying, "God does; God chooses us by baptism." And so we come here first and foremost to praise God and to meet the Lord Jesus in one another, in Word and in bread and wine.

This week I ask the question, "Who says Mass?" Most Catholics are aware that we cannot celebrate the Eucharist without a priest. While this no doubt makes priests feel needed, it can have an unfortunate side effect. Sometimes it leads us to think of the Mass as something that the priest does for the rest of the church. In fact, the Mass is something that we all do together. We need a priest to lead us, but he needs us to worship with him, too.

The first part of the Roman Missal, called the General Instruction, says that "the celebration of the Eucharist is an action of the whole Church." It goes on to say that the people who gather for Mass form "the People of God, purchased by Christ's Blood, gathered together by the Lord, nourished by his word. It is a people called to bring to God the prayers of the entire human family, a people giving thanks in Christ for the mystery of salvation by offering his Sacrifice. Finally, it is a people made one by sharing in the Communion of Christ's Body and Blood. Though holy in its origin, this people nevertheless grows continually in holiness by its conscious, active, and fruitful participation in the mystery of the Eucharist" (45).

We've heard that term a lot in recent years, haven't we? "Full, conscious, active participation by all the people" in the Mass – that's what the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s called the "aim to be considered before all else" (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #14) in the reform and promotion of the liturgy. The council was so concerned about this because it recognized that this kind of participation "is the primary and indispensable source from which the

faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit." It is by our taking part in the offering of the Mass that we are to become more and more like Christ. It is our primary path to holiness. Other faiths, other denominations have other paths to holiness. But we, you and I, have the Mass...the Eucharist.

The council fathers insisted that such participation is our right and duty by reason of our baptism, because through baptism, we have become "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Peter 2:9). We all share in the priesthood of Christ, and it is Christ who offers his sacrifice to the Father whenever Mass is celebrated. Thus, the council said this full participation is "called for by the very nature of the liturgy." All of the baptized form Christ's body, and it is the whole Christ, head and members, who offers the sacrifice of the Mass.

Perhaps one of the most important things we might learn from this Year of the Eucharist is the importance of the assembly at Mass. Sometimes we think that our presence or our participation doesn't matter much. But each one of us is important to the celebration of the liturgy. We each have a role to play that no one else can do for us. After all, God has called us, you and me, to be the Body of Christ and to worship as Catholics worship. Only together can we offer God proper worship. Again today, we shall lift up our voices and our hearts to the Lord as we share in Christ's sacrifice.

Together, we pray the prayer of
praise that is the Mass.