

Homily for October 23, 2005
30th Sunday in the Year of the Eucharist

By Father Charles Bowes

Exodus 22:20-26
Psalm 18:2-4, 47, 51
1 Thessalonians 1:5-10
Matthew 22:34-40

We become bread broken for the life of the world.

In his Apostolic Letter for the Year of the Eucharist entitled, “Stay with us Lord,” Pope John Paul II reminded us that the Eucharist always leads us to mission, leads us to sharing our faith with others. The Pope quotes Saint Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 11, where it reads: “As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

Then the Pope makes two points about this statement. First, by sharing in the Eucharist, we sense our duty to be a missionary of the event made present in this rite. Second, at the dismissal at the end of each Mass is a charge given to Christians, “to work for the spread of the Gospel and the imbuing of society with Christian values.” (24) In other words, Eucharist and mission are integrally bound together as the work of the followers of Christ.

A story is told of a pastor who was in the church with children preparing for First Holy Communion. He asked the question, “What is the most important sign in this building?” There was silence. He was hoping to hear responses that would include answers like the altar, the ambo, the font, the tabernacle or the crucifix. Silence.

Finally, one little girl raised her hand, pointed to the exit sign above the door and blurted out, “That’s the most important sign in the church!” The pastor smiled and said, “I suppose you’re right.”

On this Mission Sunday, as we end this Year of the Eucharist, it might be true for us that the exit sign is the most important reminder for us after we gather for Eucharist.

We can draw a lesson from our Gospel, Matthew chapter 22, wherein Jesus responds to an effort on the part of religious leaders to discredit him. The chief priests and elders challenge his authority, trying to destroy his influence.

“They gathered together,” reads St. Matthew, “and one of them...tested him by asking, ‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’” Now, the difference between an honest test and a temptation is that the tester hopes for the person being tested to succeed, but the tempter hopes for the person being tempted to fail. Here, the hope is clearly that Jesus will fail. The title, “teacher” is used to sound flattering, but the intent is to catch Jesus off guard, asking a question that presumably he could not answer.

So which is the greatest commandment, Jesus? With the 613 commandments, there is no clear standard for determining which is the greatest. Some believed that since God gave them all, all are of equal importance.

Jesus does answer: “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.”

That was the answer! Jesus answered the lawyer’s question without giving much of an opening for an attack. This teaching reminds us that it is easy to love in the abstract – you know, easy to be in favor of motherhood and apple pie. But to love our neighbor particularizes the type of love that Jesus teaches. The type of love that Jesus teaches is the kind of love that we take beyond our church doors, out into the world, because we are on a mission to make our love particular, to make our commitment tangible and visible for others. An example of this would be the overwhelming financial support gathered from this and other communities to aid the hurricane victims in the southern United States.

As we conclude this Year of the Eucharist, we see that it is by our mutual love and, in particular, our concern for those in need that we will be recognized as true followers of Christ. We are to ask ourselves, “how do we really love the Lord our God, and love our neighbor as ourselves? What is the sign that leads us into the world, proclaiming the message about to whom we belong?”

The message may well be given by a child about an exit sign in the church building: “That’s the most important sign in the church!” And there is the sign as we leave our church parking lot: “You are now entering the mission field.” As bread that is broken for the life of the world – that is what we become by sharing in the Eucharist. And, as Pope John Paul wrote, “This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged.”

**We become bread broken for the life
of the world.**