

On Eucharistic Adoration

I

I would like for us to think about the great gift, beautiful beyond thought, of Our Lord Jesus Christ's presence with us in the Holy Eucharist. As you know, we have Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament here at IHM every Thursday beginning at the end of the 10:00 AM Mass and closing with Benediction before the 7:00 PM Mass. This time is a great opportunity of spiritual riches, both for each of us as individuals, as well as our parish as a whole. What better could we do on a given Thursday than worship our Lord and God in such a concrete and focused manner as we kneel before Him in the Holy Eucharist? Unfortunately, we have very few people right now who have volunteered to adore the Lord exposed in the monstrance on Thursdays, and we need **your** help. Permit me to relate this little story about the late, great Archbishop Fulton Sheen (whose cause for canonization has begun, I might add). It is an excerpt from the article "Let the SON Shine Out" by Rev. Martin Lucia.

"A couple of months before his death Bishop Fulton J. Sheen was interviewed on national television. One of the questions was this: 'Bishop Sheen, you have inspired millions of people all over the world. Who inspired you? Was it a Pope?'

"Bishop Sheen responded that it was not a Pope, a cardinal, another bishop, or even a priest or a nun. It was a little Chinese girl of eleven years of age. He explained that when the Communists took over China, they imprisoned a priest in his own rectory near the Church. After they locked him up in his own house, the priest was horrified to look out of his window and see the Communists proceed into the Church, where they went into the sanctuary and broke into the tabernacle. In an act of hateful desecration, they took the ciborium and threw it on the floor with all of the Sacred Hosts spilling out. The priest knew exactly the number of Hosts in the ciborium; thirty-two.

"When the Communists left, they either did not notice, or didn't pay any attention to a small girl praying in the back of the Church who saw everything that had happened. That night the little girl came back. Slipping past the guard at the priest's house, she went inside the Church. There she made a holy hour of prayer, an act of love to make up for the act of hatred. After her holy hour she went into the sanctuary, knelt down, bent over and with her tongue received Jesus in Holy Communion, since (at that time) it was not permissible for laymen to touch the Sacred Host with their hands.

"The little girl continued to come back each night to make her holy hour and receive Jesus in Holy Communion on her tongue. On the thirty-second night, after she had consumed the last and thirty-second host, she accidentally made a noise and woke the guard who was sleeping. He ran after her, caught her, and beat her to death with the butt of his rifle. This act of heroic martyrdom was witnessed by the priest as he watched grief-stricken from his bedroom window. When Bishop Sheen heard the story he was so inspired that he promised God he would make a holy hour of prayer before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament every day of his life."

I know that many of us work and cannot come to adore during the Thursday hours. But there are also many of us who are retired, out of work, who stay home to raise our children, work

at home, and so on. Won't you consider giving an hour, or even half of an hour, completely to Jesus on Thursdays? Please reflect on this question over the next few weeks as we continue to examine more true-life stories about the Holy Eucharist.

II

As we continue to meditate upon the True Presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, it is helpful to remember one of the greatest Eucharistic miracles of all time. This miracle happened in Lanciano, Italy around A.D. 700. As you read this true story, think about how much Jesus Christ loves us, how close to us He wants to be, and how He is always waiting to console and strengthen us as we adore Him in the Blessed Sacrament. Think also about how we, for our part, spend so little time in church with Jesus. I have taken the below account of this miracle from <http://www.miraclerosarymission.org/lanciano.html>.

“A Basilian monk, wise in the ways of the world, but not in the ways of faith, was having a trying time with his belief in the real presence of Our Lord Jesus in the Eucharist. He prayed constantly for relief from his doubts, and from the fear that he was losing his vocation. He suffered through the routine of his priesthood day after day, with these doubts gnawing at him. [...] One morning, while he was having a strong attack of doubt, he began the Consecration of the Mass for the people of the town. He used the same size host which is used in the Latin Rite masses today. What he beheld as he consecrated the bread and wine caused his hands to shake, indeed his whole body. He stood for a long time with his back to the people, and then slowly turned around to them.

“He said: ‘O fortunate witnesses to whom the Blessed God, to confound my disbelief, has wished to reveal Himself in this Most Blessed Sacrament and to render Himself visible to our eyes. Come, brethren, and marvel at our God so close to us. Behold the Flesh and Blood of our most beloved Christ.’ The host had turned into Flesh. The wine had turned into Blood.

“The people, having witnessed the miracle for themselves, began to wail, asking for forgiveness, crying for mercy. Others began beating their breasts, confessing their sins, declaring themselves unworthy to witness such a miracle. Still others went down on their knees in respect, and thanksgiving for the gift the Lord had bestowed on them. All spread the story throughout the town and surrounding villages.

“The miracle that occurred in 700 was just the beginning. [...] The Host-turned-Flesh, and the wine-turned-Blood, without the use of any form of preservative, is still present in the reliquary. In 1574 testing was done on the Flesh and Blood and an unexplainable phenomenon was discovered. The five pellets of coagulated Blood are different sizes and shapes. But any combination weighs the same as the total. In other words, 1 weighs the same as 2, 2 weigh the same as 3, and 3 weigh the same as 5.

“The most recent, an extensive scientific research done in 1970, used the most modern scientific tools available. The results of the tests are as follows:

- The flesh is real flesh. The blood is real blood.
- The flesh consists of the muscular tissue of the heart (myocardium).
- The flesh and blood belong to the human species.

- The flesh and blood have the same blood type (AB).
- In the blood, there were found proteins in the same normal proportions as are found in the sero-proteic make up of fresh, normal blood.
- In the blood, there were also found these minerals: Chlorides, phosphorous, magnesium, potassium, sodium and calcium. The preservation of the flesh and of the blood, which were left in their natural state for twelve centuries (without any chemical preservatives) and exposed to the action of atmospheric and biological agents, remains an extraordinary phenomenon.”

(Note: in the picture, the host-turned-Heart muscle is in the monstrance, while the pellets of Blood are in the crystal jar beneath it.)

This amazing Eucharistic miracle highlights the reality of Jesus Christ’s human body, as well as His great humility. Even now, in His resurrected state, He reminds us in the Eucharist that we are joined to Him by a common human nature. Of course, His human nature is not only glorified—and so beyond the normal limits of time and space—but His humanity is also directly united to God through the Second Person of the Holy Trinity (what we call the Hypostatic Union). So, He can make Himself present to us sacramentally in many places at once while Himself never departing from His throne in Heaven or suffering any loss to Himself. Truly this is the great Mystery of Faith: Come, let us adore!



III

Well, I want to spend one last week meditating on the importance of Eucharistic Adoration, and I thought that, for this one, I would just give my personal experience of the matter. My mom use to drag us along to Adoration even when we were young kids. Naturally, it was really boring. But after Confirmation in my freshman year of high school (still being home schooled), I had a bit of a conversion in my life, and I began to try to think about things not ‘naturally’ but supernaturally. And so, I started to give Adoration a chance—to actually open my mind and heart to Jesus’ presence in the Blessed Sacrament.

Nothing spectacular ever happened; God apparently never thought that I needed any visions, locutions, or other miraculous signs. However, what I have always been able to find

before Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament is peace. Peace, and strength, and the quiet time that I need to think about my life and renew my resolutions to practice the imitation of Christ daily. And even if I never ‘get anything else out of it,’ so to speak, I consider the grace of peace in my life perhaps the best gift God could give me anyway.

Every day, as I try to fit in my holy hour along with a million other things, there are always things that I want to accomplish that day which I know will have to sacrifice, give up on, forget about, because I don’t have the time. Sometimes I feel guilty about the things I put on the backburner, but I never feel guilty if I have to postpone something in order to spend an hour with Jesus Christ. I know that, unless there is something truly urgent to do, I am always doing *the right thing* when I go to offer my praise, thanksgiving, petitions, and prayers of reparation before Our Lord in the Tabernacle or Monstrance. That is very important for me. I am often unsure what the right thing to do in any given situation is, but I’m always sure that I am right when I go to adore my Savior.

Please consider coming to adore Our Lord truly present in the Most Holy Eucharist. I encourage all of us to come, no matter what time or day of the week. Of course, I especially encourage people to come on Thursdays during our times of Exposition since Jesus then pours out special graces on all who come to see Him and also, through them, on our parish. Please consider joining us also for Benediction (the blessing of those present with the Eucharist Itself in the Monstrance) at about 6:30. Benediction is followed by the 7 PM Thursday Mass.

Learning from the Church in Germany

Someone alerted me last Sunday to an article in the paper entitled “German Catholic bishops: You must pay to pray.” While this headline (like many headlines these days) is misleading, I found the article fascinating. And I believe that we can learn two important lessons from the Catholic Church in Germany.

To begin, what is the case? Although it seems very uncouth and alien to us Americans, in Germany and many other European countries the State places a surcharge on each person’s income tax, which is then given over to whichever religious organization the individual is registered as belonging to. In other words (to put it in Catholic terms), instead of leaving the amount that you will financially contribute to your parish up to you, you automatically pay a set amount to the government, which gives it to the Church. It’s a religious tax.

As I say, it sounds strange to us with our emphasis on separation of Church and State, but it is actually a very old practice, and all the major religions in Germany do it this way. Well, as you may imagine, many people have figured out that if they tell the government that they are no longer church members, then they don’t have to pay the religious tax. They then continue to go to church anyway so that they can have their cake and eat it too, as we might say.

However, the Catholic Church in Germany is now cracking down on this practice, and telling those people that they may no longer have their children baptized, receive Holy Communion, get married in the Church, receive funeral rites, etc. What’s this?! If you don’t pay your Church tax then you can’t receive the Sacraments? Shocking! Horrible! Smacks of the kind of ‘buying your way to Heaven’ mentality that set Martin Luther off centuries ago....

Or does it?

Although this idea sounds repellent to our ears, let us consider carefully the real context. By removing themselves from government lists as members of the Church, German Catholics are in a serious and public way choosing saving some money over professing their faith.

Technically, that's apostasy. But wait, you say: they don't want to quit the faith; they just don't want to pay the money. The Church shouldn't force you to pay money, right?

If by "force," you mean use political might, well, obviously there's debate on that. The Church in a lot of Europe does use political might. My opinion, for what it's worth, is that this system does not work well, especially in cultures that no longer see value in the Medieval idea of the 'union of throne and altar.' Perhaps it is time for the Catholic Church in Germany to learn from the more free approach of the Catholic Church in America, which emphasizes personal responsibility and intentional, voluntary participation in raising Church monies. The Church should probably not, in this sense, "force" people to pay her money.

At the same time, if by "force" you mean teach that something is morally necessary, then yes, the Church does tell us that it is a 'must' to support the Church. One of the six precepts of the Church is that "the faithful are *obliged* to assist with the material needs of the Church, each according to his own ability" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 2043, my emphasis). The purpose of these precepts is "to guarantee to the faithful the very necessary minimum in the spirit of prayer and moral effort, in the growth in love of God and neighbor" (CCC, par. 2041). Perhaps we don't hear much about this obligation these days, but perhaps we should be reminded.

Now, of course, there are other ways of assisting with the material needs of the Church than money (or treasure)—time and talent come to mind. Further, you don't have to give just to your parish church. My mom always gives most of her tithe to the foreign missions. But the point is, unless there are serious reasons to the contrary, we can hardly call ourselves Catholics if we are not willing to offer back to God the treasures that He has given us, by giving some of them to His Church. Thus St. Paul tells us, "If any one will not work, let him not eat" (2 Thes. 3:10). In this sense, we who are truly Catholic are "forced" by our conscience and a moral life to offer our financial resources to the Church as part of the minimum of a religious life.

And so, I think that these are the two lessons that we can learn from the predicament of the Catholic Church in Germany. First, we can be grateful for the more liberal methods that our government and the Church in our country have worked out. These methods show greater respect for the dignity of the mature human person and are more true to religious values. Second, however, we should also be struck deeply by the fact that with greater freedom comes greater responsibility. Perhaps we do not run the risk of having Church authorities cut us off from the institution of the Church. But we do run the risk of sinning through greed or careless omission of our duty, and so cutting ourselves off spiritually from Mother Church. In the long run, this second danger may be far more deadly than the first.

The Society of St. Pius X

This week I had many people ask me for details on that announcement I made about the

group that does that annual rosary march in Burlington (Oct. 13th this year). That group, which includes Our Lady of the Assumption Church in Walton and a couple other parishes, is known as the Society of St. Pius X. Very, very unfortunately, they are in schism with the Catholic Church.

(One of our parishioners wrote me a long email—which I appreciated—explaining to me why the Society is technically not in schism. I’m not an expert on the situation, but I’m also not interested in playing word games. The point is that the Society is not in full communion with the Catholic Church, sort of like the Orthodox Churches. Catholics may not go to their churches for Mass or other Sacraments. As far as I understand the term, that is schism.)

The Society of St. Pius X is separated from the Church because they refuse to obey the pope. They do not accept the Novus Ordo (New Order) of the Mass that Pope Paul VI requested after Vatican II, and continue to use only the Tridentine Mass (a.k.a., the old, Latin Mass). (Not that there’s anything wrong with the old Mass, mind you, or with Masses in Latin.) All of that said, however, they are very good, reverent, and devout people. We should all pray that they will soon be reunited with the Catholic Church.

The reason I spoke about them at Masses the other Sunday was not to encourage you to shun them. We are much closer to them in the faith than Protestants or even the Orthodox. It was also not to discourage you from going to pray the rosary with them. Obviously, priests do not, as a rule, publically promote the activities of schismatic groups. But it was certainly not my intention to *discourage* anyone from going; it is always good to pray the rosary. If my announcement came off that way to anyone, I apologize; that was not its intention. It is true that we had a rosary rally here at IHM the same day, but that fact was coincidental and not intended as a ‘Catholic alternative’ to the Society’s rosary march.

So, what was the reason I even brought it up at Mass? It is because many of our parishioners had been receiving that rosary march pamphlet in the mail. How our dear Society friends managed to get the addresses of all the local Catholic households would be an interesting question. My real concern, however, was that nowhere on their pamphlet did they identify themselves as being the Society of St. Pius X. If rosary marches were all they invited Catholics too, that would be one thing, but I know from experience that Catholics are often invited to their churches without being told that they are not Catholic. I consider this reluctance to identify themselves dishonest and deceptive, and that is the reason I brought it up at Mass.

Society of St. Pius X

You may have noticed an article in the June 7th edition of the *Messenger* concerning the Society of St. Pius X and Our Lady of the Assumption Chapel in Walton, KY. If you did not, I encourage you to read the whole article. However, I wanted to hit on the most important points here in the bulletin just so that everyone is aware of them. They are twofold:

First, the bishops and priests of the SSPX are validly ordained and they have valid Sacraments. However, some Sacraments depend not only on having a validly ordained minister, but also on that minister have “faculties,” which means the necessary spiritual powers and legal permission to perform the Sacrament (these two are tied together). Two of these Sacraments are Confession

and Holy Matrimony. This means that if a SSPX priest hears your Confession or witnesses your marriage, it is *invalid*. Please, please be aware of this.

Second, priests of the SSPX offer a valid Mass—which they always offer as the “Tridentine” Mass (what we now call the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite). However, to quote from Bishop Foys’ letter (which is simply referencing Canon Law), “It is morally illicit (unlawful) for the Faithful to participate in Masses of the Society of St. Pius X unless they are legitimately impeded from participating in a Mass celebrated by a Catholic priest in good standing in the Church (cf. Code of Canon Law, canon 844.2). ***The fact of not being able to assist at the celebration of the ‘Tridentine’ Mass is not considered a sufficient motive for attending Masses offered by priests of the Society of St. Pius X.***” In other words—to put it more bluntly than the bishop—there is no excuse for going to Assumption Chapel when you can literally walk down the street to All Saints Catholic Church, which has an Extraordinary Form Mass every Sunday at 9:15 A.M.

And so, let us continue to pray that the division between the SSPX and the Catholic Church will soon be healed and unity be advanced in the world. Until then, let Catholics and Society members pray for each other, treat each other with charity and kindness, and be honest with each other. Pope St. Pius X, pray for us!

Week for Christian Unity

Fri., Jan. 18 began the annual Week for Christian Unity. During this week we pray especially that all Christians will work to overcome their differences and be again united into the one Church of Jesus Christ as we were at the beginning. Jesus Himself prayed for this at the Last Supper when He said, “I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, so that they may all be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (Jn. 17:20-21). The multitude of Christian churches and denominations is a scandal to the world and a road-block for many who might otherwise embrace the Gospel. As Catholics, of course, we pray that all Christians will be reunited to the Catholic Church—something, we note, that requires our own continual conversion and growth in holiness. Nevertheless, we can aid that process by learning more about the faith traditions of our non-Catholic brothers and sisters in Christ. We should especially try to familiarize ourselves with the Orthodox Churches, since they are closest to us in the faith, but also with the Protestant communities that are more prevalent in our own country.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Hopefully you are remembering to pray for unity among all Christians during this special week (Jan. 18-25). Here is a short prayer to help you in case you need a reminder:

Lord Jesus Christ, You said to Your apostles,
“Peace I give to you; my own peace I leave with you.”
Regard not our sins, but the faith of Your Church,
and give to us the peace and unity of that heavenly city,
where with the Father and the Holy Spirit
You live and reign, now and forever. Amen.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Today, Jan. 18th, begins the annual international observance of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. With all the forces, human and diabolical, that work against Christianity in the world today, it is very important that we work to heal the wounds that exist between Christians and pray for the day when, as Jesus Himself prayed, “all may be one” (Jn. 17:21). A reminder for Catholics, “§1. A *plenary indulgence* is granted to the faithful who participate in some of the services during the Week of Christian Unity and assist at the closing of this same week. §2. A *partial indulgence* is granted to the faithful who devoutly recite an appropriately approved prayer for the unity of Christians” (*Handbook of Indulgences*, USCCB 2008). Here is the mentioned approved prayer that you may pray throughout this week:

Almighty and merciful God,
Who wished to gather the scattered nations
into one people through Your Son,
grant that those who glory in the name of Christians
may put aside division and become one in truth and charity,
and that all men may be illumined by the true faith
and brought together into the fraternal communion of one Church.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Religious Liberty

Just a reminder about the steps the U.S. bishops have asked us to take in our spiritual battle for religious liberty, and for the heart and mind of our nation. Along with the monthly holy hour and the daily rosary, the bishops have asked that we consider abstaining from meat on Fridays. This is the ancient tradition of the Roman Church, and we always do it for Lent anyway. Lent is just around the corner, so why not just start now! Of course, we are being asked to consider continuing this after Lent is over. It's optional, but a great sacrifice to make for the conversion of our country and the protection of our religious liberty.

Fr. Andrew and the Concept of the Jubilee

As you all know, Fr. Andrew is leaving at the beginning of November for a year-long sabbatical in celebration of his 50th anniversary of priestly ordination (not to be confused with religious profession as a Carmelite; he celebrated that 50th anniversary several years ago). In church speak, we tend to refer to this as a Jubilee, and, believe it or not, the Jubilee concept is religiously and theologically very important. What does it mean? To find an answer we look to the Book of Leviticus, one of the books of the Pentateuch and the book that has most of the laws that God gave to Moses about how the Israelites should worship Him.

Most of us are familiar with the Sabbath Day as a day of rest, dedicated to worshiping and thanking God for Creation and Salvation. But, this sabbath dedication to God applies to more than just us human beings: it applies to animals and even to the plants and the soil. And so, God commands the Israelites, “For six years you may sow your field, and for six years prune your vineyard, gathering in their produce. But during the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest, a sabbath for the LORD, when you may neither sow your field nor prune your

vineyard” (Lev. 25:3-4). So, just as we have a sabbath every seven days, the land has a sabbath every seven years. Think of the trust in God that this practice would have demanded of a farming based culture such as Israel!

But, just as the Israelites counted seven weeks (seven sets of seven days) after Passover and then celebrated Pentecost (one of their harvest festivals) on the fiftieth day, so the fiftieth *year* was not just a sabbath year for the land, but was a Year of Jubilee. “You shall count seven weeks of years—seven times seven years—such that the seven weeks of years amount to forty-nine years. Then, on the tenth day of the seventh month let [the fiftieth year begin]. You shall treat this fiftieth year as sacred. You shall proclaim liberty in the land for all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to your own property, each of you to your own family” (Lev. 25:8-9a, 10). As you can see, this Jubilee Year highlighted the importance of the land or inheritance that each family owned in the Promised Land. In principal, no family could ever sell their land permanently, or have it taken from them permanently. Every fifty years it returned to the family. This meant that the Jubilee Year was an end to poverty or slavery for some, and a time of loss, simplification, and trust in God for those who were wealthy enough to have long-term ‘rented’ someone else’s land. What a beautiful solution to social justice problems!

This is how Fr. Andrew sees the Golden Jubilee of his priesthood. This is not a year of celebrating *him*, but a year of celebrating what God has done in and through him. And also, a moment of trusting in God as the humbling years of old age come upon him. This is not about gifts for him, but about his giving of himself (which is why he is spending so much of his sabbatical giving retreats and offering Masses for communities he has served in the past as a missionary). This is a year of bringing glad tidings to the poor, proclaiming liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, letting the oppressed go free, and proclaiming a year acceptable to the Lord, to paraphrase Jesus as He begins His ministry (see Lk. 4:18-19). And so we pray for our father, our brother, Fr. Andrew, as he begins his Jubilee celebrations in the next few weeks. We pray that he will truly find this to be a year of rest, liberty, and spiritual riches as he dedicates his life and his priesthood once again to Our Lord Jesus Christ.

One Body, One Spirit in Christ

As you probably already know, I only went to grade school up to grade 5 and never went to a regular high school; I was home schooled through high school (something for which I am eternally grateful to my mother). Now, I suppose someone could allege that, because of this, I have no real understanding of what that special high school loyalty, that alumni sense of belonging to a grand tradition, that band of brotherhood and/or sisterhood is really like. Perhaps. I, on the other hand, like to think that it gives me a somewhat more objective view of the way our diocesan schools interact. And sometimes, I have to say, it isn’t very healthy. For instance, my mother graduated from the old St. Thomas High School in Fort Thomas, and shortly after that it had to be closed for lack of funds and enrollment. Forty-ish years later, she still knows people who are upset with the now-deceased pastor who had to close it.

IHM is, of course, a feeder school for St. Henry District High School, where Fr. Norton

and I are both chaplains. I love St. Henry and certainly encourage our parents to send their sons and daughters there. But when it comes to the other schools and parishes of the diocese, it is important to remember that we are all on the same team. Of course, we compete with each other academically and in sports and that is a good thing. Healthy, sportsmanly competition and rivalry has an important role in developing the mature virtues of humility, patience, forgiveness, and the offering of hardships to Christ on the cross—to name only a few. But, in the big picture, we are all here to cooperate with each other as members in the Body of Christ. So, while I will always root for the IHM Saints and the Crusaders, I also love all of those Pandas, Colonels, etc. And so should we all.

Now, of course, we have a good opportunity to apply this with St. Timothy Church as they try to build a new school in Union. You may have heard talk about this already. Regardless of our opinions on whether or not this is a good idea, we must not see fellow Catholic parishes and schools as our opponents or as deserving our ill will. Let us instead pray that God's will may be done and try to work for peace and harmony in the Body of Christ on every level. This is what Jesus asks of us: let us compete with all our hearts, but then always be ready to cast away our own opinions and ambitions in order to also love with all our hearts. Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, be the king and center of my heart!

What We Believe about Divorce and Holy Communion

One of the more common misunderstandings that I run across as a priest involves the Church's teaching about how divorce affects someone's ability to receive Holy Communion (or to put it another way, whether or not divorce is understood as a sinful state of life, making one an inappropriate vessel for the sacramental presence of Jesus Christ). The simple answer—perhaps overly simple—is that being divorced *per se* does not mean that you cannot receive Holy Communion. Surprised by that? Well, let's go into a little more detail.

What is divorce? It is the legal process by which a marriage that was legally recognized by the State is dissolved. As far as the State is concerned in modern day America, marriage is a contract that can be executed and dissolved (and dissolved for no reason, now that we have “no fault” divorce). What is the Church's attitude toward all of this? Very different. We believe that marriage is a covenant, not a contract. We believe what Jesus taught: “What God has joined together, let no man separate” (Matt. 19:6b). In other words, God—and so the Church as well—does not recognize divorce; it has no real effect; it is a legal fiction.

As an aside, you may remember another teaching of Jesus which seems to leave some wiggle room: “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife must give her a bill of divorce.’ But I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery” (Matt. 5:31-32). What is this exception about being “unlawful”? This is a favorite point of dispute between Catholics and various other Christian communities because most prefer to interpret the phrase not as “unlawful,” but as “sexual immorality,” a.k.a. adultery. That is why so many of them allow divorce if one spouse is unfaithful to his or her marriage vows. But that is not what we understand Jesus to be saying. Rather, we understand the reference as meaning that there was

something wrong with the marriage to begin with (it was unlawful), and this is why we have the annulment process. Annulments are not just ‘Catholic divorce,’ but I’m not going into annulments now because that’s a whole other bulletin article.

So, as far as God is concerned, once a Christian is married it is for the rest of life—indissoluble except by the death of one of the spouses. Because this is the truth about married love that Jesus teaches us, the Church disapproves of the idea of divorce in general. A civil divorce gives the idea that marriage can be dissolved when, in reality, it cannot. (This, by the way, is why I, as a priest, would generally recommend legal separation rather than divorce.) The Church upholds the indissolubility of marriage so strongly that, earlier in the last century when culture in general still seriously disapproved of divorce, anyone who got divorced was automatically excommunicated. The Church used this stringent penalty because divorce really does contribute to the breakdown of society. However, recognizing that there are occasions when divorce could be the best thing to do—for example, when there is spousal or child abuse and just living separately is not enough—the Church eventually removed the penalty of excommunication from divorce.

So, this is why people used to not be able to receive Holy Communion if they got divorced, because, of course, anyone who is excommunicated cannot receive the Sacraments. Nowadays, if someone has the misfortune of being divorced, then he or she can still receive Holy Communion. Except...except. Except that since civil divorce has no real effect on someone’s marriage in the eyes of God, it does not make that person free to marry again—you are still married to your ‘ex.’ So, if you do marry again (without an annulment), then you are not actually remarrying, you are committing adultery and living in a state of sin. Naturally, this disqualifies you from receiving Holy Communion.

So, that’s the deal. Is divorce always and everywhere a bad idea? No. But our society seems to have forgotten that, most of the time, it is. Is divorce always a sin? No. But there is very often sin involved—quite possibly mortal sins of hatred, adultery, abuse, lying, etc. That is not the same as living in a state of sin, however, and so we repent, go to Confession, and move on. Must we stop receiving Jesus in Holy Communion if we have the misfortune of getting divorced? No (assuming there aren’t mortal sins we need to confess). If anything, we need the power of the Eucharist all the more to get us through such difficult times. But, must we stop receiving Holy Communion if we remarry after a divorce and without having received an annulment? Yes. Painful as it is to hear, our second (or third, etc.) ‘marriage’ is a lie, and we are living in sin.

It is my special hope that this explanation will allow some older Catholics to realize that, just because they were divorced in the past, doesn’t mean that they can’t receive Holy Communion today. If you needed this information years ago and this is the first time you’ve heard it, then on behalf of the Church, I’m sorry. Please come and receive Jesus in the Eucharist and experience the love and power that His sacramental presence offers.

Can Religion Save You?

You may have been surprised a couple weeks ago to find a pamphlet on your windshield after

Mass from some Protestant group: believe me, so was I. The pamphlet, entitled “Have You Ever Been Lost???” was apparently intended to warn us that we aren’t going to Heaven because we practice “religion” instead of “repenting and believing.” Here is a short quotation from the pamphlet: “Religion is man’s attempt to reform in order to be good enough to get into heaven. Religion holds to an external appearance of godliness. It looks like the real thing but it is not.” I have to admit that I chuckled while reading the pamphlet because it is clear that the author has little understanding of what he is attacking. Of course, if we thought that our religion was just a bunch of things that *we* made up and that we have to do in order to get to Heaven, then the author might be right. Fortunately, he is not the final authority in defining concepts. When we talk about religion, we are first of all talking about something that we DID NOT make up. Jesus gave us the central teachings and practices of our religion, and the Holy Spirit has continued to help us understand and develop them through the centuries. Second, religion isn’t really about just doing the practices; it’s about staying close to Jesus Christ. The word “religion” is from the Latin *religare*, meaning “to tie or bind.” We use the practices of our religious system to strengthen our relationship with Our Lord, not to replace it. In this sense, religion certainly can save you because religion means living each day with Jesus our Savior. Perhaps if our friendly neighborhood pamphlet-pushers understood the Catholic faith a little better, they would realize that we emphasize repenting and believing as much as they do, and that we hate religious hypocrisy as much as they do too. Let us pray that whoever distributed these pamphlets may have the opportunity to learn about the beauty and truth of the Catholic religion.

The Chalk: What Now?

So, last week we gave you all blessed chalk for the traditional Epiphany blessing of the home. I hope that you were able to take part in this opportunity of prayer, family fun, and receiving grace through the use of sacramentals. So, now that it’s all over, what are you supposed to do with this piece of chalk? Give it to your child to draw posies and unicorns with on her chalkboard? And indeed this is a common question when it comes to sacred items that have outlived their use, e.g., broken crucifixes, old scapulars and metals, stagnant holy water, etc. Well, of course, sometimes there are options. After all, with this chalk, you can always just save it in a drawer somewhere in case you need to refresh the 20+C+M+B+14 throughout the year. Or your blessed palms from Palm Sunday; you’re supposed to bring them back to church so that we can burn them into the Ash Wednesday ashes (we’ll let you know when you can bring them in this year).

But when there isn’t some method of disposal, then there are always two options for disposing of holy objects. First is to burn the thing. Certain highly flammable sacramentals like palm leaves or holy oil should always be burned. Any charcoal remains of the object should then be buried in the ground. Obviously, certain sacramentals cannot be disposed of in this manner (chalk, for example). And so, the second method is to just go ahead and bury the thing in the ground—deep enough that it won’t be disturbed by your dog or other animals. (Holy water, however, can just be poured out on the ground.) Why bother with all of this? Because these things have been consecrated to God, either by a formal blessing or through our devout use. Unless there is a serious reason, one does not un-consecrate things—some things, in fact, can never be

deconsecrated, and some only if they are desecrated—the object belongs to God until it ceases to exist. And so, we allow it to cease to exist when we have no further need of it. In other words, we make a sacrifice of it to God, either through fire or decomposition. So, if you're not going to save your Epiphany chalk for refreshers, then you ought to go ahead and bury it—maybe at the foot of your Mary grotto or some other appropriate spot. Happy digging!

Mourning Our Lost Children

“Make no mistake, abortion-on-demand is not a right granted by the Constitution. No serious scholar, including one disposed to agree with the Court's result, has argued that the framers of the Constitution intended to create such a right. Shortly after the *Roe v. Wade* decision, Professor John Hart Ely, now Dean of Stanford Law School, wrote that the opinion ‘is not constitutional law and gives almost no sense of an obligation to try to be.’ Nowhere do the plain words of the Constitution even hint at a ‘right’ so sweeping as to permit abortion up to the time the child is ready to be born. Yet that is what the Court ruled. As an act of ‘raw judicial power’ (to use Justice White’s biting phrase), the decision by the seven-man majority in *Roe v. Wade* has so far been made to stick. But the Court's decision has by no means settled the debate. Instead, *Roe v. Wade* has become a continuing prod to the conscience of the nation.” (President Ronald Reagan, *Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation*, 1983)

My friends, every January 22nd we experience deep and somewhat conflicting emotions. Many of us experience them far more frequently than once a year because of our regular involvement in pro-life social justice work. Probably the easiest emotion to allow is anger for the injustice and cruelty that abortion brings for both unborn children and their mothers (as well as fathers, extended families, etc.). This is righteous anger, but only if it is used to lovingly and compassionately work for an end to legalized abortion. More deeply, however, we experience sorrow and loss when we think of all of the beautiful life and opportunity denied the world in destruction of innocent life in the name—almost always—of convenience, embarrassment, and fear. We who are pro-life must mourn this loss of life because so many others who should mourn have refused to acknowledge the tragedy. Finally, and hopefully, we experience great sympathy and compassion for the mothers and fathers who have been forever changed by an abortion experience. We know that the love, forgiveness, and power of Jesus Christ can heal them and will make all things right in the end. We must always strive to reflect this attitude in dealing with those closest to this pressing social issue. Abortion must end: Christ has defeated it, but WE must work to bring His victory to fruition in our present time. Please come to our Holy Hour for Life at 7PM on the 22nd.

Allow me to end with some other quotations from wise people than myself—people who remind us that the power of the pro-life movement flows from the redemptive act of Jesus dying on the Cross, which means also from the Eucharist: “In Washington, DC in 1994 Mother Teresa said that we fight abortion by teaching the mother what love really means: ‘to be willing to give until it hurts....So, the mother who is thinking of abortion, should be helped to love, that is, to give until it hurts her plans, or her free time, to respect the life of her child.’” Gustave Thibon has said that the true God transforms violence into suffering, while the false god transforms suffering into

violence. The woman tempted to have an abortion will transform her suffering into violence unless she allows love to transform her, and make her willing to give herself away. The Eucharist gives both the lesson and the power. Mom is to say ‘This is my body, my blood, my life, given up for you my child.’”

Fatima and Our New Year’s Resolutions

You may remember on New Year’s Day that I talked about not forgetting to work on our relationship with Jesus and Mary as the most important of our New Year’s resolutions. I mentioned specifically Our Lady’s promise at Fatima that her Immaculate Heart will triumph in the world if only all of her children will pray the rosary daily, wear (and practice the life of) the Brown Scapular, and make the First Five Saturdays. So, how have we all been doing in our New Year’s resolutions? Well, it’s not too late to start some of these resolutions, so I wanted to take a minute (as I promised in my homily) to explain the First Saturday devotion to those of us who may be unfamiliar. (By the way, you can find this information all over the internet; I pulled most of what’s below off of <www.themostholysrosary.com/appendix2.htm> and <<http://www.rosary-center.org/firstsat.htm>>.)

During her July apparition at Fatima, Our Lady said to Lucia, “I shall come to ask [...] that on the First Saturday of every month, Communions of reparation be made in atonement for the sins of the world.” Although she made no further mention of this devotion at Fatima, on December 10, 1925, our Blessed Mother again appeared to Lucia at Pentevedra, Spain, where the seer had been sent to the Dorothean Sisters to learn to read and write. It was there Our Lady completed her request for the Five First Saturdays and gave her great promise.

Our Lady then spoke: “See, my daughter, my Heart encircled by thorns with which ungrateful men pierce it at every moment by their blasphemies and ingratitude. Do you, at least, strive to console me. Tell them that I promise to assist at the hour of death with the graces necessary for salvation all those who, in order to make reparation to me, on the First Saturday of five successive months, go to Confession, receive Holy Communion, say five decades of the Rosary, and keep me company for a quarter of an hour, meditating on the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary.”

We see here the four conditions to be met: 1.) Confession, 2.) Holy Communion, 3.) the Rosary, and 4.) fifteen minutes of meditating on one or more of the Mysteries of the Rosary—this is distinct from actually praying the Rosary. All of these conditions must be fulfilled for five consecutive First Saturdays (although, as usual, the Confession can be a week or more before or after). All of them should be fulfilled with the intention of making reparation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Trust me, this is hard—it requires discipline, planning, and vigilance. That is why it is such a display of devotion to Our Lady and why she promises such a great grace to those who love her enough to do it.

It is sometimes asked why Our Lady asked for Communions of reparation on five first Saturdays, instead of some other number. Our Blessed Lord answered that question when He appeared to the now-Sister Lucia May 29, 1930. He explained that it was because of five kinds of offenses and blasphemies against the Immaculate Heart of Mary, namely: blasphemies against her

Immaculate Conception, against her perpetual virginity, against the divine and spiritual maternity of Mary, blasphemies involving the rejection and dishonoring of her images, and the neglect of implanting in the hearts of children a knowledge and love of this Immaculate Mother.

Some IHM History

It is always important to remember our history. Our history tells us where we came from, gives us an indication of where we are going, and, most importantly, helps us understand who we are. With that in mind, I thought it might be worthwhile to review a little of our own parish history. Back in 1955, there were just beginning to be enough Catholics in the Boone County area to start asking then-Bishop William Mulloy for new parishes in Erlanger and Hebron. Fr. Paul Ciangetti, then assigned to St. Henry Church in Elsmere, was put in charge of forming the new parishes of Immaculate Heart of Mary and Mary Queen of Heaven. In Hebron, Mrs. Mary Ann Boh (who just passed away a year ago this Feb. 3rd, God rest her soul) was one of the pillars of support in organizing the nascent IHM. Below are excerpts from two letters that still exist in the parish archive, which Mrs. Boh wrote to the bishop. Apparently, Mary Queen of Heaven was looking more financially feasible to some than IHM at the time. Having caught wind of this development, Mrs. Boh writes:

Most Reverend and Dear Bishop:

During the winter and spring months of this year the Catholics of the vicinity of Hebron, Kentucky were doing much rejoicing. We were, after all of these years of waiting, to have the privilege of having the real presence of the Blessed Sacrament right in this section of Boone County. With the people of so many other denominations in Hebron working so enthusiastically for their churches this was to be our great opportunity to really show our love for God and His Immaculate Mother. The name of the "Immaculate Heart of Mary" seemed to fit the community perfectly, how could we fail under so great a patroness. Many of the non-Catholics seeing the great spirit and cooperation of the Catholics around Hebron shared our great joy, gave donations of money, offered us their help in whichever way it was needed, and many even offered to help with the actual building.

Real estate men sold their property with the understanding that there would be a Catholic Church and School in Hebron in the very near future. Until recently Catholics were hesitant about moving to this part of Boone County because of the distance and inconvenience of getting to a Catholic Church and School. The farmers were extremely happy with a Catholic Church in Hebron. With the large business concerns buying up the farms close to the cities at such a great price, a Catholic family wanting to buy a farm is forced to buy many miles out, thereby taking them a great distance from a Catholic Church and School. This again keeps many good Catholic farm families from settling in this district when there is such a need for them to practice good Christian farming principles amongst our non-Catholic neighbors.

Within the last month Father Ciangetti informed us that because of our insufficient funds, and the greater need of another Church in the Erlanger area, the site of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Church would probably be moved from Hebron to Donaldson Highway. Words cannot

express, only God knows, of the great disappointment we people of the vicinity of Hebron have felt. [...] We people of the Hebron area all know of the need for another Church at Erlanger, but it is our greatest desire, dear Bishop, that we could carry out our work for Christ here in the vicinity of Hebron under the patronage of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. This site of ground, so gladly donated by Mr. John Weghorn, is a most beautiful location for a Church. We all desire your approval and Almighty God's blessing that our efforts and our hopes for the Immaculate Heart of Mary Church at Hebron may not be in vain.

In an attached, secondary letter, Mrs. Boh adds:

A group of ladies of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Altar Society personally visited these families with the enclosed letter to get these signatures. We were most kindly received by these people, but it was heartbreaking to hear how some of these people have become careless about their religion. This made us feel all the more the need to keep this Catholic Church and School right here at Hebron. We believe that a patient and understanding priest working amongst us could do much toward saving these souls. Many of the children are attending the public schools. The majority of the children are in the lower grades and the parents are quite hesitant about having these little ones transfer so many times on the county busses to get to a Catholic School.

In April, feeling so happy with our work for God at Hebron, we started on our fund raising campaign. At our first attempt, through the goodness of Monsignor Carlin letting us use his auditorium for a card party, we made well over \$700.00 in one evening. Father Ciangetti has told us that if this Church is built on Donaldson Highway all the money raised in this manner would be used for the Church over there. This has been most difficult for us to understand. We were all most willing to continue our efforts to make our Church at Hebron a reality. We would be even more disappointed should the name of our Blessed Lady be taken out of Hebron. We and all our friends have been fervently praying Dear Bishop that you could see it better to keep our Immaculate Heart of Mary Church on the spot on which it was originally planned. It would bring us great pleasure if you would come to Boone County and visit with us.

Humbly begging your blessings on our efforts, I remain sincerely yours in Christ.

Mrs. William Boh

(Thereafter follow sixty-five other signatures of individuals and families)

As you can tell, Mrs. Boh and so many others who were dedicated to the formation of IHM were successful. It is to these bold souls, who were upheld in their dreams by their great faith and devotion to Jesus and Mary, that our parish exists today. Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us!

The Feast of Divine Mercy

We read the following in the *Diary* of St. Faustina: "On one occasion, I heard these words: My daughter, tell the whole world about My Inconceivable mercy. I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and shelter for all souls, and especially for poor sinners. On that day the very depths of My tender mercy are open. I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the fount of My mercy. The soul that will go to Confession and receive Holy Communion shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment. On that day all the divine floodgates through which grace flow are opened. Let no soul fear to draw near to Me, even though its sins be as scarlet. My mercy is so great that no mind, be it of man or of angel, will be able to fathom

it throughout all eternity. Everything that exists has come forth from the very depths of My most tender mercy. Every soul in its relation to Me will I contemplate My love and mercy throughout eternity. The Feast of Mercy emerged from My very depths of tenderness. It is My desire that it be solemnly celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter. Mankind will not have peace until it turns to the Fount of My Mercy.” (*Diary 699*)

This is the message that Jesus Christ has given to our day and age about His Divine Mercy and that we celebrate today on Divine Mercy Sunday, instituted by the now-St. John Paul II. But perhaps we ask ourselves, “What relevance does this have to my life?” Well, in a certain sense the answer is obvious—we are all sinners and need God’s mercy. Sometimes, however, we forget how important, indeed necessary, that mercy is to us. Contemporary culture and modern technology offer us a wide range of temptations to actions that are extremely harmful to our spiritual state. In fact, the sad reality is that many Catholics today, perhaps including ourselves, are living out our lives in ways that we know are contrary to God’s Law and which involve serious sin. You know what I’m talking about—it’s the usual litany: pre-marital sex, irregular marriages that are not blessed by the Church, contraception, abortion, the homosexual lifestyle, *in vitro* fertilization, and handing ourselves over to various forms of addiction, whether substance related (e.g., drugs and alcohol) or of a psychological nature (e.g., pornography and gambling).

Along with easier access to and opportunity for these sins that modern life provides, there remain all of the ‘classic’ mortal sins: hatred, consuming greed, serious lies, all forms of lust, missing Mass on Sundays, etc. How can we escape Hell when the snares of the Devil and our own pride are always lurking so close by? Only by relying on the mercy Jesus gives us in Confession and the holiness of life that He calls us to in the Eucharist (and, yes, in that order). We can’t make it to Heaven without God’s mercy. It isn’t frosting on the cake—it is the cake, the kernel, the Gospel itself! Fr. Robert Barron has a very good, short YouTube video called “Extreme Demands, Extreme Mercy” that deals with this same problem very well; I recommend it to all who might be interested. Let us admit our great need for mercy on the great Feast of Jesus’ mercy and rejoice in the Blood and Water that flowed from the pierced side of Christ for our salvation.

Summer Church Apparel

As we are now entering into the warmest months of the year, I would ask us all to take some care about how we dress for Sunday Mass. As we all know, our air-conditioning system does not work very well, and naturally we don’t want people passing out during Mass. At the same time, we should try our best to honor God and respect our neighbors through the way that we dress. Perhaps we might ask ourselves, “What difference is there between the way I dress at Mass and the way I dress when I go to the store?” If the answer is “None,” then it’s time to do a little soul-searching. Equally important over the summer, especially for our dear young ladies, is to ask ourselves, “Am I dressing modestly at Mass?” or “Does the way that I dress at Mass help or hinder the people around me in focusing on God?” Of course, as Christian women—as the guardians of virtue, human dignity, and civilization—you should be dressing modestly at all

times! But I do ask that you take special care when you attend the Holy Sacrifice. Thank you, parents, for your assistance and example in getting our parish youths to dress appropriately for Mass.

Let Freedom Ring!

An early, happy Fourth of July to you all! Please note that we will only be having the one 9:00 AM Mass on Independence Day; we hope you will be able to be with us. As we prepare to celebrate the 238th anniversary of the independence of our country, we do so especially by this Fortnight for Freedom—a time of prayer, awareness raising, and political action called for by the US Bishops. Here in “the land of the free and the home of the brave” we Catholics find ourselves facing once again the recurring problem of religious liberty. Last Sunday was the feast day of Sts. Thomas More and John Fischer, who both gave their lives to protect the Church’s freedom from the oppression of the British government. On the 24th we celebrated the Birth of St. John the Baptist, who was martyred because he insisted that King Herod was not above the moral law. Today, we celebrate the martyrdom of Sts. Peter and Paul, who likewise died through the unjust persecution of the Christian religion by the Roman State. In other words, we have the powerful example of our forefathers in the faith to teach us how to fight for our freedom of religion—and we fight as Jesus did, by laying down our time, treasure, talent, and even our lives as a witness to God’s supremacy over human laws. Pope Francis recently said, “reason recognizes that religious freedom is a fundamental right of man, reflecting his highest dignity, that of seeking the truth and adhering to it, and recognizing it as an indispensable condition for realizing all his potential. Religious freedom is not simply freedom of thought or private worship. It is the freedom to live according to ethical principles, both privately and publicly, consequent to the truth one has found.” May we American Catholics work to change our laws and politics to make sure that Jesus Christ is glorified in all things, and may we always rely on the indisputable power of prayer. All are especially invited to our parish Holy Hour this Sunday evening at 4:00 to pray for a restoration of our right to religious liberty.

An Interview about Gardening

I want to give special thanks to long-time parishioner Nancy Hoppus who has taken it upon herself to clean up the space in front of the school which had become so overgrown recently. Nancy and her husband Tom, who some of us around the church simply refer to as “Mom and Dad,” have been volunteering and working around IHM for well over 20 years. When I stopped down to see the progress of Nancy’s work the other day and thank her, she told me the story of how Sr. Eileen (another of the CDP nuns who have served here at IHM, and who I am sure many of you remember) had first developed that area into a flower garden. Back then, Nancy said, the area was beautifully manicured and full of different kinds of flowers. Many of the perennials are still there, although they’ve become a little wild. “One time,” Nancy said, “Sr. Eileen fell down the concrete steps while gardening and broke her hip. She had to use a shovel as a crutch and got herself up the flight of steps to her car. Then she drove herself to the hospital.” Wow!

Nobody’s tougher than a nun!

When I mentioned Sr. Eileen’s garden later that day to Sr. Armella, she also remembered all the work that went into it. She said that parishioner Amrita Gailliot, God rest her soul, was Sr. Eileen’s diligent helper. One day Sr. Armella went down to get some flowers, and she was surprised by how hot and stagnant the air could be down in the garden area. But that never

stopped Sr. Eileen or Amrita; they toiled away with bent back or bent knee and made that area as beautiful as it could be. Unfortunately, the garden has lost some of its beauty in recent times, but it is starting to look a little better. Thanks again, Nancy, for your help. And thanks to all of those who have come before us in service to our parish, for the great memories they have left us and for the top-notch legacy they have handed on to us.

“Pray to Your Lord and God”—an IHM Parishioner Writes a Song

With his consent, I would like to share with you a powerful story about one of our parishioners, Mr. Michael Nagel. Mike sings in the choir for our 9:00 Sunday Mass. He has done this for years now, not because he thinks he’s a wonderful singer, but because of his deep love for the Lord Jesus, which he finds himself able to express best in song. In October of 2012, Mike was admitted to the hospital with a very serious medical condition that could have taken his life. I continue in Mike’s own words: “As I lay in the hospital bed late at night I began to pray to Our Lord, and I made my peace with Him. I have never been so ready for Heaven as I was that night. A calm came over me, and I was not afraid. I began to recite words and then I began to put a melody with the words.” Despite having no real training in music other than his music ministry in church, Mike was given the gift of a song that night, words, melody, and all. And he has chosen to share that gift with us. Mike met with the Music Director at St. Agnes Church, Bobby Fisher, who helped him by writing a score for Mike’s song and submitting it to Oregon Catholic Press for publication. This Sunday at the 9:00 Mass the choir made Mike’s prayer their prayer—and indeed, our prayer—during the Communion meditation. Let us pray for our brother, Mike, that his song may be published by OCP and that we may look forward to singing it more in the future. We thank Mike for sharing this special gift of God with us, and we thank God for all that He has done in Mike’s life and in the life of each of us: truly His mercy endures forever! I close with the lyrics from Mike’s song, which is dedicated to his deceased brother, Tim Nagel:

“Pray to Your Lord and God” by Michael Nagel

Pray to your Lord and God.
Tell Him all your fears.
Pray to your Lord and God.
Let Him join in your tears.
Then one day He’ll come your way,
hold out His hand and say,
“Come follow me.
I’ll take you home.
Heaven is where you’ll be.”
Pray to your Lord and God.
Spread His holy Name.
Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is His glorious Name.

Pray to your Lord and God.
Tell Him all your sins.
Pray to your Lord and God.
In the end you will win.
And on that day He'll come your way,
hold out His hand and say,
"Come follow me.
I'll take you home.
Heaven is where we'll be."
Pray to your Lord and God.
Spread His holy Name.
Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is His glorious Name.
Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is His glorious Name.

Take Jesus by the Hand

The other week we had our annual evening of reflection and review for our parish Lectors and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHCs). It was quite an enjoyable time and also eye-opening for me in hearing about some of the problems our ministers face during their Sunday ministry. One of the requests I got from our EMHCs was to do a little more catechesis with the whole parish about how to receive Holy Communion in the hand. So, at their request, I ask for you to consider the way that you receive Holy Communion.

As you may know, there are two ways that you may receive the Holy Eucharist: you may receive on the tongue (which is the norm given for the whole Church, the Church Universal), or you may receive in your hands (which the U.S. Bishops got permission for us to do, and which is the norm for U.S. Catholics). It is hard to monkey around with receiving Holy Communion on the tongue—the only common problem is that some of us don't open our mouths wide enough.

However, there seem to be an endless variety of ways—abuses really—that we find to receive Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God, in our hands. There is one (count 'em: one) and only one proper way to receive Holy Communion in the hand. That is to place the hand by which we are going to pick up the Sacred Host UNDERNEATH our other hand (that's right under left for most of us), open the palm of that top hand nice and flat, and then wait for Jesus to be lovingly laid in our hand. Think of the glory of such a thing! It's like being the Virgin Mary holding the Christ-child! Anyway, after we respond to the minister's words with a nice, loud, from-the-heart "AMEN," we carefully take the Sacred Host from the palm of our top hand with the fingers of our other hand, and place the Body and Blood of Our Lord reverently in our mouths.

Having described the proper procedure, let us examine some of the best ways NOT to receive Holy Communion, many of which are rather common, unfortunately:

- **Grab That Jesus:** this is when we walk up to the minister and, as he or she shows us the Host, we reach out and grab it from the minister's fingers. This is improper because Holy Communion is always something that we must receive, we cannot take it by our own power (which is what Adam and Eve did in the Original Sin, remember?).

- Pick A Hand, Any Hand: this is when we put both of our hands side by side and the minister has to decide which hand you want the Lord in (and believe me, I'm going to pick the wrong one).
- Not That Hand, The Other Hand: usually following from the "Pick A Hand, Any Hand" method, but also seen in other situations, this is when Our Lord ends up in our dominant hand instead of in our less coordinated hand. What this often means in practice is that we will flip Our Lord from one hand to the other in order to pick Him up. If you notice yourself having to do this, it means that you need to start thinking about where your hands go before you get up to the front of the Communion Procession. Practice it if you need to; be prepared.
- But I Only Have One Hand: this one happens in many ways—people with an injured hand or arm, people using a cane, people holding their missalette (please don't do that), and people who actually only have one hand. The most common reason, however, is when we decide that we have to carry our children up in the Communion Procession. However it comes about, what it usually means is that we're going to pop Our Lord into our mouths with one hand, like a piece of popcorn.

Now, believe me, I know that there are lots of seemingly good reasons why we come up with these various ways of receiving Holy Communion. I understand that you don't want to leave your children in the pew by themselves. I understand that you are injured or have arthritis. But we are dealing with the Almighty Incarnate God, Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died on the cross out of love for us. Our first concern must always be showing reverence and attention, as well as protecting Our Lord from ever being dropped on the floor (which happens far too often here at IHM). Please, please listen to what I am telling you as your spiritual father and shepherd. If you are not able to receive Holy Communion in the hand according to the procedure established by the U.S. Bishops, then you really must receive on the tongue. There is no other option.

While I'm on this topic, let me just mention two other things. First, sometimes people want to receive the Precious Blood of Christ by dipping their Host into the chalice. Understandably, people sometimes want to do this because they are sick and don't want to communicate germs, but still want to receive under both species. However, this practice (known as intinction) is strictly forbidden for anyone except the minister to do. Again, this is because we don't "take" Communion, we "receive" it. Please don't do this; you will be stopped if you try. Second, you may have seen recently on the news about that black mass (which I intentionally leave uncapitalized) which was publically performed in Oklahoma City back in September. There are still true Satanists in the world today, worshiping Satan and looking for opportunities to blaspheme Jesus Christ by desecrating consecrated Communion Hosts. If you ever see anyone returning to the pew or trying to leave church with a Host, please gently but firmly stop him and ask him to return the Host to the priest or minister. If the person refuses, please go immediately and tell the priest or deacon. Please remember also that most of the time these occurrences are mistakes by people who are non-Catholics or who suffer from a mental handicap; they are usually not malicious. The greatest law is always charity. Thank you for your patience and

attention to this long and rambling instruction. “O Sacrament most holy, O Sacrament divine, all praise and all thanksgiving be every moment Thine.”

Understanding the Extraordinary Synod on Marriage and the Family, part 1

Whether or not you’ve been keeping up with the recent reactions to the recently completed Extraordinary Synod in the Catholic media, I’m sure you’ve been hearing reactions from the secular media. What exactly is going on with this synod, and how can you answer questions from your non-Catholic family members and friends? Let’s take just a minute to reflect on the synod. If you’d like some more in-depth discussion, you might attend (or send your husband to) the December 6th Men’s Prayer Breakfast where Dcn. Greg will present on the “Synod on the Family: What’s All the Fuss?”

First of all, what is this synod? An extraordinary synod is one called to discuss specific, urgent issues. A synod is not a policy-making body, i.e., it doesn’t create or revise Church laws. It is rather an opportunity for the Pope and bishops to listen to (in this case) married couples and family experts, as well as each other, as the first step in guiding the Church of Christ on important issues. Notice that “first step” part. Now that the synod is over, the bishops will reflect on the discussion until next year, when the regularly scheduled Ordinary Synod of Bishops will happen. There, the College of Bishops will make some official recommendations to the Pope. After the Pope prays and thinks about it all, he will write some sort of document (it’s often an encyclical). If there are to be any sort of changes in Church law, it will only come at this point.

But, what are these changes that so many people seem to be expecting from this synod-process? Secular society is often looking for changes in Church doctrine. However, Church doctrine does not change—it is the very teaching (doctrine) that was handed down to us from Jesus Christ and the Apostles. Now, Church doctrine does develop as we continue to learn new things, but it never just changes from saying “this is bad” to “this is good.” One thing that we Catholics know is that the Church will never change her teaching on what constitutes marriage, the immorality of fornication, contraception, *in vitro* fertilization, etc., and the immorality of homosexual acts. These doctrines are based on Jesus’ Own teaching. Not only will we not, but we in fact cannot change these doctrines. So, are there any changes the synod is calling for? In a sense, I think there are. But we’ll talk about that next time.

Understanding the Extraordinary Synod on Marriage and the Family, part 2

Well, sorry that this second part is a week late; I was delayed by funerals. May the souls of all the Faithful Departed rest in peace. So, as we said last time, no changes in Church doctrine will be coming out of the process that the Extraordinary Synod has begun because Church doctrine does not change. But lots of other things about the Church do change in every age, and I think that Pope Francis and the bishops want to point out to the Catholic world what some of the changes we need are. As we have come to expect from Pope Francis, the biggest change has to do with attitude, that is to say, with our hearts.

Pope Francis didn’t pull any punches or worry about being ‘politically correct’ when he gave his address to the General Assembly at the conclusion of the synod. He said that the Church today

faces two temptations: “One, a temptation to hostile inflexibility, that is, wanting to close oneself within the written word, (the letter) and not allowing oneself to be surprised by God, by the God of surprises, (the spirit); within the law, within the certitude of what we know and not of what we still need to learn and to achieve. From the time of Christ, it is the temptation of the zealous, of the scrupulous, of the solicitous and of the so-called – today – ‘traditionalists’ and also of the intellectuals. The [second] temptation to a destructive tendency to goodness, that in the name of a deceptive mercy binds the wounds without first curing them and treating them; that treats the symptoms and not the causes and the roots. It is the temptation of the ‘do-gooders,’ of the fearful, and also of the so-called “progressives and liberals.”

A perfect example of this problem the Pope is talking about is the debate that has been going on in the media during the Extraordinary Synod over homosexuality. (Which, by the way, is pretty ironic since the final document of the synod did not even deal with homosexuality—because, of course, this synod was about marriage and family life, not homosexuality.) You may have heard about the outcry over statements in the half-way document such as, “Homosexuals have gifts and qualities to offer to the Christian community.” According to the BBC article “Catholic synod: Vatican family review signals shift on homosexuality,” which is rather common in its presentation, we learn the following: “Human Rights Campaign, a leading US gay rights organisation, said the document set a ‘dramatic new tone’. The London-based Catholic gay rights groups Quest called parts of it a ‘breakthrough’. However Voice Of The Family, a conservative Roman Catholic organisation, rejected the interim report as a ‘betrayal’.”

The really sad part of this article for me is how people think that it is a new thing for us Catholics to recognize the gifts and qualities of homosexual persons. The Church always recognizes the dignity and gifts of each person, even if they are stuck in a life of sin. And the Church does not consider someone to be sinning simply because they *feel* homosexual desires, but only if they *perform* homosexual acts. There’s nothing new in what the synod said, but the problem is people think it’s new. And that’s the real change that Pope Francis and, following his lead, the bishops of the world are working for: to *first of all* teach the world about God’s mercy and love (that’s the Pope’s challenge to what he terms “traditionalism”), and then afterwards to *teach* people about God’s moral laws that keep us out of sin (that’s his challenge to what he terms “liberalism”). You see, the Church asks a hard thing of sinners—she asks them to acknowledge their sins. We should recognize for our brothers and sisters—indeed, some of our fellow parishioners—who are living in a homosexual relationship or are divorced and remarried outside the Church, recognize that it causes them pain when they hear that they cannot receive Holy Communion until they are ready to change their life. It is true, we can’t change that reality—again, that doctrine—but we can perhaps change how much pain it causes them by emphasizing God’s love and our parish community’s love for them despite their problematic situation. So, whether we consider ourselves “traditional” or “liberal” or somewhere in between, let us take to heart the words of Pope Francis and whatever other teachings may come out of the process begun by the Extraordinary Synod. Whether we like what the Church’s Magisterium is teaching or not, the real question must always be: how is Jesus revealing His Will to me through His

doctrine and the guidance of His Church? Because the old saying is true: the more things change, the more they stay the same. If we want to keep the eternal Law of God, then we must always examine how we do that in our present age. Otherwise, we might cease keeping the Law as God's Law and begin to keep it merely as our own law.

Faith and Works: A Christmas Reflection, part 1

“Today in the city of David a Savior has been born for you who is Christ the Lord”—thus spake the angel to the shepherds (see Lk. 3). And these tidings were to be “good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” What is so good and joyful? Why is the message for “all the people,” Jews and Gentiles alike? Because Jesus Christ is our Savior. We need to meditate upon that a little bit as we enter into the Christmas Season. What does a savior do? Why should it make a difference in my life?

Perhaps we can get some perspective here by revisiting one of the oldest debates from the days of the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s. Few things in life are more divisive than what we believe about God. (Often people like to say that “religion” is divisive, by which they usually mean the institutional structures of religions, but in truth the things that divide us are the tenants of faith themselves, what we believe.) This is admittedly unfortunate since God wants us to live in peace, harmony, and universal brotherhood. And yet it makes a certain amount of sense as well because there is nothing more important in life than knowing rightly and loving perfectly our God. Differences here cannot be taken lightly. One major division between the Catholic Church and the Protestant Reformers—which still exists today between Catholics and a certain number of Protestants—is the debate over salvation. How are we saved: by faith alone or by faith and works?

We might be tempted to say, who cares? Isn't it all just semantics and pie-in-the-sky theology? But that wasn't the Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther's experience. He had grown up Catholic and actually had become an Augustinian monk. But his life was full of stress and anxiety (sound familiar?). Luther knew that he was a sinner. He lived in a time where the importance of deeds of charity, good works, was highly emphasized (as indeed it should be in every age). But Luther had also picked up the idea from the Catholic monks and teachers of his day that we had to do enough of these good works, and do them well enough, in order to earn our right to enter into Heaven. And Luther knew he couldn't do it. He was too weak, sinful, and imperfect. What he really needed was a savior, someone to win Heaven for him since he could not win it for himself. Obviously, Luther realized that Jesus Christ is just such a Savior; he found inspiration in St. Paul's saying, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

Unfortunately, Luther emphasized this insight so much that he overemphasized it. He came to the conclusion that we are saved, as he said, “by faith alone.” We'll flesh out why that's a problem in next week's article, but please don't miss the importance of Luther's insight—which is the insight of all faithful Christians throughout history, beginning with the Twelve Apostles and St. Paul. What Luther had completely right was that we cannot save ourselves. We are not pleasing to God by ourselves. For that matter, we're not even pleasing a lot of the time to our

spouses, our family, our friends—those people who are supposed to love us most. If we think that we can stand before God at the end of life and say, “I’m a good person; I never hurt anyone,” then we are dead wrong. We do, in fact, hurt people all of the time. Maybe not in an obvious way, but how many times may our gossip, our lies, our passing over of those in need, have really damaged the lives of others? Certainly, and before all else, our sins are the reason that Jesus had to die on the cross—because they made it impossible for our God, Who is love but Who is also holy, to bring us into His presence. We cannot save ourselves.

To this rediscovered insight of Luther, the Catholic Church whole-heartedly agrees. Now, it is true that certain Catholics at Luther’s time disagreed with him, and Luther was right to contradict and castigate them because they did not really know what the Church teaches. When the Church called the Council of Trent to respond to the challenges the Protestant Reformers had raised, it said the following in its Sixth Session: “no one can be just except he to whom the merits of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ are communicated” (Chapter VII.3). “It is furthermore declared that in adults the beginning of that justification must proceed from the predisposing grace of God through Jesus Christ, that is, from His vocation, whereby, *without any merits on their part*, they are called” (Chapter V, my emphasis). I would quote a little more extensively from Trent except each paragraph is basically one sentence and it’s really hard to read. Suffice it to say that Trent and Luther are in agreement: the grace of justification (what St. Paul and Luther call salvation) is a free gift of God in Jesus Christ. No one can merit this grace, but Jesus merits it for us—He saves us. That, in a nutshell, is the joyful proclamation of Christmas: Today our Savior is born! All of that anxiety and fear can be thrown away! God has come to save you, to forgive your sins, and give you a chance at a new beginning! No wonder the angels appear to the shepherds praising God. It is with this faith in Christ as our Savior that we approach this glorious day of Christmas. Next week we will consider the Catholic synthesis of how faith and works fit together when we truly make Jesus Christ Lord of our lives.

Faith and Works: A Christmas Reflection, part 2

Last week we talked about the joy that we feel when we understand that Jesus is really our Savior. In other words, the joy that comes from realizing that we don’t have to try and be ‘good enough’ for Heaven because Jesus paid the price of our entry in His Blood—a joy which was memorably exemplified in the life of Martin Luther during the Protestant Reformation. So then, if Martin Luther was right about that and it’s all so joyful, then where did all of the division come in?

Well, you may have noticed last time that while Luther—following St. Paul—speaks of the grace of “salvation,” Catholic doctrine—actually also following St. Paul—speaks of the grace of “justification.” St. Paul, of course, was not trying to build a precise, theological vocabulary when he wrote his letters, so he uses both terms, sometimes interchangeably. However, the tricky part about the word “salvation” is that it can mean two different things: it can mean the gift of God’s grace that makes us *able* to enter Heaven—for example, that hallmark Protestant question, “Have you been saved?” (e.g. see 2 Cor. 6:2; 2 Thes. 2:13). Or it can mean *actually getting to Heaven*, actually being saved (e.g. see Rom. 13:11; Phil. 2:12). See, as Catholics, we believe

that God made us free, and freedom comes with responsibility. Perhaps none of us can merit justification by his good works, but all of us can *lose* it by our sinful works. With this point, early Protestants disagreed, and indeed, even today many Protestants believe that once you are saved you are always saved, even if you commit horrible sins later in life. If we return to the Council of Trent, we read, “If anyone says that a man once justified can sin no more, nor lose grace [...] let him be anathema” (Canon 23). “Anathema,” you may know, is a New Testament word that means “cursed.” Strong language, but the point is to make you pay attention: this is important. This is the distinction Catholics draw between “justification” and “salvation” as we strive to interpret the Scriptures according to the Mind of Christ. Justification means being brought into a right relationship with God through the free gift of Jesus Christ our Savior. For this, as Luther said, all that is required is faith, the acceptance of Jesus as our Lord and Savior. But to actually get to Heaven, to actually attain salvation, requires more: it requires that after we are justified by faith, we live a life of good works.

And so it was with this difference of belief that Protestantism began and division entered into the Catholic world of the 1500s. (Naturally, there were lots more differences in belief going on than just the “faith vs. works” debate, and it was all of them together that began the Protestant Reformation—or as it seems more fittingly called to the Catholic mind, the Protestant Revolt). As I said, and as hopefully all Christians today would agree with, it is a truly sorrowful thing, a great harm to the world, and displeasing to God that Christian brotherhood should be so violently divided. Jesus Himself said at the Last Supper: “I pray not only for them [His disciples], but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me” (Jn. 17:20-21). Today, through the ecumenical process, whereby Christians of different traditions try to learn about each other and find common ground, all Christians are called to work for the day when we can again agree on our beliefs in God and our interpretations of the Bible and so truly be for the world the One Church of Christ. The Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation rejoice that at least one step in that process was taken in 1999 when they both signed the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. In this document, both sides agreed that, at least regarding the role of faith and works in justification, our beliefs are actually the same even though we tend to use different language. Yes, that’s right, the successors of Martin Luther and the successors of the Council of Trent have both agreed that we actually teach the same thing about justification. Too bad we didn’t realize that 500 years ago, but it’s never too late to correct a mistake—and hopefully only the first of many.

And so, to sum up, we might say that we don’t need works to initially receive God’s grace, but we do need works to keep us from losing that grace. That’s what good works accomplish. They are the living out of God’s grace, the action of Christ Who now dwells in us acting through us. They increase that grace of justification in our lives, as well as safeguard it from loss due to serious sin. But then we ask the question, doesn’t that just dump all of those anxieties and fears of life that Luther was trying to escape from back on us again? Admittedly, it does strike a little fear into us—just enough to keep us from becoming complacent. After all, Jesus says,

“Whatsoever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me. [...] Whatsoever you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me” (Matt. 25:40, 45). It is upon the choices and actions of our lives that we will ultimately be judged: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive recompense, according to what he did in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Cor. 5:10). And yet, just as it is our Christmas faith in Christ as truly God that gives us the joy of a Savior, it is our Christmas faith in Christ as truly man that gives us the determination to do good works, for they are the working of Christ within us. We find that good works are not the mandate of a critical-eyed God Who is always watching to see if we fail to live up to the requirement of Heaven. Rather, good works are the opportunity for the love of Christ within us (a.k.a. the Holy Spirit) to manifest Himself. As such, good works bring us not anxiety, but joy. This is the mystery of the Incarnation—the mystery of Christmas—that because He is both God and man, we who now learn in Him what it truly means to be man, can also hope to learn, and indeed begin to learn, what it means to be God. As the Collect at Mass for Christmas Day says, “O God, who wonderfully created the dignity of human nature and still more wonderfully restored it, grant, we pray, that we may share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity.”

Tragedy or Comedy: Which Is Greater?

This past Sunday for Epiphany, I preached about how Jesus Christ shifts our world view from one that is tragic (to use literary terms) to one that is comic. Since I was a literature major in college, tragedies and comedies have always interested me. Many and masterful are the literary works of both tragedy and comedy, but—I ask—which is truly the higher form of art? Certainly some of the most classical and enduring of all literature are the Greek tragedies, such as the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles. In the ancient world, many, especially the Stoics and the Skeptics, believed tragedy to be the highest form of literature because it reflected both man’s majestic greatness as well as his terrifying finitude. It presented man as he truly was—a being trapped by fate and the gods in a temporal destiny far too inadequate for his natural potential. Many atheistic or agnostic moderns would also agree with this tragic view of human destiny; I think here especially of the so-called “absurdist” and works such as Albert Camus’ *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

The Christian, of course, cannot accept this claim of tragedy as either the highest form of art or the truth of life. For us, “the joy of the Resurrection renews the whole world,” as the Easter Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer so beautifully says (in the old translation, that is). In Christ, death is conquered and we come to hope in ultimate justice, peace, and happiness. Thus, many people have argued that comedy (in its traditional sense of a story with an ending for the good, rather than in the restricted, modern sense of a humorous story) is in fact the highest literary art form. Certainly it is only in the Christian mindset that the greatest comedies are written, such as Dante’s *Divine Comedy*—quite possibly the greatest literary work ever created. Indeed, some have argued that the Christian cannot even write a true tragedy as the ancient Greeks did because of his hope in the Risen Lord. Even Shakespeare’s masterful tragedy *King Lear* is, I and others would argue, truly comic in its ending.

Yet, perhaps we have asked the wrong question when it comes to which literary art form is the highest. J. R. R. Tolkien had a poignant understanding of how completely the Fall pervades Creation, especially man, and how unconquerable the presence of sin in the world ultimately is for man until Christ's Second Coming. Nevertheless, he firmly believed that God's providential design allows men who act virtuously to achieve lives of comedic heroism through which we can see a glimpse of the True and the Good, that is, of God Himself. As he says: "[that] peculiar quality of the 'joy' in successful fantasy can be explained as a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth" (Lang Lecture on Fairy Tales). The supreme task of literature, Tolkien argues, is to give the reader that moment of heart-bursting joy out of the midst of sorrow. Tolkien coined the term "eucatastrophe" to express this concept, and it is a concept that contains both the tragic and the comic.

Perhaps, then, it is in some sense better not to talk of one being higher than the other, but to see them as both necessary to achieve literature's highest form. True, man is redeemed in Christ Jesus. True also, man is also the source of great evil in the world. Truest of all, God brings a greater good out of every evil, a greater joy out of every sorrow, and a greater beauty out of every imperfection than would otherwise have been: allowing us to cry with the Easter Exsultet, "O truly necessary sin of Adam, destroyed completely by the Death of Christ! O happy fault that earned for us so great, so glorious a Redeemer!" I answer my original question this way then: in a certain sense, neither comedy nor tragedy is the higher art form because both are necessary for literature to achieve its most powerful presentation of man's redemption by grace from his sinful state.

The Sacrament of Anointing: Jesus Forgives and Heals

February 11th is the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, under which title the Blessed Virgin works many miraculous healings in both body and soul at her shrine in Lourdes, France. St. John Paul II therefore designated Feb. 11th as the World Day of the Sick. This day is to be, as he wrote, "a special time of prayer and sharing, of offering one's suffering for the good of the Church and of reminding us to see in our sick brother and sister the face of Christ" (*Letter Instituting the World Day of the Sick*, 13 May 1992, par. 3). In honor of this day, we would like to have a special day of prayer and anointing for the sick in our parish on the following Sunday, Feb. 15th (which is also the last Sunday before Lent—alleluia, alleluia!).

Since the Eucharist is "the source and summit" (*Lumen gentium*, 11) not only of the Christian life, but also of the other Sacraments, it is fitting at times to offer those Sacraments in the context of the Sunday Mass (with the obvious exception of Confession). This is all the more appropriate because the Sacraments build up the whole body of Christ; they are really not personal or family events, but parish events. This reality is better expressed when the Sacrament can be celebrated with the parish. For this reason, we are going to offer the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick during Sunday Masses on Feb. 15th (and at 5:00 P.M. on the 14th).

Who should receive this Sacrament? We read in the Bible, "Are there any who are sick among you? Let them send for the priests of the Church, and let the priests pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.; and the prayer of faith will save the sick persons, and the

Lord will raise them up; and if they have committed any sins, their sins will be forgiven them” (Jas. 5:13-15). So, what qualifies as “sick” when it comes to this Sacrament? All the Sacraments are designed to strengthen us in a particular part of the spiritual life. The Church teaches that the Anointing of the Sick is intended to bring the grace of Christ not to those simply suffering from a bad cold or chronic back pain, but rather to those moments of life when we experience serious illness, so that they might unite their sufferings to those of Christ, dying on the cross. In the Second Vatican Council’s *Constitution on the Liturgy*, we read, “as soon as any one of the faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, the fitting time for him to receive this sacrament has certainly already arrived” (article 73).

The Council is making two points here. First, the Sacrament of Anointing is connected in some degree with the end of life and the mystery of death. At least a potential danger of death should be present when we receive this Sacrament (e.g., a surgery to remove a cancerous tumor, even if the cancer is at a very early stage). On the other hand, the Council does not want priests to be too scrupulous about giving the Sacrament or to delay (as the old practice used to be) until the literal hour of death. That’s why it says that when you begin to be in danger of death, the time for the Sacrament has *already* arrived.

Just so we all are clear on this point, let me quote from the ritual book *Pastoral Care of the Sick*, which says: “The priest should ensure that the abuse of delaying the reception of the sacrament does not occur, and that the celebration takes place while the sick person is capable of active participation. However, the intent of the conciliar reform (*Constitution on the Liturgy*, art. 73) that those needing the sacrament should seek it at the beginning of a serious illness should not be used to anoint those who are not proper subjects for the sacrament. The sacrament of the anointing of the sick should be celebrated only when a Christian’s health is seriously impaired by sickness or old age” (par. 99). Another paragraph reads, “Elderly people may be anointed if they have become notably weakened even though no serious illness is present” (par. 11).

So, what I would like you to do is the following: If you believe that your current health conditions may warrant the Anointing of the Sick, please contact me (ext. 222) or Fr. Norton (ext. 231). This way, we can help you evaluate whether it is time for you to receive this Sacrament, and we’ll also be able to know who’s coming to which Masses and be prepared to anoint them. This will also help us to know if we need to reserve the front pews and the handicap-accessible pews should the need arise. I know that most of us don’t like to admit when we are sick or in need of help, but part of our parish life is to pray for each other when in need. We must have the humility to admit our need for prayer and care so that we can be drawn closer to Jesus Christ through His People. Also, just a reminder that if you’re going to receive the Anointing of the Sick, you really should go to Confession first. As for the rest of you who are sick with less serious problems, we want to include you too. I am trying to organize some of our local charismatic prayer warriors to be present at one or more of our Masses that weekend to pray over any who are ill after Mass. We’ll give you more information about this soon. Lord Jesus Christ, forgiver of sins and healer of body and soul, have mercy on us!

Flying Bells?: Easter in France

When we try to think of symbols for Easter, we usually come up with eggs and bunnies, both symbols of new life. Naturally, there are the much richer and important symbols of Christ's Resurrection, the empty tomb, the various Resurrection appearances, Pentecost, etc. However, when we are young what we really remember and look forward to are the Easter Eggs brought by the Easter Bunny. I have recently realized that this cultural poverty when it comes to Easter is not universal, but more or less American. We have a parishioner here at IHM who is actually a first generation immigrant from France—the Eldest Daughter of the Church, as she was once known (I mean France, not our parishioner). She often tells me about the wonderful, rich cultural expressions of the Catholic faith that she grew up with as a little girl. She recently was kind enough to give me one of the (many) traditional Easter candies of the French—not a chocolate bunny, but a chocolate bell! Why a bell, you ask? Well, even an American Catholic can know the answer to that if you pay close attention to the special liturgies of the Easter Triduum. The ringing of bells has always been associated with joy. Thus, we ring bells during the *Gloria* on Holy Thursday as we remember the institution of the Eucharist. After that *Gloria*, however, we enter into the deep sorrow of Jesus' Passion and Death. Therefore, all bells (even the bell in front of church) are silenced until they are rung again during the *Gloria* of the Easter Vigil Mass. This, by the by, is the reason why the wooden clapper, or *crotalus*, is sounded during the consecration of Holy Thursday Mass instead of the bells. This is a universal Roman tradition, and it is from this tradition that the French find inspiration for treating their children on Easter. According to the Easter legends that the French tell their children, after the Holy Thursday Mass all of the church bells fly to the Vatican in Rome. Yeah, you heard that right. All the French bells fly to Rome to mourn Jesus' Death. Then, on Easter Sunday, they fly back just in time to ring in Jesus' Resurrection at the Easter Sunday Mass. As they fly, they drop chocolate eggs for the children to collect. How 'bout that, Easter Bunny—your French competition can fly! This wonderful French tradition reminds us how beautifully diverse the Catholic Church is, but also challenges us to find creative ways to connect our family celebrations of Easter more concretely to the ancient liturgy of our Church. *Vive la France! Vive Jésus-Christ!*



The Brown Scapular

This week our Third Graders will be enrolled in the Brown Scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel—congratulations! During the month of May, wherein we honor not only our earthly

mothers but especially our Heavenly Mother, it is helpful to remember the importance of the Brown Scapular in our faith. Of all scapulars, this one is the more important, and all Catholics really should be enrolled in the Brown Scapular. Most of us, of course, are—but do we actually wear it with devotion (which is really the only way that counts)? Here are the duties that we, as members in the family of Carmel, are called to live out:

- frequent participation in the Mass and reception of Holy Communion;
- frequent reading of and meditation on the Word of God in Sacred Scripture;
- the regular praying of at least part of the Liturgy of the Hours (or the Rosary);
- imitation of and devotion to Mary, the woman of faith who hears the Word of God and puts it into practice;
- the practice of the virtues, notably charity, chastity (according to one's state of life), and obedience to the will of God.

Remember also that one only has to be enrolled in the Brown Scapular once. After that, the enrollment and graces carry over even if you get a new Brown Scapular later. (Although you may still have the new scapular blessed, like rosaries and metals, if you so desire.) Our Lady of Mount Carmel, pray for us!

Jesus Present in the Eucharist: The Perspective of the Early Church

As we continue over these several weeks to meditate upon Jesus' real, true, and substantial Presence in the Most Holy Eucharist, it can be instructive to think about how old this belief is, from the very beginning, in fact. Here is a quotation from St. Justin Martyr who lived around A.D. 150 describing the Mass and Eucharist from his perspective—quite interesting because almost exactly the same as 2,000 years later! Consider:

“No one may share the Eucharist with us unless he believes that what we teach is true, unless he is washed in the regenerating waters of baptism for the remission of his sins, and unless he lives in accordance with the principles given us by Christ. We do not consume the eucharistic bread and wine as if it were ordinary food and drink, for we have been taught that as Jesus Christ our Savior became a man of flesh and blood by the power of the Word of God, so also the food that our flesh and blood assimilates for its nourishment becomes the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus by the power of his own words contained in the prayer of thanksgiving. The apostles, in their recollections, which are called gospels, handed down to us what Jesus commanded them to do. They tell us that he took bread, gave thanks and said: Do this in memory of me. This is my body. In the same way he took the cup, he gave thanks and said: This is my blood. The Lord gave this command to them alone. Ever since then we have constantly reminded one another of these things. The rich among us help the poor and we are always united. For all that we receive we praise the Creator of the universe through his Son Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit. On Sunday we have a common assembly of all our members, whether they live in the city or the outlying districts. The recollections of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as there is time. When the reader has finished, the president of the assembly speaks to us; he urges everyone to imitate the examples of virtue we have heard in the readings. Then we all stand up together and pray. On the conclusion of our prayer, bread and wine and water are

brought forward. The president offers prayers and gives thanks to the best of his ability, and the people give assent by saying, 'Amen.' The eucharist is distributed, everyone present communicates, and the deacons take it to those who are absent. The wealthy, if they wish, may make a contribution, and they themselves decide the amount. The collection is placed in the custody of the president, who uses it to help the orphans and widows and all who for any reason are in distress, whether because they are sick, in prison, or away from home. In a word, he takes care of all who are in need. We hold our common assembly on Sunday because it is the first day of the week, the day on which God put darkness and chaos to flight and created the world, and because on that same day our savior Jesus Christ rose from the dead. For he was crucified on Friday and on Sunday he appeared to his apostles and disciples and taught them the things that we have passed on for your consideration." (*First Apology* of St. Justin Martyr)