

Reflections

by the
Most Reverend Thomas J. Murphy



A Letter from the Holy Father

Pope John Paul II continued a custom begun last year of addressing a letter to the Bishops of the world on the feast of Holy Thursday. This year's letter focused on the Eucharist which the Holy Father called the "center and goal of all sacramental life."

The Holy Father's letter is a tremendous reminder to all of us on the importance of the Eucharist in our lives as members of the Christian Catholic community of Eastern Montana. The media has called our attention to certain points found in the Holy Father's letter to the Bishops. These would include the need for respect and reverence of all people receiving the Eucharist with the further caution that peoples' right to receive the Eucharist in the hand or on the tongue should be acknowledged. Moreover, the Holy Father called upon priests to recognize their responsibility for the distribution of the Eucharist and to share this ministry with lay persons only when the priest or deacon is not available. But once again the Holy Father stresses the preparation and ongoing formation of lay ministers of the Eucharist. The Holy Father also reminded priests to use approved liturgical texts and vestments. And finally, the Holy Father asked for attention to be given to those "educated on the basis of the old liturgy in Latin who experience the lack of this 'one language.' " But we are also reminded that if the Latin text is used, it must be the text of the revised ritual from Vatican II and must involve the full and active participation of the faithful.

The above points in the Holy Father's letter deserve and should receive compliance and respect from Bishops, priests and people of the Church. However, in reflecting on this letter, we are asked not only to appreciate the practical guidelines offered, but also to understand the theology which gives them meaning and significance.

The Eucharist is at the heart of Christian life and worship. The Eucharist becomes the focal point for gathering the Christian community together each week. Our identity as Catholics is celebrated in the Mass. Each parish community is asked to respond to the challenge of our belief in the Eucharist by truly making it a full and active celebration of the community. This does not just happen. It demands prayer and preparation by all involved. It demands special leadership from the priest not only in preparing a homily to reflect on the word of God, but to call the people of the parish community to a celebration of faith, hope and love.

Finally, the Holy Father urges the Christian community not to make the liturgy "a point of division and source of distortion of thought and of behavior." The Eucharist should be a gathering point, a convergence of faith. The Eucharist is our greatest treasure within the Church. It's good to receive a letter from the Holy Father to remind us of the riches we possess and the respect and reverence we should have for this gift.