

Reflections

by the
Most Reverend Thomas J. Murphy



The Sunday Liturgy – An Opportunity for All to Participate

In the short time that I have served as the Bishop of Eastern Montana, I have had the opportunity to meet many people at various gatherings of diocesan and parish organizations in addition to civic affairs in communities of the diocese. But already I realize that the most important focal point for gathering the Christian Catholic community together is when we celebrate the Sunday liturgy. It is at the celebration of the Sunday liturgy, whether on a Saturday evening or sometime Sunday itself, that a Roman Catholic community publicly manifests its faith and is asked to experience a worship of faith that is expected to sustain us for the week ahead.

Maybe it is because we attend mass regularly each week that we take the Sunday liturgy for granted. However, that would be tragic. The celebration of Sunday liturgy is expected to gather the various fragments of our lives during the past week and to offer them with the elements of bread and wine to the Father. In the course of the liturgy, we have a right to be nourished by the Word of God, the homily of the priest, the prayers of our fellow Christians, and the Eucharistic banquet in which we are invited to participate.

The celebration of the Sunday liturgy is not the responsibility of the priest alone. The priest who presides at and celebrates the Eucharist has the responsibility of leading his community in prayer which presumes that he will be a man of faith who recognizes his responsibility as President of the assembly which comes together for worship. The priest has a serious obligation to recognize the importance of the Sunday homily as a time for reflection and insight into the Word of God that has been proclaimed. At no other time in the course of the week does a priest have the opportunity to motivate, inspire, encourage and instruct so many people as he does at the Sunday homily. Before and after the Sunday liturgy, the priest is able to meet and greet and welcome the people who come together for this central act of our Catholic faith.

But others also join with the priest in the celebration of the Sunday liturgy. Hopefully, there are Liturgy teams in parishes which plan a theme for the Sunday liturgy by using the Sunday readings to develop a particular parish's response to the Word of God. These same liturgy teams could well propose and utilize songs that convey the theme of the Sunday liturgy. Banners might well be made and prayers of the faithful might be composed that would respond to the needs of the community that comes together for worship.

Since Vatican II, lay people have had more and more a greater responsibility in the celebration of liturgy. Readers share with the community the Word of God and they should never take the responsibility for granted. Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist have a sacred responsibility which must be evidenced in the respect and reverence for the Eucharist in the liturgy as well as in the course of their own lives.

Though the celebration of Eucharist remains the same, the options offered by the Church in the course of the celebration are many. Music offers one important option with the possibility of a choir, community involvement, or guitar group.

But there is one element in the celebration of Eucharist which has no option and that is that the celebration must be the action of the community which comes together. Participation in the liturgy is essential for all in attendance.

Continued on next page

The Sunday Liturgy – An Opportunity for All to Participate

It has been a joy for me to celebrate the Sunday liturgy with the parishes in our Diocese. I am becoming more and more convinced that this celebration of Sunday liturgy should be the foremost priority in each of our parishes throughout the diocese because of its importance not only to local parish community, but because through the Sunday liturgy we join with each other as a Diocesan community and we join with a universal Church in the public proclamation and celebration of our faith.

+++++

As a Diocese, we are blessed not only with the service of the diocesan priests who staff our parishes and institutions, but we are very fortunate to have the services and gift of the members of religious communities who minister to the people of our diocese. At the beginning of October, three priests from the Capuchin community celebrated their 25th anniversary as priests. They are Fr. Fabian Fehring (Hardin), Fr. Chester Poppa (Broadus), and Fr. Emmett Hoffman (Culbertson). Congratulations to each of these men and may they have many more years of life and happiness in service to God's people. We also rejoice in the 50th anniversary of Fr. Patrick Berther (Ekalaka) as a member of the Capuchin community. To these priests and to all members of religious communities for men and women in our diocese, may I express the deepest gratitude of the diocese for the gift of ministry on behalf of all of us.