



A BENEFICIAL PRESENCE

The liturgy is one of the most important places where the presence of Jesus is active in our world. A liturgy of the Word reminds us over and over how Jesus is the very Word coming to us today. It is a Word of Life that gathers and nourishes. I urge you to have a deep devotion for these celebrations of the Word. Who ignores Scripture runs the risk of ignoring Jesus himself. It is the Word that gives meaning to each of the seven sacraments; it is an essential component of every sacramental celebration; it is too bad that too often we only skim over the proclamation of the Word, especially in the celebration of the sacrament of penance and reconciliation. In what follows I would like to briefly recall this presence of Jesus at the heart of the renewal of each one of the seven sacraments.

« BAPTISED IN JESUS »

It is with gratitude and pride that we acknowledge the renewal already taking place for the adequate preparation and celebration of baptism. Parents, baptism preparation teams, pastors and pastoral agents are taking great care in this preparation. If such a celebration is a special event for the new-born's family, such is not always the case for the parish as a whole. In many places it will be important to place greater value to baptism preparation ministry so as to better indicate that the reception of a new member in the community is a major event. United with Jesus himself, the baptised person becomes sign and presence of Jesus in our world today.

« CONFIRMED IN JESUS »

Jesus not only gives himself, but he also gives us his breath of life, his Holy Spirit. I warmly congratulate all the parents, catechists and pastors for all they are doing for a renewal of this sacrament. The celebration of such a sacrament does not concern only the one to be confirmed, but the community as a whole. It is the community also that is renewed by the Spirit who gives it the power to witness to the presence of Jesus in our world and renders it more and more responsible for the community's future.

« NOURISHED ON JESUS »

This third sacrament completes the Christian initiation cycle. Nourished by the body and blood of Jesus, Christians not only do eucharist but day-to-day become eucharist themselves. This deep communion with Jesus and his members inspires one to communion with one's brothers and sisters. This is what we call building up the kingdom of Jesus. This is a movement of renewal since every eucharistic celebration sends forth the Christian on a mission in the midst of the world. The Eucharist becomes the very heart of the mission. Between 1996 and the year 2000 we shall have held five diocesan eucharistic congresses in preparation for the year 2000, to help us keep the memory of Jesus alive.

« CONVERTED AND RECONCILED »

It is not always easy to perceive the renewal behind this sacrament which for centuries focused on obtaining forgiveness. The renewal will require much more effort if we want to promote this sacrament as a sign of forgiveness and of reconciliation enlightened by the Word of God. « *Repent, and believe the Good News.* » [Mark 1:15] This invitation of Jesus is still being made today. It is the basis of the Gospel of Jesus: with a new heart and a new mind it is possible for us to have the love, kindness, mercy and faithfulness of God and to believe in the confidence he has in us, which allows us to keep on being associated with his mission despite our sinful state.

« WITNESSES OF GOD'S LOVE »

There seems to be an ever-growing and marvellous deepening of the sense of Christian marriage. Thanks to adult religious education, to marriage preparation sessions, to homilies on the topic, and to family counselling services, we are getting a better grasp of the mission associated with this great sacrament. Jesus acknowledges the love of man and woman and makes it a sign of the love that he has for humankind. Givers of life, the Christian couple are bid to grow in love by witnessing daily to the love of Jesus. Through the grace of this sacrament ever-renewed in prayer, dialogue and celebration of the other sacraments, spouses can not only persevere in this mission but also develop fully.

« UNITED WITH THE SUFFERINGS OF JESUS »

The sacrament of the anointing of the sick is a gift from Jesus. In it he brings comfort to a sick brother or sister. « Do not be afraid: I am with you. » If Extreme Unction, because it referred to extreme of final moments was viewed for what it actually was - of death at one's door - the renewal of this sacrament of the living which is the anointing of the sick is better accepted and celebrated. Through this sacrament, Jesus joins his own sufferings to those of his suffering brothers and sisters. Jesus took all suffering upon himself, and this should be enough for us to take up our daily cross and that we bear it together, he with us, and we with him.

« DEACONS, PRIESTS, AND BISHOPS OF JESUS »

Jesus was established priest of the new and everlasting covenant through the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and it was Jesus' will that there be a diversity of services in the Church. [Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:5] It is Christ himself who gives to all the redeemed the dignity of the royal priesthood. Out of love for his own, he chooses those who will share in his ministry, through the imposition of hands. They shall have to devote themselves to serving his people, to nourish it with his word and give it life through his sacraments. They are to be authentic witnesses to faith and love, ready to give up their lives like the Christ, for their brothers and sisters. These words from the preface of the chrism mass proclaim what deacons, priests, and bishops become, through ordination: distinctive witnesses to Jesus' love, messengers of Jesus' joy, ministers of his Word and sacraments, and servants of the people of God.

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