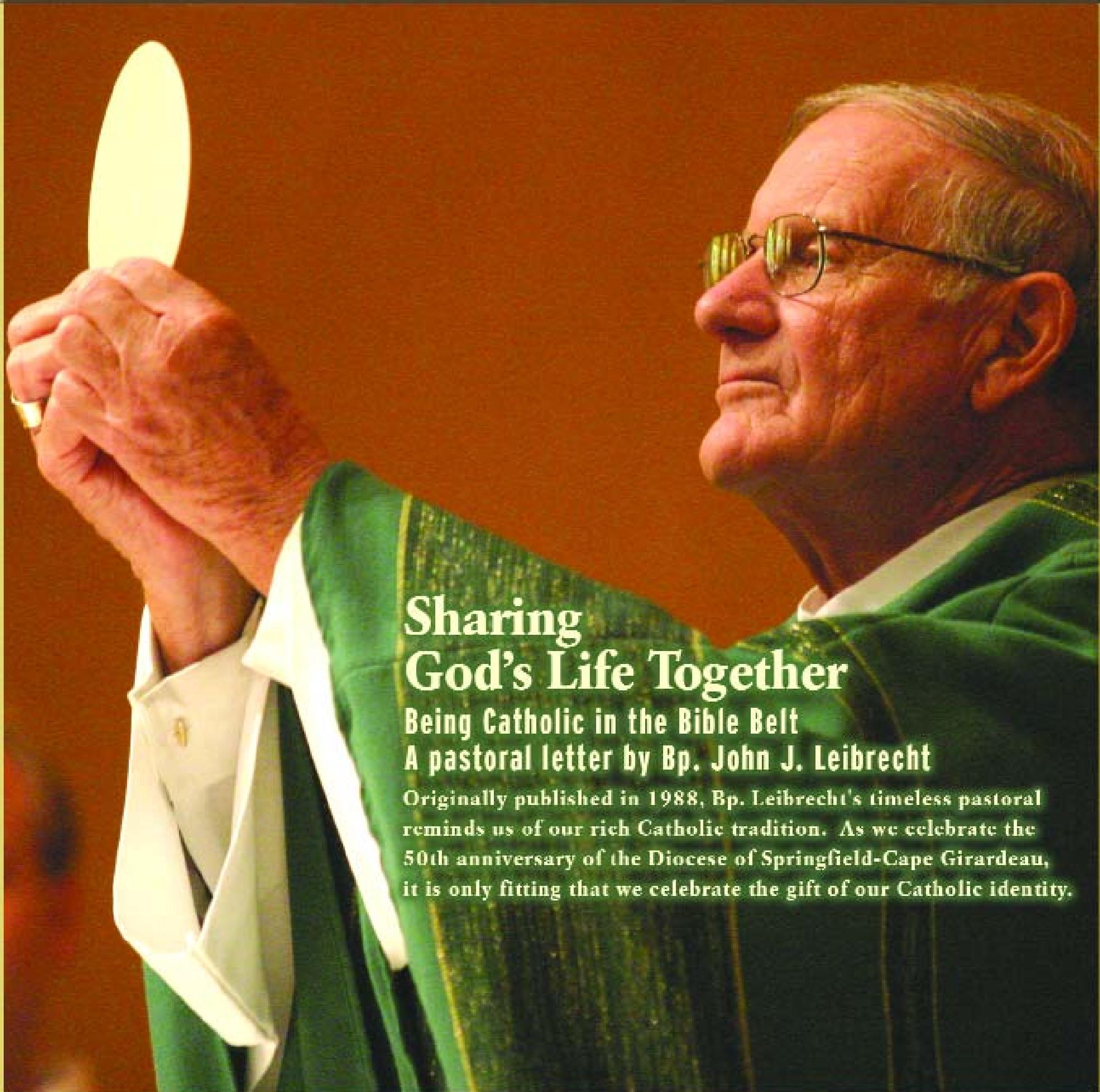


# The Mirror

Vol. XLII, No. 21

DIocese OF SPRINGFIELD • CAPE GIRARDEAU

October 21, 2005



## Sharing God's Life Together

Being Catholic in the Bible Belt

A pastoral letter by Bp. John J. Leibrecht

Originally published in 1988, Bp. Leibrecht's timeless pastoral reminds us of our rich Catholic tradition. As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, it is only fitting that we celebrate the gift of our Catholic identity.

# The Bible: God's gift to us

**"I** know what is Bible," said the man still learning the English language, "and I know what is belt. What is 'Bible Belt?'"

Coining the term Bible Belt is credited to H.L. Mencken in the mid-1920s. A commentator and satirist on matters Americana, Mencken used the phrase to refer to our nation's Midwest and South as regions of endemic fundamentalist interpretations of the Bible. Some fundamentalists, in their interpretation of the Book of Genesis, for instance, believe that God literally created the earth in six days.

The "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation" ("Dei Verbum") of Vatican II speaks about biblical inspiration and the proper interpretation of the Old and New Testaments. God is revealed through the inspired words of biblical writers. God used the powers and abilities of inspired writers to write everything, and only those things, needed for the salvation of mankind. Paul wrote to Timothy (2 Tim 3:16-17), "All scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correcting, for instruction in justice."

To understand and interpret God's word, it is necessary to know what the inspired author wanted to assert in accord with his own times and culture. The individual books of Scripture must be placed in relationship to one another and to the traditions of the church. Catholics take more factors into consideration, in interpreting the sacred Scriptures, than do many fundamentalists. Original languages and the languages of trans-

## The Bible

## WALKING TOGETHER

*Bp. John J. Leibrecht*



lation, cultural, historical, and geographical conditions influencing the writers must be assessed. The literary forms used by inspired writers must also be taken into consideration. The church assists us in all this.

Pope Pius XII wrote, "What the literal sense of a passage is, is not always as obvious in the speeches and writings of ancient authors of the East as it is in the works of our own time. For what they wish to express is not to be determined by the rules of grammar and philology alone nor solely by the context; the interpreter must, as it were, go back wholly in spirit to those remote centuries of the East and with the aid of history, archeology, ethnology, and other sciences accurately determine what modes of writing, so to speak, the authors of that ancient period would be likely to use and in fact did use."

The 1943 encyclical "Divino Afflante Spiritu" ("On Promoting Biblical Studies") of Pope Pius XII proved to be a significant guide to Catholic Scripture scholars. In 1993, the Pontifical Biblical Commission issued "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" to give further guidance to Catholic biblical scholars and homilists.

Catholic scholars increasingly cooperate with Protestant, Orthodox, and Jewish scholars in identifying the true and deepest meaning of God's biblical word. Catholics share with many others, including Christian fundamentalists, a reverence for the Bible. However, Catholics frequently interpret God's biblical word differently from fundamentalists as, for instance, in the meaning of Christ's words, "This is my body, this is my blood," at the Last Supper.

The Bible is God's gift to us. Open your Bible at home, especially the Gospels. Read a few verses slowly. Ask the Holy Spirit to make the words you read meaningful in your own life. Also, listen carefully to the Scriptures read at Mass. Be alert to what touches your heart. Listen to the homilist offer reflections on God's word. At Mass, honor the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Honor, too, the word of God in the Scripture readings. Let them be a light to your feet.

## Catholic Campus Ministry

On Sunday evening, Oct. 9, I celebrated Eucharist in the crowded St. Thomas Aquinas Chapel on the campus of Southeast Missouri State University. Fr. J. Friedel, director of Catholic Campus Ministry, invited me to the campus to ask God's blessings upon a recently-formed advisory council of lay men and women assisting him with present programs and plans for the future.

Catholic Campus Ministry on our college and university campuses offers a remarkable opportunity for

students and faculty. Academic education and choice of careers mature more fully if accompanied by growth in religious faith.

I am deeply grateful to all priests, religious, and lay staff members involved in Catholic Campus Ministry throughout the diocese. They are a uniquely important part of the Church's mission in our times. May the Lord bless their work in his vineyard!

## Moving forward

It was a beautiful afternoon at Sacred Heart Parish in Springfield when on Sun., Oct. 2, I participated in the groundbreaking for a new parish center. The present parish hall is no longer large enough for the needs of the parish. Former pastor, Fr. Joseph Peplansky, CME, and his parishioners worked several years in planning for a new center. Newly-arrived pastor, Fr. Frank Iacona, CME, told parishioners at the groundbreaking that he fully supports their hopes and will work with them energetically in making the new center a reality. Congratulations to all parishioners of Sacred Heart! You are adding an important chapter to your history in this your 123rd year since the parish's founding.

## The whole story

The teacher explained to her kindergartners, "In the Bible, a man named Lot was warned to take his wife and flee out of the city. His wife, however, looked back and turned to salt." Listening carefully to the story, little Bobby asked, "And what happened to the flea?" ©TM

# How do we live the two great commandments?

**O**n the Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Jesus gives us a summary of the whole law and the prophets: Love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:34-40). The first commandment comes from Deuteronomy 6:5, and the second is found in Leviticus 19:18. We may ask ourselves, how do I go about loving God and my sister or brother as myself? We don't have to look farther than what is described in today's first two readings. They help us answer that question.

In the first reading from the Book of Exodus (Exodus 22:20-26), the author issues directives dealing with fair treatment of others. Today's passage, which comes from a section of Exodus called the Book of the Covenant, is a collection of laws that governed Israel. Part of the legal code deals with social morality, and today's passage has direct bearing on two social issues: the treatment of aliens (immigrants), widows,

## 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

## LIVING THE WORD

Oct. 23 - Oct. 29

*Fr. Bobby Manso*



and orphans, and lending money to the poor. In ancient societies, widows, aliens, and orphans were among the most vulnerable and needed special protection. As a motivation to be compassionate, kind, and just toward the most vulnerable in their midst, the author reminds the Israelites that they were once aliens in Egypt.

St. Paul reminds us simply to be imitators of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 1:5-10). Paul tells us that our professed love for God and for others should be matched with action. It is not good enough to simply say I love God and I love my sister or brother. Our love of God should be expressed in action for the poor and the most vulnerable in

our midst.

The question for us is, how do we express our love of God? How do we live these two great commandments in our daily lives? We are reminded by

John that if we say we love God, whom we have never seen, but hate our brother or sister, whom we see, then we are liars (1 John 4:20). The two great commandments are closely linked because love of God is expressed in love of neighbor. This is nowhere more evident than in Matthew 25:31-46. In this passage, Jesus gives us concrete examples of how our love of God should be

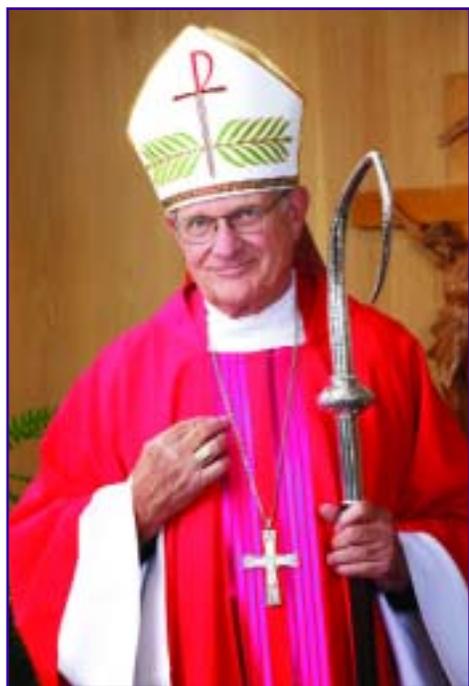
expressed in the love of our sister or brother. This is at the heart of Christian living. As the sacred word is proclaimed today, let's pray for the strength and the grace to love God and neighbor more deeply.



## Feast: Sts. Simon and Jude

The Feast of Sts. Simon and Jude, Apostles, is Oct. 28. Known as the "Zealot", Simon learned obedience, love, and humility from Jesus. Tradition tells us that Simon preached the good news in Egypt and Persia. He is also called Simon the Canaanite, to distinguish him from St. Peter and St. Simeon.

See Living the Word / 11



Bp. John J. Leibracht

### My Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

**T**he Church encourages Catholics to be aware of the religious beliefs of others and to respect both the beliefs and the people who hold them. The Church teaches us to celebrate faith in the one God wherever we find it. Many important elements of faith “can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church,” Vatican Council II stated (Decree on Ecumenism, #3).

Catholics are also taught to appreciate and celebrate the unique blessing we have in our own Catholic faith—its two thousand years of history since Jesus Christ’s coming to this earth, its many sources of growth in the spiritual life, its teaching with authority, its unity.

It is out of a deep appreciation of the faith in God, which I experience in many of our non-Catholic neighbors—often in exemplary ways—that I write to you. You share that appreciation, I know. My purpose in this letter is to help all of us in the Catholic community to rejoice in the wonderful blessing we find in our Catholic faith.

You know, as well as I, we live in a part of the United States that is often called the “Bible Belt.” In this region there is an immense emphasis on religion and on the relationship that human beings have with God. There is a strong focus on salvation (“Have you been saved?”) and on the Bible. At times, we find a focus on certain Catholic beliefs, such as devotion to Mary, with which some other Christians disagree.

I write this letter because the religious language we hear in this region can be confusing to a Catholic and, sometimes, even frightening or irritating. We need



## Sharing God’s Life Together: *Being Catholic in the Bible Belt*

to be familiar with the questions and the issues others raise about our faith. I would like to share with you some basic Catholic thinking related to the kinds of questions and issues we encounter among our neighbors. I hope I can help alleviate some of the confusion and some of the uneasiness people may feel when discussing religion.

### Have you been saved?

For many reasons, lay Catholics in the United States have not been extensively involved in approaching others to speak about faith in Jesus Christ. We do not go around our towns or neighborhoods evangelizing others, and we really do not expect others to come around to evangelize us. Because of that, Catholics are not particularly accustomed to conversations about religion and about our own salvation. When someone approaches us with questions about salvation, many of us tend to become uneasy. For example, some of us may have been asked whether or not we are saved. When that question is asked, it is not asked as a neutral question; there is an urgency to it. There can be a suggestion within the question that, indeed, we may not be saved.

People who ask, “Have you been saved?” have something very specific in mind. You are being asked whether or not you have ever had an experience of God so strongly entering your life that you hand your life over to him. You are not being asked whether you live a moral life or whether you have developed good habits over the years. The question refers to one, single experience which has taken place in a specific moment of your life—in a moment when God confronted you and you surrendered to him. This experience is sometimes called “being born again.”

I sincerely hope that every Catholic has had one, or many, unusually powerful experiences of Christ and the presence of

God in life. I have had several. Such experiences are blessings. Catholics do not believe, however, that such a single experience is what makes salvation. For us, the focus of salvation is not basically on God entering our lives. It is on our entering into the life of God. Permit me to explain.

When I was born, I was born into a human life with the qualities and traits necessary to live a human life. When I was born a second time, in baptism, I was born into a divine life with the qualities and traits necessary to live that divine life given to me.

Catholics believe that, in baptism, we are given a share in the life of God. That is what salvation (“being saved”) means. Salvation is a participation in the life of Jesus Christ. Catholics believe that this sharing in the life of Christ begins with baptism. It only begins then. It is not completed in that moment.

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***“Catholics believe that, in baptism, we are given a share in the life of God. That is what salvation (“being saved”) means.”***

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Suppose, for example, someone has been born with all of the talents necessary to be a great pianist. Suppose, further, that the person never chooses to learn music or practice the piano. In the end, it would be as though those talents had never existed. The inner talent for music and the piano must grow and mature. Growth and maturity take time and practice.

The same thing can be said of our share in the divine life which we were given in baptism. With it we receive the qualities and traits necessary to learn to live in accord with the life of Christ, which is within us. It takes time and development, however.

Because Catholics emphasize that development or “practice” is necessary, we are sometimes accused of believing that people can earn salvation; it is our own achievement. We do not believe that. We believe that, as a gift, God gives us a share in his divine life. Catholics speak about “growth in holiness.” Developing, with the grace of God, the qualities and traits of the divine life within us is what we mean by this. If we do not grow and develop in the life of God, we are like the person who never develops the musical talents present from birth. Catholics have peak religious experiences in life, but “being saved” is not such a singular, peak experience. It is a life-long process of growing in the gifts God gives us.

While I am discussing salvation, I want to mention “sin.” Catholics accept the fact of sin—both original sin and personal sin. We believe sin entered the world through disobedience, and that the unwillingness of human beings to live according to the will of God is the cause of the continuing presence of evil in the world. We do not believe, however, that the world itself is evil.

When God made the world and everything in it, “it was good,” as the Bible states. God’s love for the world continued even after sin had entered it. We pray in Eucharistic Prayer IV: “Even when we disobeyed you and lost your friendship you did not abandon us to the power of death but helped us to seek and find you...Father, you so loved the world that in the fullness of time you sent your only son to be our Savior.” We believe that in the Incarnation, in which the second person of the Holy Trinity became a human being, all creation was remade in goodness. In the second century, St. Irenaeus stated that clearly and forcefully: “Christ became what we are, in order that he might make us what he is.”



## Sharing God's Life Together: *Being Catholic in the Bible Belt*

From Page 3

### The Church

For Catholics, it is difficult to talk about salvation without talking about the Church. Many different things can come into a person's mind when the word "Church" is used. For some people it can be the memory of a parish church where they grew up. For others "Church" might mean the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome or some other impressive building. Or, the word "Church" might bring to mind the picture of a group of bishops making decisions which will affect all of us.

For Catholics, "Church" means more than buildings and authority figures. The Second Vatican Council gave much attention to the meaning of "Church."

The Council emphasized the Church as people, the people of God. This understanding of the Church as people is as old as the Church itself. Parishioners gather in a church, but they are the Church present in a particular place. I emphasize this because it is important in any discussion of "church" not simply to think the discussion is about buildings, priests, bishops, or popes, but about all of us. We are the Church.

A familiar understanding of "Church," and one we are likely to hear in our area among our non-Catholic neighbors, is that the Church is a fellowship in the Spirit. This means that when we see a gathering of people who call themselves "Church," we see a group of people who believe that, because they are gathered in the name of the Lord, he fulfills his promise: "Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of

them" (Mt. 18:20). As Catholics, we agree that the Lord is present with those gathered in his name.

We think, however, that focusing our understanding of Church on that one idea severely limits the richness of the presence of Christ in both the Church and in the world.

Our Catholic belief about the Church flows from our belief about the effects of baptism. We believe when a person is baptized, a personal journey of salvation begins. This journey is not a solitary or individual one. The baptized person is given a share in the life of

their affection for one another. It can also be defined as a group of people who gather together for

sometimes called communities; some groups of priests, brothers, or sisters are called religious communities. Community can be defined as a group of people who are held together by

Christ brings with it the blessing of salvation as we mature in God's will and God's ways. It also brings the responsibility of caring for other members of the community. To have no concern for those with whom we share divine life would be senseless.



***"For Catholics,  
'Church' means more  
than buildings and  
authority figures."***

the sake of some common purpose or goal.

When we say that the Church is a community, we mean a great deal more than these definitions offer. We cannot say we are held together by bonds of personal affection because we will never know, or even see, the vast majority of those with whom we share Christ's life. Nor do we gather ourselves together simply for a common purpose. It is God who gathers us for the purpose of saving us. As members of the body of Christ, we are a community of life—receiving life and giving life.

Belonging to the community of the body of

Certainly, we cannot know the details of the lives of hundreds of millions of people; therefore, it is not possible to be directly concerned with each of them. We do, however, have the obligation of praying for them.

See Sharing / 5

***"We are the visible parts  
of the way Christ chooses  
to be visible to today's  
world, namely, through  
the Church."***

Christ. Just as Christ was visible in the past on this earth, so now there is a visible body of Christ on earth—the Church. We are the visible parts of the way Christ chooses to be visible to today's world, namely, through the Church. There is only one Christ. Because he shares his life with us, we share his life with millions and millions of other people with whom he also shares his life. This sharing brings us into a unity with one another beyond human imagining.

The Church is a community. Because the word "community" is used to describe many things, it can be easily misunderstood. Neighborhoods or towns are

## Director of Liturgy & Music

Active, vibrant parish community of 2,100 families with collaborative staff seeks a full-time pastoral professional. This ministry position exists to direct the worship of the parish by coordinating and providing quality liturgical experiences which celebrate and strengthen the membership's journey of faith. The director is responsible for a wide range of ministries including prayer leadership, volunteer recruitment and support, musical decisions, and direction of vocal and handbell choirs. The successful candidate will be self-directed, take initiative in responding to pastoral needs, and function respectfully and effectively in an inclusive manner. **Qualifications:** Knowledgeable and experienced in Vatican II Catholic liturgy; BA/BS in theology, liturgy, or pastoral studies or equivalent education and experience. MA in theology, liturgy, or pastoral studies preferred. Minimum of three years related professional experience. Keyboard proficiency and musical directing skills required. Please send cover letter including salary requirements and resume to Liturgy Director Search, St. Mark the Evangelist Parish, 3736 S. Lee's Summit Road, Independence, MO 64055; fax (816) 373-3816; E-mail: careersstmarksparish@yahoo.com. EOE, M/F/D/V

## Youth Ministry Coordinator

St. Stephen Cathedral in Owensboro, KY, is seeking a Coordinator of Youth Ministry for students in grades 7-12 (approx. 100 students). The coordinator will serve through direct ministry with the youth and by dras an advocate for this age by training parish volunteers to work with youth. The coordinator will also serve as an advocate for this age population. To apply or for more information, contact Fr. John Vaughan, 610 Locust St., Owensboro, KY, 42301-2130; phone: (270) 683-6525; or E-mail: john.vaughan@pastoral.org.





# Sharing God's Life Together: Being Catholic in the Bible Belt

From Page 4

We have, as well, the obligation of doing what we can to help them when we are made aware of

material and other needs they might have.

As we become more aware of the details of the lives of those with whom we share community,

our responsibilities become more specific. The fact that we share life with people should draw us to want to know them better. In the parish community, this is especially possible. Parish communities should provide opportunities for their members to know one another better, to encourage one another more, and to do what is helpful for both the

members of the parish community and the wider community of Christ's body.

As God the Father sent his Son to reveal to the world the Father's love through the Son's works of healing, teaching, and reconciling, so the community of the body of Christ, the Church, is called to continue that work in the world. Where there is hunger, sickness, and human misery, the Church—the body of Christ—is called to bring healing. Where there is ignorance of the love and care of the Father, the Church—the body of Christ—is called to

See Sharing / 6

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Parishes and organizations are invited to submit notices of future events to be printed in the Announcements. They will be printed on a space-available basis. There is no fee.

**Bolivar**—Sacred Heart PCCW will sponsor an indoor garage sale Sat., Oct. 22, 7 a.m.-1 p.m., in McKenna Hall. For more information or call (417) 326-5596.

**Cape Girardeau**—St. Vincent de Paul Parish Christian Service committee will host its annual "Ugly Quilt" Weekend to make sleeping bags for homeless persons Sat., Oct. 29, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., and Sun., Oct. 30, 1-4 p.m., in the DePaul Center gym. Volunteers of all ages welcome; no sewing skills required. For more information call Alma Heisserer, (573) 335-9275, or Sue Iten, (573) 335-0372.

**Cape Girardeau**—A Marriage Encounter Weekend for couples who wish to enrich their marriage will be presented Fri., Nov. 18—Sun., Nov. 20. For more information call Jerry and Kay Lange, (573) 262-2050. Registration deadline is Oct. 31. To register for the weekend, call (314) 469-7317 or visit [www.stl-wwme.org](http://www.stl-wwme.org).

**Carthage**—St. Ann Parish will host its fall chili dinner and bazaar Thurs., Nov. 10, in the gym. Food served 11 a.m.-1:30 p.m. and 5-7 p.m.; chili or vegetable soup, pie, coffee or tea. Adults: \$4.50; children 12 and under: \$2. Bake sale, bazaar, and Trash and Treasure sale: 9 a.m.-7 p.m. For more information call (417) 358-

5011 or (417) 529-2261.

**Chaffee**—St. Ambrose School will host its 16th annual dinner-auction Sat., Oct. 22, 5 p.m., in the Chaffee VFW Hall. \$20 per person. For more information or tickets call St. Ambrose School, (573) 887-6711.

**Dexter**—Sacred Heart Parish will host its annual turkey, ham, and all the fixings dinner Sun., Nov. 6, 11 a.m.-1 p.m., in the parish center. Adults: \$6.50; children 6-10: \$3; under 5: free. For more information call Mary Ann Taylor, (573) 624-7381.

**Scott City**—The Knights of Columbus will host fish dinners Each Friday, Oct. 21—Nov. 4, 4-7 p.m., in the upper hall. Adults: \$8; children 6-12: \$4; 5 and under: free; carry-outs: \$8. Proceeds will support St. Joseph Parish, St. Denis Parish, St. Ambrose Parish, St. Lawrence Parish, St. Augustine Parish, and the Knights' charitable program. For more information contact Charles Stotz, (573) 334-9254 (daytime only).

**Springfield**—Knights of Columbus Council 698 will host an Octoberfest Sat., Oct. 22, 4:30 p.m., at the Knight's hall. Food, music by The Big House Band, more; babysitting available. Proceeds benefit Catholic Campus Ministry in Springfield. For more informa-

tion call (417) 862-7780.

**Springfield**—St. Agnes Home & School will host a Boofest Sat., Oct. 22, after 5 p.m. mass. Book fair, games, silent auction, food, more. For more information call Theresa, (417) 864-8263.

**Springfield**—Theology on Tap invites Catholic young adults in their 20s and 30s, married or single, active or inactive in church, to its fall discussion series which will meet each Tuesday beginning Oct. 25, 7 p.m., in Ebbet's Field. Topics include end-of-life issues, satisfying spiritual hunger, the art of Catholic dating, and controversial social topics. For more information visit [www.springfieldtot.org](http://www.springfieldtot.org) or E-mail [springfieldtot@CatholicWeb.com](mailto:springfieldtot@CatholicWeb.com).

**Springfield**—The Secular

Franciscans will meet Sat., Oct. 29, 1 p.m., in Holy Trinity Parish Center. Open to anyone interested in a simple Catholic lifestyle. For more information call Jose Tirado, (417) 869-4628.

**Springfield**—Singles Reaching Out invites all single adults to a Halloween Costume Dance Sat., Oct. 29, 7-11 p.m., in Holy Trinity Parish gym. Advance tickets available; \$10 per person; \$19 per couple. Bring a snack to share; costume awards and door prizes will be given. For more information call John, (417) 883-2588, or Carolyn, (417) 882-4754.

**Springfield**—Sacred Heart Parish will host its third annual chili cook-off Sat., Nov. 5, 5-7 p.m., in Catholic Campus Ministry's O'Reilly Student Center hall. Attendees will judge entries. All-you-can-eat chili: \$5. Proceeds support

construction of Sacred Heart's new parish hall. For more information contact Joe Yoker, (417) 833-4141.

**Subiaco, AR**—Subiaco Academy, a Catholic college preparatory high school for boys, will host Discovery Weekend and Open House for prospective students and their parents Fri., Nov. 4—Sun., Nov. 6. Opportunity to experience dorm life and activities, tour the campus, take entrance exam, meet with faculty and current parents. For more information or reservations call (800) 364-7824 or E-mail [admissions@subi.org](mailto:admissions@subi.org).

The Mirror Announcement Policy: The Mirror will print announcements of future events if: (1) the announcement must be of diocesan or regional significance and not pertaining to only a particular parish; (2) the name of the event, the place, the time, the day, and the date is due in The Mirror office by 9 a.m. a minimum of 10 days before the first indicated publishing date; (3) announcements cannot be received over the telephone; (4) all announcements are subject to editing and approval by the editor. E-mail announcements to [jward@dioscg.org](mailto:jward@dioscg.org); FAX (417) 866-1140.

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*In this edition of  
The Mirror On-Line*

*Benedict XVI's interview  
on Polish television*

*Ethics in an aging society:  
What to do about care for  
the sick and dying*

*Holy See urges attention to  
causes of mental illness*

*What the unborn  
sense in the womb*

[www.the-mirror.org](http://www.the-mirror.org)

**Suggested  
Web site  
of the week**

Log onto this Web site to read the US Catholic bishops' statement: "Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice."

**[www.usccb.org/sdwp/criminal.htm](http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/criminal.htm)**

### Safe Environment in-service

#### Schedule

<b>Oct. 22</b>	9 a.m.-noon	Immaculate Conception, Springfield
<b>Oct. 23</b>	1-3 p.m.	St. Catherine of Siena, Piedmont
<b>Nov. 4</b>	6-9:30 p.m.	St. John the Baptist, Licking

For more information call (417) 866-0841

From Page 5

bring teaching. Where there is division, hatred, and bitterness, the Church—the body of Christ—is called to bring reconciliation.

Any consideration for the Church as community, and its call to bring reconciliation to the world, should include reference to the sacrament of Penance. Because we share the life of Christ with one another and therefore cannot be anything but a community, everything we do—whether sinful or holy—has an effect on the entire body of Christ. Sin is not only something between the individual sinner and God, as some would have us believe. Sin has a communal dimension.

When a sinner expresses sorrow and the intention to deal with sin in life, and when that person brings his or her sinfulness to a priest, it is not simply one person talking to another. Catholics believe that one member of the body of Christ is asking forgiveness from the entire body for the wrong which has been done. The priest is the representative of the body of Christ and he offers forgiveness in the name of the body.

The sacrament of Penance is a wonderful reminder of who we are in Christ. Together, as Church, we are in a holy relationship both with God and with others. Centuries ago Tertullian said, “One Christian is no Christian.”

#### The Church at prayer

A striking difference between Catholics and some other Christians in this region is the way in which we pray when we come together in a church. One way for me to describe that difference is to say that many other Christians are people of the Word alone. Catholics are people of Word and Sacrament.

The largest part of many Christian worship services consists of explanation—explanation of a Scripture text and explanation of the way in which that text is applicable to daily life. The service itself helps individuals

deepen their knowledge of the Bible, thereby putting them in closer touch with God. Also, the service usually includes hymns and prayers of praise, thanksgiving, and petition.

Catholics also have readings from the Scriptures and explanations of those readings, but through the readings and the explanations, we are

helped to become more aware of God’s revelation to the world. We are helped to become more aware of ways in which we can respond to that revelation. This part of our Liturgy has similarities to

other Christian worship services. The “Liturgy of the Word” at Mass, however, acts as an invitation to something which is different from many other Christian services, the second part of Mass, called the “Liturgy of the Eucharist.”

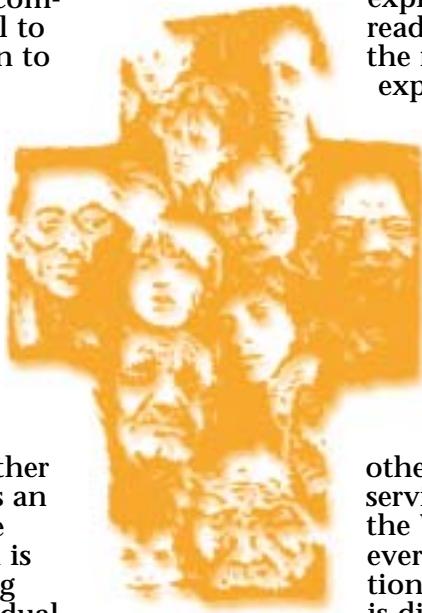
Catholics believe that Jesus Christ is truly present both in the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Remember, earlier in this letter I said that Baptism gives us a share in God’s own life. That gift flows from the redemptive work of Jesus. Because we each share in that one Life, we are one in Christ.

Jesus eternally offers himself as a gift of praise to the Father. In the Eucharist, he is made present—praising the Father. Because we are members of his body, we, with him, offer ourselves as gifts and sacrifices of praise to the Father. As Jesus said “Your will be done” to the Father and showed he meant it to the fullest by giving his life on the cross, so we, during Mass, as fully as we can in the various circumstances of our lives, say to the Father: “Your will be done.”

Because Jesus Christ is truly

**“Because Jesus Christ is truly present in the Eucharist and because we are members of his body, we are also present to one another in a very special way in the Eucharist.”**

present in the Eucharist and because we are members of his body, we are also present to one



# Sharing God Being in the

another in a very special way in the Eucharist. I can’t imagine anything more awesome or marvelous than the Mass. The Second Vatican Council taught that “every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the priest, and of his body the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others” (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #7). Furthermore, Vatican II declared that “the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fountain from which all her power flows” (#10).

Every time Mass is celebrated a wondrous marvel occurs. Because of the Lord’s presence in his Word, and because his body and his blood give us the spiritual strength to live his Word, we are drawn more fully into the life of God.

Earlier in this letter, I said that salvation is about life. The Church is about life. The Eucharist and all the sacraments of our Catholic Church are truly blessings of our faith. They continually lead us to a more intimate participation in the life of God.

#### The mission of Jesus and the Church’s hierarchy

The structure of our Catholic Church does not resemble other churches in our region. We have a pope and others do not. We have a bishop; most other churches do not. We have a number of ceremonies that emphasize the role of the bishop in the Church. This emphasis is seen clearly when the bishop ordains priests. In this ceremony it is easy to be conscious of the fact that if there were no bishop, Catholicism would not be able to continue. This fact alone says we are different from other churches.

One of the principal differences is the way in which we understand authority in the

Church. Some of the symbols of authority in the Church, such as the bishop’s chair in the Cathedral or his crozier (staff), are developments within the Church’s history. Authority itself, however, is not just a product of history; it is part of the Church from the beginning. The exercise of authority flows from the mission of the Church in the world.

The Church continues the saving work of Jesus Christ. One large part of that mission is to



insure the transmission and interpretation of God’s revelation from generation to generation. Under the guiding light of the spirit of truth, revelation is faithfully preserved and taught. We believe Jesus’ promise to be with the Church until the end of time is a promise that the Church—in essential matters—will never teach things that will not lead to salvation.

With the help of the Holy Spirit who lives within the Church, authority in the Church guards God’s revelation and its interpretation. Everyone knows the Bible did not simply fall out of the sky one day, to be found by whomever might pick it up. The New Testament, in effect, is part of the teaching of the Church about the work of Jesus in the world. Exercising its

# God's Life Together: Catholic Bible Belt

authority, the Church decided which books would be included in the New Testament. Some early Christian writings were excluded from the Bible because they did not come about through the special inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Without the guarantee of authority in the Church guided by the Spirit, Christians would not have adequate guidance about the interpretation and understanding of Scripture.

Without an authority to unite the members of the Church, to listen to the voice of the Spirit within the community, and to express what the Spirit within the community has said, followers of Jesus would not have sufficient guidance

in making the decisions which have to be made in life. Often enough, history has shown that in the absence of authority under the Spirit, there is dissension and division within Christianity.

## The Holy Spirit

Catholics believe in the Holy Spirit. Each Sunday when we recite the Profession of Faith (Creed), we express that belief. We remember from our reading of the New Testament that Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to the apostles and disciples—the Church. We believe Jesus kept his promise.

We believe Jesus—in his life, death, and resurrection—initiated the Church. We believe that the Holy Spirit enlivens the Church, the body of Christ. Christ redeemed us and established his body; he breathes life into it through his Spirit. This is similar to God's forming of Adam, in the

Genesis story, and then breathing the breath of life into him.

We believe we are the temple of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit dwells in the Church. Because we are the Church, members of the body of Christ, the Holy Spirit dwells in each of us. Because we, the Church, are the temple of the Holy Spirit, each one of us, as a member of the Church, is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

An understanding of the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Church, and our relationship to the Spirit through the Church, is very important. We believe that the Holy Spirit guides the whole Church and keeps it faithful to the revelation of Jesus; and that, within the Church, the Spirit keeps faithful to that revelation. That relationship of the Spirit to the believing community, for instance, prompted the apostles gathered in Jerusalem to

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***“The Catholic Church has always believed the Holy Spirit dwells individually in each baptized person.”***

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discuss the conditions under which Gentiles could be admitted to the Church (cf. Act 15:1-35). Some leaders were teaching that the Gentiles who entered the Church were subject to the Jewish law. There is no reason to think that those promoting such a teaching were anything but good people, who were following their individual consciences.

However, their teaching had to be brought to the community in order to be judged by the Spirit dwelling within the community. Guided by the Spirit, the community then judged that Gentiles entering the Church were not subject to Jewish law.

There are many indications in the New Testament that Jesus wanted his message to be preached to all people. There is, however, no indication in the Gospels that Jewish law should be dispensed. As a matter of fact, the opposite is more likely. In Matthew's Gospel, we read that Jesus told his disciples: “I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Mt. 5:18). A literal reading of the text of the Gospel would lead one to conclude that Gentiles are obliged to all the requirements of Jewish law. The Church, under the guidance of the Spirit, eliminated the requirements of Jewish law for Gentile Christians. That may not seem to be much to us now, but it was an immense step for the apostles to take. The author of the Acts of the Apostles indicates that he is fully aware of the immensity of this step. He says that the decision was made with the help of the Holy Spirit. “It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and ourselves...” (Acts 15:28).

I have been emphasizing the relationship of the Holy Spirit with the whole Church. I also want to emphasize that the Catholic Church has always believed the Holy Spirit dwells individually in each baptized person. We believe the Holy Spirit is the giver of special gifts to individuals within the Christian community.

The Holy Spirit gives different kinds of gifts to different individuals. In the New Testament, the most noticeable or striking of these gifts is called a “charism.” A charism is a gift which is given to someone—not for the sake of the one receiving the gift—but for the sake of others. In other words, a charism is a gift which makes the receiver a servant of others.

Paul talks about two kinds of charisms. The first had to do with offices or roles within the Church, such as apostle, prophet, teacher, or pastor. The second kind of charism is that which witnesses to the community that

God is present and working within it. This can be relatively ordinary such as preaching and instructing, or it can be extraordinary such as the power to heal, to work miracles, or to speak in tongues. Catholics believe that these gifts, when they are given, are given for the service of the Church. Saint Paul indicates that the use of charismatic power is subject to the authority of the Church and, in his First Letter to the Corinthians, he gives a detailed list of rules and regulations for its use (1 Cor. 12-14).

Catholics also believe that the Holy Spirit gives gifts to individuals for their own sake—for their own growth in holiness. These are what have traditionally been called “the gifts of the Holy Spirit.”

Highlighted in the sacrament of Confirmation, which we receive, I'm sure that you remember learning them—Wisdom,

Understanding, Right Judgment, Counsel, Knowledge, Reverence, and Wonder and Awe in God's Presence. These gifts help us to be open to the working of God in our lives and, therefore, they increase God's presence and power in our lives. They foster holiness in us.

Many people in this region, both Catholic and non-Catholic, have a great devotion to the Holy Spirit. A difference existing between Catholics and some other Christians is the way in which we understand the relationship between ourselves and the Holy Spirit. Traditionally, Catholics have seen the Holy Spirit coming to us through the Church. We hope that, in the future, beliefs about the Holy Spirit can be a source of greater unity among Christians. I pray that our Catholic faith in the Holy Spirit will lead us always to a care, a concern, and a love for all of God's people.

## The Bible and tradition

People like to be sure about things. The desire for certainty is a powerful one; each one of us feels it. That desire grows stronger as life becomes more complicated and difficult to understand. The struggle for understanding is so overwhelming at times that it becomes tempting to grasp and hold on to whatever offers certainty and stability. For many people, especially in this region, that assurance

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may come from the Bible.

Sometimes, Catholics are accused of not taking the Bible seriously or of not even believing in the Bible. For most Catholics that accusation is painful because we know in our hearts that we treasure and honor the Word of God. It is not always easy, though, for us to explain our Catholic belief to others. I will try to help.

Catholics believe that God has chosen to reveal himself to the world. The fullness of that revelation is in a person, Jesus Christ. We also believe God reveals himself to us in the written word.

If the Bible is understood as the literal words of God, our choices about many things are made almost infinitely easier. As one bumper sticker declares: "God said it. I believe it—and that's that." If the Bible truly were the exact and literal words of God, the search for certainty would be over. But such is not the case.

The four Gospels can serve as an example of how Catholics approach God's written word. The most important thing to understand, perhaps, is that the Gospels

were not written so that there would be a historical record of everything that Jesus said and did. John's Gospel concludes, "There is much else that Jesus did; if it were written down in detail I do not suppose the world itself would hold all the books that could be written" (Jn 21:25).

Jesus said and did many things. He was seen and heard by his disciples. After the resurrection, the apostles and disciples began to preach about Jesus. In that preaching they told some stories about Jesus and used some of the things he said. The stories were told so that people's faith in Christ would be strengthened, so they would understand him more clearly. The apostles and disciples were not as concerned about historical details as about the faith of the followers of Jesus.

Approximately fifty years after the Lord's resurrection—in a world where there was no electronic media, where a journey of just a few hundred miles might take days; where most people believed in many gods (and the Jewish people steadfastly believed in only one); where Greek was the most commonly used language—the Gospels were written so that they could continue to support the faith of Christians. They were not designed as history books but as supports and encouragements of faith in Jesus. The authors of the Gospels could not imagine a world like the one in which we live today. Likewise, it is not always easy for us to understand

the world in which they lived.

Catholics believe that the Holy Spirit inspired and guided the writers of Scripture as a means of continued support for the faith of God's people. Scripture teaches

the "truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation" (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, #11). We know that the authors of Sacred Scripture were people of

written down and some were not. Both the written and unwritten tradition have been handed down to us. From the earliest times, the Church struggled to understand and to express its belief as clearly as possible. As the years and centuries passed, the Church, the community of the body of Christ enlivened by the Holy Spirit, expressed in writing truths passed on verbally—truths and practices which had been only implicit in the beliefs of the early Church. Catholicism commits itself to the faith of the first century. But Catholicism does not limit itself to the insights of the first century. Through the continuing and ever-present

guidance of the Holy Spirit, the understanding of our faith and its expression have grown within the community of believers across the centuries.

Some of what Catholics believe about the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, for instance, flows from the written tradition of the Church. In the New Testament's Letter of James, we find: "Any one of you who is ill should send for the elders of the Church, and they must anoint the sick person with oil in the name of the Lord and offer prayers" (Jm. 5:14).

Anointings were done in various ways in the early Church. The earliest written statement we have from a pope about the Anointing of the Sick as a sacrament is from Innocent I in the early fifth century. Over the years, theologians developed a deeper understanding of the Anointing of the Sick as a sacrament. In the sixteenth century, the Council of Trent offered official teaching about the sacrament. More recently, Vatican Council II taught: "By the sacred Anointing of the Sick and the prayer of the priest, the whole Church commends those who are ill to the suffering and glorified Lord that he may raise them up and save them. And, indeed, she exhorts them to contribute to the good of the People of God by freely uniting themselves to the passion and death of Christ" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, #11). In other words, the Church's beliefs about the Anointing of the Sick as a sacrament have gradually developed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

There are many other examples that could be given about the growth and development of beliefs in our Catholic tradition. Our doctrinal belief about Jesus, for instance, as truly human and truly divine, took over three cen-

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***"Catholics believe that God has chosen to reveal himself to the world. The fullness of that revelation is in a person, Jesus Christ. We also believe God reveals himself to us in the written word."***

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their own times, writing for their own times. Consequently, to apply all Scripture literally to our own times runs the risk of misunderstanding it.

We believe "all Scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correcting, for instruction in justice" (2 Tim. 3:16). We believe God speaks in Scripture through human beings. This means that anyone who wants to understand Scripture must search out what the author really intended to say and take into consideration the time, place, and circumstances of the writing. The Gospels (and all the Bible) are revelations of God to us. They have been written by human beings through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Also, Catholics believe that the Spirit of God lives in the Church. Therefore, we believe that God, through the Spirit in the Church, continues to reveal himself. The word we use for this is "tradition." Tradition does not mean "custom," it means all that has been handed down to us by the apostles—along with the written word—and its development within the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The early Christians believed and practiced many things because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Some of those things were

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turies to develop in the early Church. Later the growth and development of faith and understanding about Jesus led to a more advanced understanding of the Holy Trinity.

Catholics look to the Scriptures for God's revelation. We also look to the Church's tradition, as guided by the Holy Spirit, for a fuller understanding of God's revelation. Most of the clearly expressed beliefs of all Christians, not just Catholics, are the result of the Church struggling to better understand God, in faith, from both written and unwritten tradition.

**Mary**

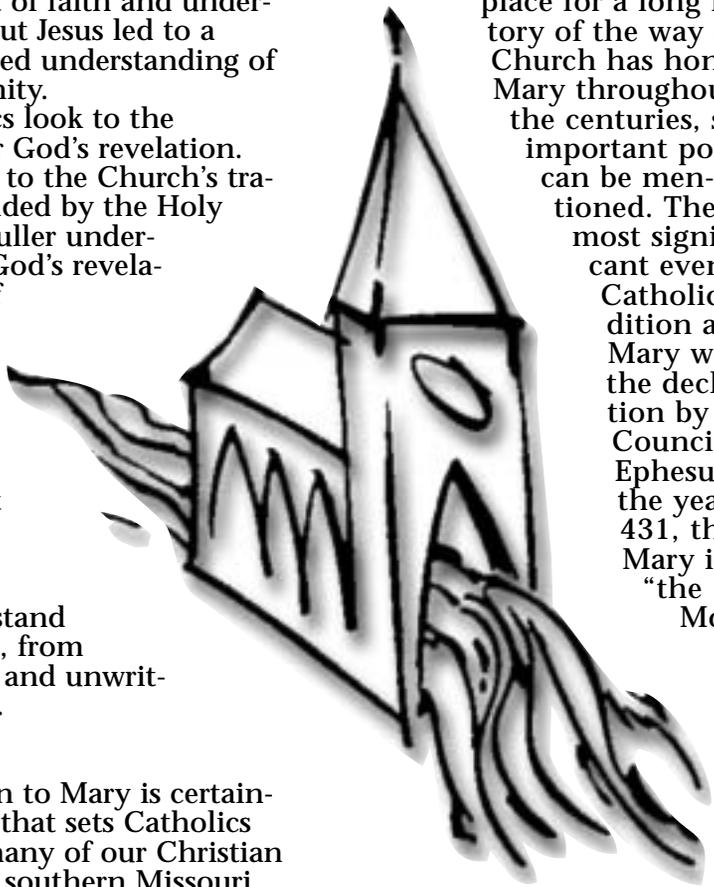
Devotion to Mary is certainly one thing that sets Catholics apart from many of our Christian neighbors in southern Missouri. They do not always understand what we believe about Mary, and from time to time we are accused of worshiping her. That accusation is simply not true. In all the years the Church has been in existence, it has never instructed its members to worship Mary as if she were a fourth person of the Trinity. We do, however, honor Mary above all other creatures of God.

Early in the Church's history, Mary was singled out for special honor. The question was asked, "What must the mother of the Incarnate Word of God be like?" Both Matthew's and Luke's descriptions of the events surrounding the conception and birth of Jesus Christ are an effort to answer that question.

Early in the second century, St. Justin the Martyr referred to Mary as the "new Eve." Many other writers in the Church also singled out Mary for special attention. Great Gothic churches of Europe, such as Notre Dame in Paris and the Cathedral at Chartres, testify to the special place which Mary held in the

Middle Ages. That honor has continued to our own time.

Although this pastoral letter is not the appropriate place for a long history of the way the Church has honored Mary throughout the centuries, some important points can be mentioned. The most significant event in Catholic tradition about Mary was the declaration by the Council of Ephesus, in the year 431, that Mary is "the Mother of



them with God.

It is possible that in recent years, the special place Mary holds in the Church has become confused. There may be a feeling that Vatican Council II in some way changed devotion to Mary, so it no longer is an important part of Catholic life. It was not the intention of the Council, however, that the place of Mary be diminished in the Church. It is just the opposite. Mary is the disciple of Jesus. She is the model of love for Jesus.

The popes of recent times, beginning with Pope Pius XII, have emphasized that devotion to Mary continues to be, as it has always been, a significant part of the Catholic Church. Occasionally in the history of the Church, some Marian devotions have exaggerated who she is and given her a place to which she is not entitled. The popes have warned against such abuses.

Consistent with what other

popes taught, Pope Paul VI encouraged us to honor Mary by imitating her: "The Virgin Mary has always been proposed to the faithful by the Church as an example to be imitated ... She is held up as an example to the faithful for the way in which, in her own particular life, she fully and responsibly accepted the will of God, because she heard the word of God and did it, and because charity and the spirit of service were the driving force of her

God." That Mary became the mother of Jesus, the Son of God, is the source of all the honor we give her. Her honor comes through her relationship to Jesus.

An understanding of Mary as our own mother also began in the early days of the Church. She was called "Mother of Nations" and "Mother of Believers." The Second Vatican Council spoke of Mary as the "Mother of the Church." All such references to Mary as Mother are rooted in our belief about the body of Christ. Since we are members of Christ's body, sharers in his life, we share in his relationship to his mother.

The Catholic Church has always believed that the saving work of Jesus Christ is sufficient for, and necessary for, the salvation of every human being. Jesus is the Savior of his mother, Mary. It is important to say that.

We also believe that Mary is now present with God in heaven. She is our spiritual mother. She intercedes for us, even as she

interceded in the Gospel story for the newly married couple at Cana who had run out of wine at their wedding reception. Christians have, from the earliest days of the Church, asked Mary to intercede for

actions. She is worthy of imitation because she was the first and most perfect of Christ's disciples" (On Honoring Mary, February, 1974).

We are called to honor Mary as the Mother of God and as our own mother, given to us by Jesus in his words to St. John on Calvary: "There is your mother" (Jn 19:27).

**Final word**

As I stated in the beginning of this pastoral letter, I invite all of you who are part of the Church of Springfield-Cape Girardeau to thank God for your Catholic faith. Show your thankfulness to God by strengthening your commitments to live the Catholic life in a way which shows his loving presence and action within your lives. Rejoice in your Catholic faith. In prayer, realize more clearly what a blessing it already is, and what it can grow to be in your lives.

Respect the religious beliefs and practices of your neighbors. Celebrate the faith in God you find in them. But let your hearts be touched, deeply and appreciatively, by the unique blessings of your Catholic faith which helps you grow closer to God, to one another, and to all God's people.

Welcome others—friends, acquaintances, neighbors, those

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## Sharing God's Life Together: *Being Catholic in the Bible Belt*

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you meet in your places of work and relaxation—to come, to see, and to learn about our Catholic faith. Invite those to return, who were baptized into the Catholic Church, but may not have recently been active in our Catholic community. When you invite and welcome others, your parish priest will be happy to assist you.

For my part, I promise to do all I can, with God's help, to build up the body of Christ in southern Missouri. I pray you have the joy of realizing that God gives you the grace to do the same.

**Most Rev. John J. Leibrecht**  
Diocese of Springfield-  
Cape Girardeau  
Nov. 11, 1988  
reprinted Oct. 21, 2005

### Questions a Catholic may be asked

#### Are you saved?

I am being saved. At my baptism God gave me a share in the life of Christ. As I progress with the help of God's grace to live the life of Christ, I am being saved. Intense and memorable individual experiences can be a part of God's saving me, but whether or not I am saved involves the way I live my entire life.

#### Why do Catholics confess their sins to another human being?

We do so because we believe we are members of the body of Christ. We share the life of Christ with millions of other people and

our actions have an effect, good or bad, on them. When we sin, we believe we must ask God's forgiveness, and also that of our brothers and sisters through Christ's body, the Church. We

believe that the priest is a representative of that body. We were baptized by a representative of the Church, and, through a representative of the Church, we affirm our baptismal promises in the sacrament of Penance.

#### Why pray to Mary?

We ask Mary to pray for us. We know Mary is not God. We know, however, that she is the Mother of the Word of God made flesh, and, because of that, she is worthy of more honor than any other of God's creatures. We give special honor to Mary because God himself first gave her special honor by choosing her to be the mother of the Messiah. One additional point: Because we are members of the body of Christ, Mary is, in a real sense, our mother too. She prays to God for us even as our earthly mothers do.

#### Why pray to saints?

We ask saints to pray for us. We believe that saints are in the presence of God, and in loving God, they also love us. We ask

them to pray to God for us in the same way we ask any friend to pray for us. We honor them because they are good people whose lives were open to God's presence and power.

#### Why can't Catholics read the Bible?

Catholics can and do read the Bible. Each Sunday at our Mass a portion of the Old Testament is read; there are also sections of both the Epistles and Gospels of the New Testament. The Church encourages all Catholics not only to read and study the Bible, but to use it for prayer and meditation.

#### How can you say you receive the body and blood of Christ?

In the words of the Gospels, Jesus says: "This is my body; take and eat. This is the cup of my blood." Catholics have always accepted these words as true. The Gospels tell us that Jesus asked that what he did be done by us in his memory. Paul emphasizes this in his First Letter to the Corinthians (11:23-30).

From the very earliest days of the Church, Christians believed that they truly received the body and blood of Christ at the Eucharist. Such a belief makes sense. Human beings know that the greatest gift one of us can give to the other is our self. Jesus Christ, who is both God and human, who loves us beyond all imagining, chooses to give himself to us



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to strengthen us. Catholics believe God continues to work the miracle of Christ's body and blood at every Eucharist. This is not beyond the love and power of Jesus.

**Why do Catholics listen to the pope when they have the Bible?**

We listen to the Holy Father because we believe we are members of the body of Christ. The body of Christ, as it is present on earth, is not an invisible collection of people. It is a visible community. Like any visible community, it needs to be structured. It

is different, though, from other communities of which we are members because it has its life and its unity from God's Holy Spirit. The pope is called to be guided by the Holy Spirit who lives within the community and, then, to lead the entire community. Catholics see a blessing in the continuity of authority in our Church since the days of St. Peter.

**Can someone be saved without being baptized by water?**

Catholics believe that God wants every human being to be saved. If someone wants to obey God's will, and if for some reason

baptism is not available or possible, the desire to do God's will is sufficient for salvation. Catholics have also always believed that those people are saved who, although not baptized, have suffered and died for Jesus.

be saved, and baptism is the ordinary way in which that begins. We make use of the ordinary way. If baptism is not available or is not possible, we believe that God, in his mercy, will provide for the salvation of the innocent.

**Why is going to church every Sunday so important?**

Catholics believe that the eucharistic liturgy, the Mass, is the continuation of the offering of Jesus to his Father. Because we are members of his body, we offer ourselves with him in his offering. It is important for growth in our Christian living that we be present with Christ, as he and we, the members of his body, make that offering to God the Father in the Holy Spirit. ©TM

**Why do Catholics baptize babies who are not able to make an act of faith?**

We do so because we believe salvation is the work of God and not primarily the work of human beings. God wishes that all people

# How do we live the two great commandments?

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Jude, also known as Thaddeus, is thought to have preached in Persia and Palestine. Thaddeus is the patron of those in despair or in hopeless situations.

The Lord chose both men (Luke 6:12-16). They form the foundation of the Church, along with other apostles, with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19-22). Simon and Jude were both martyred in the first century

and are both mentioned in the Roman Canon. ©TM

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## Making a complaint or an allegation of sexual misconduct to the diocese

The Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau supports and encourages the reporting of all incidents of sexual misconduct, regardless of the identity of the alleged offender.

The diocese recognizes that bringing an allegation of sexual misconduct to the attention of church officials can be a difficult decision. To make this process as safe and comfortable as possible, the diocese has provided a variety of methods for bringing such a complaint.

Any person who alleges sexual misconduct on the part of diocesan personnel\* may bring a complaint by contacting any one of the following individuals in writing, or by telephone, or in person. Please mark all correspondence "Personal and Confidential."

- A. The bishop of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, 601 S. Jefferson Ave., Springfield, MO 65806, (417) 866-0841;
- B. The chancellor of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, 601 S. Jefferson Ave., Springfield, MO 65806, (417) 866-0841;
- C. Any pastor or parish life coordinator of a parish within the diocese;
- D. The assistance coordinator, who is a layperson not in the employ of the diocese. (The name of the assistance coordinator is available through The Catholic Center, (417) 866-0841.)

Nothing within this document shall be interpreted to preclude or prohibit the reporting of any incidents of sexual abuse to appropriate civil authorities. In fact, the reporting to civil authorities is encouraged.

\* "Diocesan personnel" includes clergy, teachers in Catholic schools, and any employee or volunteer who works or volunteers on a regular basis within any parish, Catholic school, or other diocesan entity.

**Assistance provided to victims**  
The Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau will reach out to every person who has been the victim of sexual abuse as a minor by anyone acting in the name of the church, whether the abuse was recent or occurred many years in the past. This outreach will include provision of counseling, spiritual assistance, support groups, and other social services agreed upon by the victim and the diocese. The assistance coordinator will aid in the immediate pastoral care of persons who claim to have been sexually abused as minors by clergy or other diocesan personnel.

**The Catholic Center**  
601 S. Jefferson Ave., Springfield, MO 65806-3143  
(417) 866-0841 • FAX (417) 866-1140 • www.dioscg.org

# Life after a flood of fear

## *A missionary in Haiti recalls finding hope through faith after a hurricane*

**H**aiti was hit twice by devastating floods this past year, most tragically in September when raging waters brought about by Hurricane Jeanne killed thousands in and near the city of Gonaives. One witness to the flood's heartbreak and utter destruction was Passionist Fr. Rick Frechette, whose home state is Connecticut. He brings an added dimension to his mission calling: He is not only a priest, but a medical doctor as well. Even in the midst of the post-flood desolation, however, he found hope—the ability to rise beyond despair, the resolution to overcome fear. Here, excerpted from his report on the disaster to his religious superiors at home, is what Fr. Frechette, a missionary in Haiti for 17 years, saw, as told in his own words.

When I heard from the sisters in Port-au-Prince what had happened in Gonaives, we headed there at once. We would go in solidarity, to show our friendship and care, and to see what help we could offer. We would go with our friend and colleague, Phadoul, to help him search for his mother and brothers and sisters who live in Gonaives.

Five hours of terrible roads. We arrived after sunset. To get into the city we had to drive through a lake that had once been rice fields. Our headlights completely under water, only darkness and dark waters were before us—waters which rose to our doors. Two guides stood on our sideboards, guiding us along so we would not fall off the roadway—as had many overturned trucks and public busses, which lay at our right and our left like toppled buoys.

Gonaives itself was dark and desolate and in ruins. There were no signs of people, at least not at night. We plowed through the waters, the garbage, the broken city until we arrived at the sisters'. They came out to greet us, muddy but happy to see friends, recounting in detail their ordeal. With everything covered with mud, we had no choice but to sleep in the truck on the only clear patch of land we could find.

In the morning we had Mass together, very early. A Mass of thanks-

giving, a Mass for the victims, a Mass begging for help. After Mass, the Sisters gave us canned breakfast from army rations which they had, and eggs and bread. We made lists of what would be needed from Port-au-Prince, and we went off to the city to find Phadoul's family.

Wandering through the streets in water to our waist, as dead puppies floated by and people washed muddy clothes in the even muddier water that engulfed us, it would be impossible to describe the extent of the disaster. Everything was destroyed to a height of 15 feet. Electric lines dipped in the water around us. People greeted us from the roofs on which they were huddled together with whatever belongings they could salvage, on roofs which had saved their lives, and called down to us, "Be careful the white man doesn't fall into the canals. He doesn't know where they are on the side of the road. He is wet enough!"

"Thank you!" was our answer.

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***"On World Mission Sunday, Oct. 23, we join the Catholics of the world at the Eucharist in celebrating our common mission vocation. We offer prayers for the church's missionary efforts throughout the developing world—the work of bringing help and hope to the suffering poor."***

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"Ki gen nou ye? How are you?"

"Nou pa pi mal. We are not bad. When you still have your life you have everything!"

I thought back to the funeral that

had taken place a few days before, when a storm named Jeanne was in the throes of releasing its stores of



water onto the mountains above Gonaives. This was the funeral of our dear little Immacula, who had been with us at the orphanage since she was a small child. Her mother and her sister had died of AIDS, and Immacula was also infected with that dreaded virus. She was a child who never thrived and always had emerging health problems, which she fought with full force. Even though the medicines only helped her in a moderate way, they did help her survive a good dozen years longer than she would have otherwise. Those dozen years were truly "good," in fact precious to us. They were obviously precious to her as well.

As we processed to the cemetery after the funeral Mass, the choir of children was singing, and dreadful wailing and frantic cries began to fill the air. Who could not weep at the sound, the sight, the pain?

But the wailing and screaming was much louder and tormented in Gonaives, for there was no solid ground on which anyone could stand to gather the panic-stricken drowning into their arms, as children were washed cruelly away from their mothers to their deaths, and humble homes were uplifted and destroyed, and dead horses and cows and grandmothers and uncles floated in the

mud toward the sea.

As we entered the courtyard of the house of Phadoul's mother, our sandals were sucked off by the deep mud with every step. The body of an

old woman was immediately apparent, buried face down in the mud. We uncovered enough mud to know it was not Phadoul's mom, and we stopped to pray for her. We could not raise her body, simply because if we did there was absolutely no place to put her. And we would never have been able to carry her back through the waters, two miles back to the truck.

We got news that Phadoul's mother had been taken to a friend's house at high ground, and that she was all right. We trudged farther into the city until we found the home of Phadoul's

brothers and their families. Belongings piled high on the roof that had saved them, drying in the sun, the family began the arduous task of digging six feet of mud out of their house.

With gratitude to God for the safety of the sisters and Phadoul's family, moved by the concern for us shown by many strangers from their rooftops, inspired by the great spirit shown by those grateful for life and already starting to reshape their lives, we headed back to Port-au-Prince so that we could start organizing serious help—the same help we continue to offer in Thiole since the terrible floods of last May.

Everything is needed. Clothes, drinking water, cots for sleeping, food, medicine, seeds for replanting, cement for rebuilding, shovels for digging through the mud.

Everything is needed, but the day is young. And when you still have your life you have everything.

On World Mission Sunday, Oct. 23, we join the Catholics of the world at the Eucharist in celebrating our common mission vocation. We offer prayers for the church's missionary efforts throughout the developing world—the work of bringing help and hope to the suffering poor. And too we offer our financial help to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith to support all those who day after day bring the good news of Jesus Christ—his hope and his peace—to all nations and peoples.

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*For information on how to help, call Msgr. Michael Swalina, director, Diocesan Missionary Apostolate, (573) 785-9635; Pontifical Mission Societies-US, (212) 563-8700; or visit [www.worldmissions-catholicchurch.org](http://www.worldmissions-catholicchurch.org).*