

**UNITED IN HEART AND MIND**  
*A Pastoral Letter*  
*by Bishop William Murphy*  
*On the Life of the Church in the Diocese of Rockville Centre*  
*in Preparation for the Upcoming*  
*Eucharistic Congress*  
*and*  
*Diocesan Synod*

**Introduction**

*The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common. With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great favor was accorded them all. There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need. [Acts 4:32-35]*

As this passage from the Acts of the Apostles shows, from the beginning of her existence the Church has had certain characteristics that have marked her way of life. The People of the New Covenant, made into a new creation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, were called to live a new life in the pattern and image of the Savior who gave his life for his friends. The Son of God made man, risen from the dead, was still among his people. This summary of the life of the early Christian community written by Saint Luke in Acts shows us the effects of the Holy Spirit which the Risen Savior had breathed on the apostles. These effects can clearly be seen in a life of unity, expressed in joyful worship of God and in loving concern for others. Indeed, it is the very nature of the Church in Christ to be a sign and an instrument — a *sacrament* — of communion with God and of unity among all people so that the light of Christ might shine out visibly for all to see.<sup>1</sup>

**Five Characteristics From the Beginning**

From the first days of the Church's existence five characteristics have marked the sign of the Church's communion. These characteristics allowed the Church in apostolic times to live her mission and to shine brightly with the presence of Christ to a world so desperately in need of Christ's light. Those five characteristics are: *kerygma*, *catechesis*, *koinonia*, *diakonia*, and *eucharistia*. They remain essential for us today as Christ's Church on Long Island.

***Kerygma.*** This term comes from a Greek word meaning “preaching” or “proclamation”. Preaching the *kerygma* is the essential mission of the Church. Christ enjoined his apostles that they were to go out into the whole world and proclaim the good news of salvation to all people (*cf.* Mt 28:19-20; Mk 16:15; Jn 20:21; Acts 1:8).

Acts 2:14-36 recounts Peter's first great missionary discourse — his first “homily”, so to speak. In this speech, Peter proclaims the basic *kerygma* by preaching

about the earthly ministry of Jesus and, most importantly, proclaiming the saving power of Jesus' death and resurrection.

This *kerygma* that "Jesus is Lord", whom the powers of death could not defeat, comprised the earliest preaching of the Church. The Paschal Mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ, His victory over the forces of evil, darkness and sin, is the heart of our faith. That Paschal Mystery of the Lord's dying and rising is the saving mystery that is made present for us in every liturgical celebration. It is especially true in the Eucharist itself. The *kerygma*, then, is not merely a message in words, but it is the proclamation of God's salvific truth, lived out as the very action of salvation taking place in our midst.

**Catechesis.** This word refers to the instruction by which the faithful are formed and educated in the truths of Christ's teachings and the teachings of the Church. Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae (On Catechesis In Our Time)* reminds us that catechesis is an experience as old as the Church, insofar as "the image of Christ the Teacher was stamped on the spirit of the Twelve and of the first disciples".<sup>2</sup> The entire book of the Acts of the Apostles shows how faithful the apostles were to this vocation. We read in Acts 2 of how the growing early Christian community "devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers" (Acts 2:42).

Down to this very day the Church continues to be faithful to the catechetical mission given to her by her Lord. The desire to understand what we believe lies deep in the human heart. Catechesis is that action of the Church that helps the baptized develop an informed faith that is living, conscious and active, drawing each disciple into deeper relationship with and love for the Lord Jesus through knowledge and insight: a true union of heart and head.

**Koinonia.** This Greek word expresses "fellowship" or "community". It is much more than just friendship or community in a civic sense. It specifically means the union of the faithful with Christ and among themselves. It is a common living out of life that reflects a total oneness with each other in the Lord. The fact that the community of believers as described in Acts was truly of one heart and one mind is the concrete expression of *koinonia*. As Acts 2:44 tells us, "All who believed were together and had all things in common." More than interdependence, more than solidarity or fraternity, this is true communion with the Lord and with one another.

In this communion, we are transformed. Transformation in the Lord is a total transformation that touches every level of the disciple's life. The Holy Spirit, a Spirit of unity, enables believers to place the needs of others before one's own needs. The Church's living out of *koinonia* echoes Jesus' prayer at the Last Supper in John's Gospel that His disciples might be one, as He and the Father are one (*cf.* Jn 17:11, 21-23).

**Diakonia.** *Diakonia* is the biblical Greek word for service. A life lived in loving service of others is the only appropriate response to believing in the *kerygma*; it is the fruit of catechesis and the concrete manifestation of *koinonia*. Thus, as Acts tells us, the believers would "sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need" (Acts 2:45). Because of this, "there was no needy person among

them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles” (Acts 4:34).

Indeed, the Church is not an end in herself. She does not exist for her own sake, but for the sake of the transformation and salvation of the world. The Church has received from the Lord Jesus the mission to proclaim and advance among all peoples the Kingdom ushered in by Him. Here on earth, the Church is the seedbed, the beginning and the pledge of that Kingdom.<sup>3</sup> This Kingdom is established, however, only by the Church reaching out to the world, serving men and women in the image of the Suffering Servant Jesus, the Good Shepherd: “Christ was sent by the Father ‘to bring good news to the poor...to heal the contrite of heart’ (Lk 4:18), ‘to seek and to save what was lost’ (Lk 19:10). Similarly, the Church encompasses with her love all those who are afflicted by human misery and she recognizes in those who are poor and who suffer, the image of her poor and suffering founder. She celebrates and embraces all of them in their inherent human dignity and does all in her power to respond to their need while serving them as a privileged way to serve Christ.”<sup>4</sup>

***Eucharistia.*** This is the source and summit that calls from us “gratitude”. *Eucharistia*, or “thanksgiving”, is the basis for our word “Eucharist”. When Christ instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper, He “gave thanks” over the bread and wine, transformed now into his very body and blood. The Eucharist was absolutely essential to the life of the Church from the very beginning, the most precious gift the Lord left to us His Church. Stemming from the Lord’s command to “do this in memory of me” (*cf.* Lk 22:19) the Eucharist stood at the center of the Church’s life from the beginning. From the earliest images of the Church as found in the Acts of the Apostles, the Eucharist gives us identity and union even as it nourishes our pilgrim journey and forms us into His very Body, the Church. “They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.” (Acts 2:42) Here, of course, “breaking of the bread” refers to the Eucharist.

### **Living These Five Characteristics Today**

Those five characteristics continue to be descriptive of the Church today, both the Church universal and our particular Church of the Diocese of Rockville Centre. We are the Body of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit and strengthened by the Lord who shares His life with us through the sacraments. We continue to proclaim that Christ is risen and that in Him and Him alone we have redemption and the forgiveness for our sins (*kerygma*). We instruct those who are already baptized and those preparing for baptism in the truths of the faith and the life of the Church (catechesis). We strive to live as brothers and sisters in the Lord, united in our common faith and baptism (*koinonia*). We seek to serve one another in self-sacrificing love, in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for His sheep. We do this seeking to be the good and faithful servants who have been entrusted with working in His vineyard (*diakonia*). Finally, we are nourished at the Lord’s table, as daily the Church unites her sacrifice with the sacrifice of Christ in the celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy, giving thanks to God the Father through, with and in the Son and in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

As a diocese, The Lord calls us to be ever vigilant in our commitment to live as fully as possible the mission entrusted to us by the Lord. As he calls us, he also enables us, because the One who "calls also justifies and those He justifies, He will also glorify". Responding to that call means in essence that we must constantly re-appropriate over and over again those five characteristics that mark the life of the Church. Believing in the *kerygma* and being converted to Christ is not a once-and-for-all event, but is something that must be ongoing and ever deepening in the life of every disciple. Catechesis is not only something for children, but it is a life-long journey for everyone, insofar as we can never fully exhaust our understanding the depths of our relationship with the One who is the source of our life and the "fountain of all holiness".<sup>5</sup> We must continually rid ourselves of the divisions, hatreds, anger and prejudices that keep us from being the one Body of Christ (*koinonia*) and embrace one another in a communion of forgiveness and reconciliation in imitation of Him who died on the cross. We must always be sure that as good stewards we are renewing our commitment to serve others, avoiding our tendency to become lazy and selfish. We must especially be attentive to the needs of the poor, the marginalized, the defenseless and the unborn. And, of course, we can never be truly united to the Lord without partaking of the "food for the journey", the Eucharist. As we eat the Body of Christ we become ever more the Body of Christ, a process that demands our constant purification and sanctification through the gift of God's grace. To give thanks and praise to God in the Eucharist for the salvation that has come to us in Jesus' death and resurrection is the heart of the sacramental life of every Catholic.

We are blessed as a diocese to be at a particular point in our history where two upcoming diocesan events will assist us in the on-going process of renewal and recommitment to *kerygma*, catechesis, *koinonia*, *diakonia*, and Eucharist. Those events are the **Diocesan Eucharistic Congress** and the **Diocesan Synod**.

### **The Diocesan Eucharistic Congress**

The first Eucharistic Congress for the Diocese of Rockville Centre will run from June 3, 2006 to June 18, 2006, and its theme will be "Bread of Life, Hope for the World". Following upon the Year of the Eucharist that concluded this past October 2005, the two weeks of the Diocesan Eucharistic Congress will be marked as special days of prayer, reflection and adoration in every parish in the diocese. While the parishes will have their own moments of prayer and celebration, deepening our worship and love of the Eucharist we celebrate, there will be three major diocesan celebrations:

- *The Opening of the Eucharistic Congress, on Saturday, June 3, 2006, the Vigil of Pentecost: this will be marked by a diocesan pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of the Island in Eastport. There the many cultures and peoples that make up our diocese will gather for prayer and fellowship, for reconciliation and Eucharistic sharing. During the day one of Latin America's most dynamic pastors, Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez of Honduras, will address us all on the theme of "Eucharist, Pentecost and Diversity". We will conclude the Day with the Mass for the Vigil of Pentecost celebrated by Cardinal Oscar along with myself and all the bishops and as many priests as possible who can join us. If you can, plan to be with us for the whole day or as much of the day as you can!*

• *Then there will be A Special Celebration for the Youth of the Diocese on Saturday, June 10, 2006, the Eve of the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity; All the youth of the Diocese are invited to the campus of Holy Trinity Diocesan High School, Hicksville where I will have the privilege of spending time with them and leading them in the celebration of Mass with special homage to our Lord present in the Eucharist.*

• *The Eucharistic Congress will conclude on Sunday, June 18, 2006, with the celebration of the Eucharist on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, at St. Agnes Cathedral, Rockville Centre. His Eminence, Edward Cardinal Egan, Archbishop of New York, will be the Principal Celebrant and preach. There will be a procession with the Blessed Sacrament at the end of Mass.*

In your parishes and around the Diocese there will be many other moments to deepen our Eucharistic faith. For example, all the priests will be able to share in one of the three Eucharistic Days for Priests at the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception on Monday June 5, Tuesday June 6 or Thursday June 8. Houses of consecrated women or men are invited to develop programs within their own communities using the materials the Diocese will provide. The parishes will also receive useful material and information for their own programs.

It is my hope that all Catholics on Long Island will enter into the days of the Eucharistic Congress by participating not only in these diocesan events but also in the various events offered in one's own parish. Those days will be a grace-filled time for drawing more deeply into communion with our Lord and with one another. They will enable us, through the various opportunities for catechesis, prayer, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and the celebration of the Eucharist, to consider the profound mystery we celebrate in the Eucharist. Since the celebration of the Eucharist is at the center of the life of the Church and the very process of the Church's on-going renewal and growth, our Eucharistic Congress will be a time for us to become more deeply united in heart and in mind through the graces of the Eucharist.

### **The Diocesan Synod**

In my homily in my installation as Bishop of Rockville Centre on September 5, 2001, I stated that I hoped we might be able to celebrate for the first time a Diocesan Synod in conjunction with our fiftieth anniversary as a Diocese in 2007. I did so with great trust in the wisdom of the People of God in this diocese and belief in the presence of the Holy Spirit to guide us through the synod process. I was confident then, as I still am now, that all those involved in the process would contribute their wisdom, holiness, and experience in addressing matters of importance to the diocese.

After consultation with the Priests' Senate, we began a synodal process which has been an opportunity to listen to the concerns of the people of this diocese and a way to help the faithful understand what it means to be members of the Church. It has been educational as participants had the chance to recognize together the many good things happening in the life of the diocese. The synod has been a process of no small undertaking, involving the time and talent of many people. Since it first began in the Fall of 2002 with the establishment of the Steering Committee, more than 15,000 persons have made contributions. The celebration of the Synod in 2007 will culminate a common

commitment of us all to work together to build the Church of the new millennium. My prayer is that we will all receive the grace of the Spirit so that we, with the next generations will discover and re-discover Christ's life in our lives and Christ's love for His Church and for all humankind. At this time I express my gratitude and admiration to the members of the various committees who have kept the process of the synod moving forward throughout these years, and to all the numerous good people of the diocese who have attended various committee meetings, listening sessions and strategy sessions.

Before the actual celebration, the members of the Synod will be chosen. They will review the pastoral proposals the committees have been developing. Once they have approved the pastoral statements, I will have the privilege of promulgating them. With these pastoral "vision statements", the work of the synod will begin to bear fruit for the future of the diocese.

Coinciding with the promulgation of these pastoral documents will be the celebration of the **50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Diocese in 2007**. Truly it will be a time of great joy for us all, bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated women and men and all the lay faithful, "united in heart and mind". It is my prayer that, as we give thanks for these first fifty years of the Church on Long Island, the Eucharistic Congress and the Diocesan Synod will be privileged, grace-filled moments to make us better poised, spiritually and temporally, to meet the challenges of the new millennium and thus be more effectively united in heart and mind in the years ahead.

### **Conclusion: United in Heart and Mind**

In his beautiful encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict reflects on these characteristics of the Church: "The Church's deepest nature is reflected in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the Word of God, celebrating the sacraments and exercising the ministry of charity."<sup>6</sup> Inspired by the Holy Father's meditation on charity, the life of the Church in the Diocese of Rockville Centre in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be as vibrant as the life of the early Christian community described by Saint Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. Ours can be a life of unity in Christ expressed through our worship of the Triune God and our concern for others. Through the gifts bestowed on us by our Risen Savior Jesus Christ, we can become a brighter sign and a clearer instrument of communion with God and with one another and indeed with all people, so that the light of Christ might shine out visibly from among us for all to see.

As your Bishop, I thank God daily for the blessings He has bestowed on this great diocese, and I pray for the needs of all the people of this diocese. I have confidence that together we can grow in being more faithful disciples, with greater obedience to God's will. Together, united in heart and mind, may our upcoming Eucharistic Congress, Diocesan Synod and 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary allow us all to shine brightly with the gifts of *kerygma*, *catechesis*, *koinonia*, *diakonia*, and *eucharistia* so that all the world might see the glory of God and come to know Him the one true God and Jesus Christ His Only Son, our Savior and Lord, to whom be glory and praise forever and ever.

**+William Murphy**  
**Bishop of Rockville Centre**  
**March 1, 2006**  
**Ash Wednesday**

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, No. 1.

<sup>2</sup> No. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, No. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, No. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Roman Missal*, Eucharistic Prayer II.

6. *Deus Caritas Est* 25.