

SAID ED July 9, 2017

As you are aware the Diocese of Rochester will celebrate the 150th anniversary of its founding on March 3, 2018. Bishop Matano writing in a pastoral letter, which was published recently in the Catholic Courier: “Therefore with gratitude to God and in conjunction with our 150th anniversary, I am declaring the observance of a Year of the Eucharist to commence Sunday, June 18, 2017, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, Corpus Christi, and to conclude on Sunday, June 3, 2018, on this same solemnity.” [As I mentioned before in this column the full text of the Bishop’s pastoral letter can be found in both last month’s Catholic Courier and on the diocesan website, www.dor.org.]

What will a “Year of the Eucharist” involve? Bishop Matano wants all parishes and families to make a comprehensive effort to renew and deepen the understanding that we have of this central sacrament of our faith, to urge every Catholic household to recommit themselves to reverent participation in the celebration of the Mass, and to see the celebration of the Eucharist as “the heart and center of our Sesquicentennial Celebration ... and the driving force for our Diocese’s pastoral, apostolic and charitable works.”

The Bishop’s pastoral letter does not outline specific programs for parishes to engage in during this special Year. He leaves that to individual parishes to decide. But he does name two specific requests concerning our practices at Mass. He does so in light of paragraph #42 of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal: “A common posture, to be observed by all participants, is a sign of the unity of the members of the Christian community gathered for the sacred liturgy: it both expresses and fosters the intention and spiritual attitude of the participants.”

First, the Bishop is asking, whenever possible, that all the faithful kneel during the Eucharistic Prayer, from the end of the “Holy, Holy, Holy” to after the “Great Amen.” In truth, this practice has been local law in the dioceses of the United States since the revised Order of Mass was promulgated in 1969, and has been reaffirmed several times since by the US Bishops. But kneeling has not always been the traditional communal posture for Christian prayer of praise, of which the Eucharistic Prayer is the prime example. Other more ancient practices are readily found in our tradition. Some individual parishes in our Diocese and around the country have had the long-time custom of standing during this Prayer. They gather in churches that were built without kneelers. Our sisters and brothers at Resurrection are a case in point. Transfiguration in Pittsford and St. Catherine’s in Mendon are other examples. Kneeling there would be awkward and uncomfortable as the Bishop notes.

The Bishop is also asking that we kneel prior to Communion, after we sing the “Lamb of God” through the distribution of Holy Communion. When the General Instruction of the Roman Missal and the third edition of the Roman Missal were promulgated, the decision about posture at this point of the Mass was left to the local Bishop. In 2002, when the General Instruction was published, the common practice in our Diocese was to stand until after Holy Communion had been received, and Bishop Clark decided to leave it that way. But in the time since, practice has shifted, so that often some stand and some kneel – again, an awkwardly divided congregation. So Bishop Matano is asking all parishes to kneel in reverent preparation for receiving Holy Communion. I ask that beginning today, we accept the Bishop’s request for the sake of unified, communal prayer, remembering that we are celebrating the Lord’s Real Presence in every Eucharist and this is to be our prime focus as we approach the Lord’s Table.

Have a great week!

Fr. Ed
