

CATHOLIC CALENDAR.

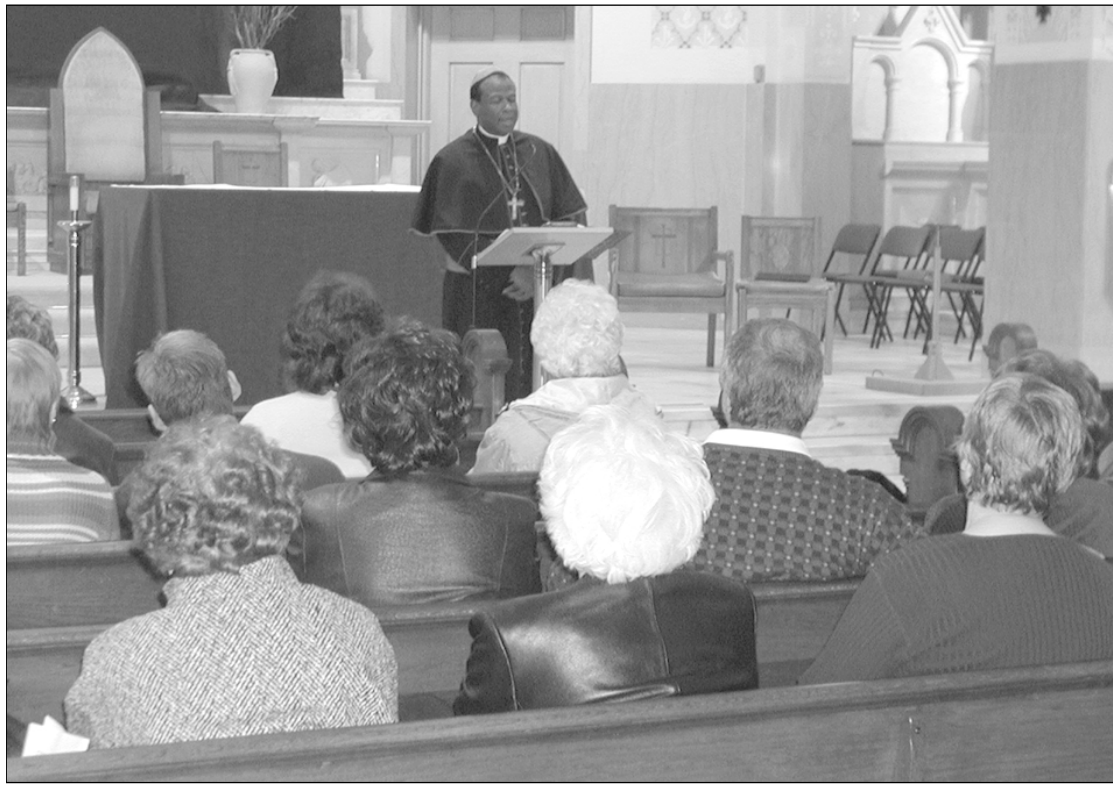
A page devoted to local Catholic interests

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The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Bishop of Lake Charles, led an informal afternoon of reflection on the Lenten readings for more than 75 people last Sunday, March 3, in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. The event was similar to the Advent afternoons of reflection held in December. The next afternoon of reflection will be held Sunday, March 17, from 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. in the Cathedral.

Sunday Afternoon of Reflection on March 10 cancelled

LAKE CHARLES - Due to unforeseen circumstances the second of three informal afternoons of scripture reflection with The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton to be held in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception and scheduled for Sunday, March 10, the Fourth Sunday of Lent, has been cancelled.

Last Sunday's first session drew more than 75 attendees.

Bishop Braxton will be back in the

Cathedral for the final informal session on Sunday, March 17, the Fifth Sunday of Lent.

The gathering will allow those who participate the opportunity to learn more about the Bible, especially the texts on the Last Supper, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. They will also provide the opportunity to discuss questions about the Church and the Catholic faith that they may have with the Bishop.

Shouldn't I decide if I want to be baptized?

(Reprinted with permission of The Church Today, Diocese of Alexandria) By Msgr. Ronald Hoppe Vicar General, Diocese of Alexandria

Question: Since I did not make a choice to be baptized as an infant, isn't it important that I make an adult decision to be baptized?

Answer: Your question is a very current one, since we live in an age which stresses personalism and individual choice; but it is also an age-old one, dating back to the second century (Tertullian refers to it, but does not see any conflict).

Scripture has no references to infant Baptism, but in the New Testament times, they would argue that Jewish families initiated their male infants into the faith of their parents through circumcision.

Certainly a more candid approach, with little or no religious tones, would allow that parents make a lot of decisions for their children viz. Health needs, school requirements, disciplinary actions, etc. In the old Baptismal rites of the Church, much was an adaptation of the adult ceremony. Since Vatican II, however, a newer rite is designed which stresses the social character of the celebration, bringing in the

aspect of the Faith of the Church as an essential part of the sacrament, allowing the greater part of the parents and the community of the faithful to participate.

Historically, the sacrament of confirmation was administered at the same time as Baptism. In more recent times, however, Confirmation

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is given at a later date, allowing the child or person to make a choice at that time to continue in the practice of the faith. We also assert in our Sunday liturgy during the creed that there is but one Baptism, hence the effects of initiation remain throughout our lives, negating the need for a "rebaptism." Incidentally, when an adult Baptized in another Christian tradition such as Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, et alia, he or she is not re-Baptized when entering the Roman Catholic tradition, because we recognize their Baptisms as valid, hence no need of another.

As we reflect on the mystery of this most necessary of all the Sacraments, we recognize more clearly Baptism

as the sign of the paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. The Rite of initiation of Adults takes place ordinarily at the Easter Vigil; at the infant's ceremony, the presence of the Paschal Candle is very visible, along with presenting the child's father with a candle, a sign of the new life of Christ, now more fully present in the newly Baptized.

As I reflect on the many infant Baptisms I celebrated, what joy was experienced by the parents as they saw their children being brought into the community of the church. Parents always want the best for their children, and most certainly in their infancy. And when the church offers this New Life of Christ to the child, what parent would turn away from this gift!

None of us can know what relationship exists between God and the newly

Baptized child. This great mystery of God's salvation, and mystical experience of this Union can only be seen as God's great gift to humankind.

"Go, therefore and preach to all nations, young and old, far and wide Baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit!

Church of Christ, and the Reformed Church in America. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is an ecumenical partner in the process.

"In addressing the possibilities and challenges facing ecumenical families who seek to share their life of faith and worship, the members of the dialogue soon realized that many (though not all) of the concerns that arise are based on language that is often misunderstood or misinterpreted," the cochairs explained. "Much time was spent during the sessions trying to describe to the members' mutual satisfaction what we each believe and how we express that belief in practice."

"The prime intent of the participants in this dialogue was to promote and facilitate the ongoing journey toward full, visible Christian unity," wrote Rev. Bush and Bishop Cooney.

Pope John Paul II's message for Lent 2002

WASHINGTON — The text of Pope John Paul II's message for Lent this year, titled "Freely You Have Received, Freely Give," was released Feb. 5 in Washington by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

"You received without paying, give without pay" (Mt 10:8).

Dear brothers and sisters, 1. We are preparing to follow the path of Lent, which will lead us to the solemn celebration of the central mystery of faith, the mystery of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. We are preparing for the favorable time which the church offers the faithful, so that they may contemplate the work of salvation accomplished by our Lord on the cross. The heavenly Father's saving plan was completed in the free and total gift to us of the only begotten Son. "No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (Jn 10:18), Jesus declares, leaving no doubt that he decides to sacrifice his own life for the salvation of the world. In confirmation of so great a gift of love, the Redeemer goes on: "Greater love has no one than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13).

Lent, the providential time for conversion, helps us to contemplate this stupendous mystery of love. It is a return to the roots of our faith, so that by pondering the measureless gift of grace which is redemption, we cannot fail to realize that all has been given to us by God's loving initiative. In order to meditate upon this aspect of the mystery of salvation, I have chosen as the theme for this year's Lenten message the Lord's words: "You received without paying, give without pay" (Mt 10:8).

2. God has freely given us his Son: Who has deserved or could ever deserve such a privilege? St. Paul says: "All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God, but they are justified by his grace as a gift" (Rom 3:23-24). In his infinite mercy God loved us, not permitting himself to be blocked by the grievous state of separation to which man had been consigned by sin. He graciously stooped down to our weakness, and made it the cause of a new and still more wondrous outpouring of his love. The church does not cease to proclaim this mystery of infinite goodness, exalting God's free choice and his desire not to condemn man, but to draw him back into communion with himself.

"You received without paying, give without pay." May these words of the Gospel echo in the heart of all Christian communities on their penitential pilgrimage to Easter. May Lent, recalling the mystery of the Lord's death and resurrection, lead all Christians to marvel in their heart of hearts at the greatness of such a gift. Yes! We have received without pay. Is not our entire life marked by God's kindness? The beginning of life and its marvelous development: This is a gift. And because it is gift, life can never be regarded as a possession or as private property, even if the capabilities we now have to improve the quality of life can lead us to think that man is the "master" of life. The achievements of medicine and biotechnology can sometimes lead man to think of himself as his own creator, and to succumb to the temptation of tampering with "the tree of life" (Gn 3:24).

It is also worth repeating here that not everything that is technically possible is morally acceptable. Scientific work aimed at securing a quality of life more in keeping

with human dignity is admirable, but it must never be forgotten that human life is a gift, and that it remains precious even when marked by suffering and limitations. It is a gift to be accepted and to be loved at all times, received without pay and to be placed without pay at the service of others.

3. In setting before us the example of Christ offering himself for us on Calvary, Lent helps us in a unique way to understand that life is redeemed in him. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus renews our life and makes us sharers in the divine life which draws us into the intimate life of God and enables us to experience his love for us. This is a sublime gift, which the Christian cannot fail to proclaim with joy. In his Gospel, St. John writes: "This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3). This life is passed on to us in baptism, and we must nourish it constantly by responding to

and loved for themselves, regardless of their qualities and defects. Indeed, the greater their hardship, the more they must be the object of our practical love. This is the love to which the church, through her countless institutions, bears witness in accepting responsibility for the sick, the marginalized, the poor and the exploited. In this way, Christians become apostles of hope and builders of the civilization of love.

It is highly significant that Jesus spoke the words "You received without paying, give without pay" as he sent the Apostles out to spread the Gospel of salvation, which is his first and foremost gift to humanity. Christ wants his kingdom, which is already close at hand (cf. Mt 10:5ff), to be spread through gestures of gratuitous love accomplished by his disciples. This is what the Apostles did in the early days of Christianity, and those who met them saw them as bearers of a message greater than



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it faithfully, both individually and communally, through prayer, the celebration of the sacraments, and evangelical witness.

Since we have received this life freely, we must in turn offer it freely to our brothers and sisters. This is what Jesus asked of the disciples when he sent them out as his witnesses in the world: "You received without paying, give without pay." And the first gift to be given is the gift of a holy life, bearing witness to the freely given love of God. May the Lenten journey be for all believers an unceasing summons to enter more deeply into this special vocation of ours. As believers, we must be open to a life marked by "gratuitousness," by the giving of ourselves unreservedly to God and neighbor.

4. "What do you have," St. Paul asks, "that you did not receive?" (1 Cor 4:7). The demand which follows this recognition is that of loving our brothers and sisters, and of dedicating ourselves to them. The more needy they are, the more urgent the believer's duty to serve them. Does not God permit human need so that by responding to the needs of others we may learn to free ourselves from our egoism and to practice authentic Gospel love? The command of Jesus is clear: "If you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?" (Mt 5:46). The world prizes human relationships based on self-interest and personal gain, and this fosters an ego-centric vision of life, in which too often there is no room for the poor and weak. Every person, even the least gifted, must be welcomed

themselves. In our own day too the good done by believers becomes a sign, and often an invitation to believe. When, like the Good Samaritan, Christians respond to the needs of their neighbor, theirs is never merely material assistance. It is always a proclamation of the kingdom as well, and speaks of the full meaning of life, hope and love.

5. Dear brothers and sisters! Let this be how we prepare to live this Lent: in practical generosity toward the poorest of our brothers and sisters! By opening our hearts to them, we realize ever more deeply that what we give to others is our response to the many gifts which the Lord continues to give to us. We have received without paying, let us give without pay!

What better time is there than Lent for offering this testimony of gratuitousness which the world so badly needs? In the very love which God has for us, there lies the call to give ourselves freely to others in turn. I thank all those throughout the world — lay people, religious and priests — who offer this witness of charity. May it be true of all Christians, whatever the circumstances in which they live.

May the Virgin Mary, mother of fair love and hope, be our guide and strength on this Lenten journey. Assuring you all of an affectionate remembrance in my prayers, I gladly impart my apostolic blessing to each of you, especially to those engaged day after day on the many frontiers of charity.

From the Vatican, 4 October 2001, Feast of St. Francis of Assisi.

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Diocesan Penance Services set week of March 18-22

LAKE CHARLES — Penance Services will be conducted during the week of March 18 through March 22 in five churches of the Diocese of Lake Charles.

All of the services will begin at 7 p.m.

Sites for the Penance Ser-

vices are The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception on Monday, March 18, St. Philip Neri Church in Kinder on Tuesday, March 19, Our Lady of Prompt Succor Church in Sulphur on

Wednesday, March 20, Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Creole on Thursday, March 21 and Our Lady Help of Christians Church in Jennings on Friday, March 22.

(This page paid for by the Diocese of Lake Charles.)