

What do you like about Lake Charles?

February 22, 2005
The Fourth Anniversary
of My Installation

When I am visiting with people after Sunday Mass in front of the Cathedral, enjoying dinner in their homes, talking with students at St. Louis Catholic High School or at McNeese University I am often asked questions about just about anything. As I conclude my fourth year as Bishop of Lake Charles and as we prepare for the Celebration of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Diocese in April I have decided to share my responses to some of those questions with you.

1. What do you like most about Lake Charles?

While I like many things about Lake Charles, what I like most is the people. Just as a parish priest experiences the meaning of his priesthood through his involvement in the lives of the people he serves, a bishop experiences the meaning of his episcopal ministry through his involvement in the lives of the priests, religious, and Christian faithful he serves. The priests and people of this community are very welcoming. There is a friendly, gracious spirit here that I was aware of from my first weeks in the area. I have experienced this warmth and openness in people of all religious faiths and in people of very different cultural and educational backgrounds. Over the years it has become apparent to me that this hospitable spirit is not superficial. It is the real thing. As a priest and bishop, I am particularly impressed by the genuineness of the way so many of our people live the faith they celebrate in church on Sunday every day of the week.

2. How did you become so devoted to your mother?

I grew up in Chicago in a very close-knit family. My father, Cullen Lawrence and my Mother Dear were dedicated to caring for me, my sisters, Gwendolyn, Patricia, Adrienne, and my dear brother, Cullen Lawrence Jr. We did many things together

such as: reading, playing games, household chores, praying the Rosary, going on trips, making Christmas presents, going to Mass, and the usual, soon forgotten, quarreling. Mother Dear was the center of all of our activities, especially when my father's work took him away from home. She introduced me to the Chicago Public Library, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Chicago Symphony, and so much more. She taught me that the real trip is in your mind, your heart, and your spirit. I was blessed to know from experience how much my parents loved me. It was my Mother who first set my feet on the path of faith. Her trust in God, her love for Christ, her devotion to the Church and Eucharist were the soil in which my vocation to the priesthood took root. In many ways my parents have been not only my mother and father but also two of my dearest friends. With the death of my father, the death of my brother, and my mother's advanced age (85, March 11), and gradually increasing dementia, it is easy to be devoted to one who is the dearest of the dear in my life.

3. Don't you ever get tired of talking about the Bible?

No! I am aware that I speak about the Sacred Scriptures often. I always reflect on Scripture in my homilies but I talk about the importance of reading, studying, understanding and praying the scriptures in many other contexts as well. I firmly believe that one of the most important things we can do to deepen our Catholic faith and share it with others (especially our children) is to overcome our fear and ignorance of the Bible. It is most unfortunate that some Catholic people seem to believe that the faith of Protestants is centered on the Bible and our faith is centered on doctrines and devotions. This simply is not true. Authentic Catholic doctrine is born from scripture and the living tradition of the Church guided by the Holy Spirit. Genuine

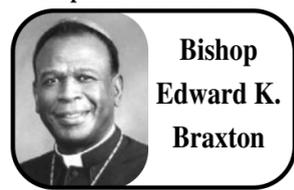
Catholic devotion either arises from Scripture (e.g. the Stations, the Rosary) or directs us back to the Scripture (e.g. the lives of the saints). Many of our neighbors of other Christian traditions are very knowledgeable of Scripture and they often have questions about the Catholic Church and Scripture. I encourage every Catholic home to have solid Catholic translation of the Bible (e.g. the Jerusalem Bible) and a good Catholic commentary. (There are many. Page through them and pick the one that meets your needs.)

4. Isn't this suppose to be the Year of the Eucharist?

Every year is supposed to be the year of the Eucharist! However, Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter, *Mane Nobiscum Domine* (Remain with us, Lord) asked us all to devote the twelve months between October 2004 and October 2005 to renewal of our appreciation of the great gift that comes to us from the God who dwells in unapproachable light, the Living Gift of Divine love, the consecrated Bread and Wine that are the Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. During this year in our Diocese we have asked all of our parishes to make every effort to enhance the prayerfulness and reverence of every celebration of the Eucharist. We are aided in this effort by The General Instruction on the Roman Missal, *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (The instruction from the Congregation for Divine Worship) and my notes on this document, which have been published and distributed in every parish. Three of the best ways for each of us to celebrate this Year of the Eucharist are a.) to receive the Eucharist worthily and often and spend time in prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, b.) teach our young people to treasure the Eucharist and to understand the Church's authentic belief about the Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and the presence of Christ in the

Church and the world, c.) manifest the truth of our Eucharist centered lives by really loving God with our whole being and loving our neighbors as we love ourselves.

5. Why was Immaculate Conception Cathedral built



Bishop Edward K. Braxton

in 1913 when our Diocese is only twenty-five years old?

Immaculate Conception Cathedral was not built in 1913. Immaculate Conception parish Church was built in 1913. It was not built as a cathedral. It was built as a church in the Archdiocese of New Orleans. It was simply designated as a cathedral in 1980 when Pope John Paul II created the Diocese of Lake Charles. In older dioceses like New Orleans and Lafayette, the diocese was established first, and then a temporary cathedral was built. Eventually as the diocese grew, a building was designed and erected specifically as the cathedral, that is the Seat (cathedra) of the bishop; the church from which the bishop presides in charity over the Local Church entrusted to his pastoral care by the Pope.

On April 25, 2005 the Diocese of Lake Charles will mark its Silver Jubilee with a special Mass at the Cathedral. This will also mark the 25th anniversary of the Episcopal ordination of our founding Bishop, Bishop Jude Speyrer.

6. Why do you think there are fewer seminarians studying for the priesthood in the United States today than there were in the past?

I do not know the answer to this question. Nor do I think any one else knows. In my Pastoral Letter, *The Shape of the Church to Come*, I indicated some of the reasons that are mentioned frequently: The ultimate questions addressed by

religion in general and by Catholicism in particular do not seem relevant to many young people. The reforms of the Second Vatican Council have obscured the role of the priest. The secular, materialistic, egocentric American culture makes it difficult for someone to embrace a life of selfless-service to others receiving neither wealth nor fame in return. The lack of enthusiasm about the Church and the priesthood on the part of families who rarely encourage their sons to consider the priesthood. The perception that celibacy and permanent commitment are incompatible with a culture saturated with sexuality and the desire for personal gratification. The fact that Catholics are not really praying for vocations. The selfishness of those who are called by Christ and are failing to respond to their vocations. The terrible scandal caused by members of the clergy abusing children. The low morale of some priests that makes it impossible for them to be dynamic ambassadors for the priesthood. The concern that there may be an active homosexual presence in some seminaries. The loss of reverence in the liturgy, the lack of devotion to Mary, and indifference to the clear teachings of the Holy Father.

Even though I personally am not sure that I know why there are fewer candidates for the priesthood than most of us would like, I am sure that the Holy Spirit is with the Church. Providence will guide the worldwide Church and our Local Church as we make adjustments and adapt to present and future realities.

7. Is it true that Pope John Paul II can resign as Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church? Would we then have two popes?

Yes it is true. He has only to announce that he is resigning from the office of Bishop of Rome. (The resignation is submitted to no one.) The College of Cardinals then elects a new Bishop of Rome. There would

only be one Pope.

8. Do you think the Holy Father Will resign?

I have no way of knowing the answer to that question. It is better to concentrate on being attentive to his faithful witness to Christ and praying for his well-being.

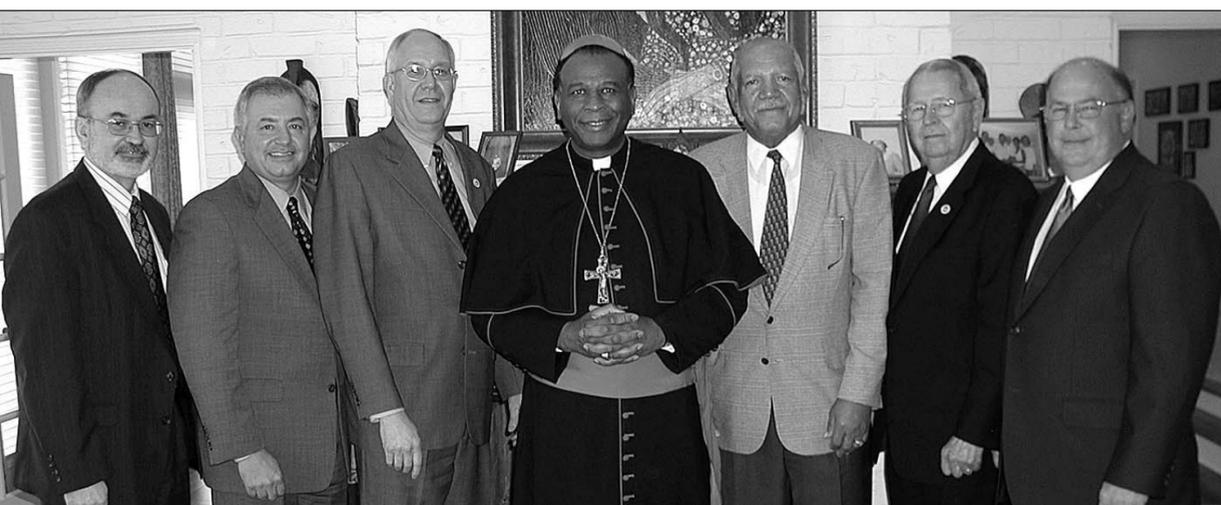
9. Do you know who the next pope will be? Will the Church change much under a new pope?

As a bishop and theologian I have met many of the cardinals from around the world. Since the next pope will probably be one of the cardinals, I may have met the future pope. But I have no idea who he will be. The Church will never change her commitment to proclaim "the faith that comes to us from the apostles." The essentials of the Church will not change. However, the Church has clearly changed in dramatic ways from one pontificate to another. Compare Pius XII (1939-1958) and Blessed John XXIII (1958-1962). While we should continue to pray for John Paul II and imitate his heroic example of service, we should not worry about future popes. Remember the words of John XXIII at the end of a long day as Pope. "I have done the best I could for you today, Lord. Many challenges lie before us. But I am not worried. It's your Church, Lord and I'm going to bed!"

10. Why are your columns so long? How do you expect us to read them?

I do not consider them to be so long. They are briefer than the front page of the *American Press*, briefer than the Sports pages. The length is dictated by the breadth and depth of the aspect of our faith I am writing about. Of course my training is that of a writer and university professor. That may make me long winded! If the column is interesting but a bit too long, why not read a few paragraphs one day and a few paragraphs the next?

May God Bless you now and always!



Bishop Edward K. Braxton, center, stands with Catholic members of the Southwest Louisiana legislative delegation and Danny Loar, Executive Director of the Louisiana Catholic Conference following a lunch at the Diocesan Residence. Pictured, from left, are Loar, Rep. Ronnie Johns, Rep. Dan "Blade" Morrish, Bishop Braxton, Rep. Elcie Guillory, Sen. Gerald Theunissen, and Rep. Dan Flavin. Loar and Bishop Braxton and the members of the delegation spoke about a variety of subjects of interest that may come up during the upcoming session of the Louisiana Legislature, which opens on April 25.

Keeping Our Youth and Children Safe

The Diocese of Lake Charles recognizes the God-given dignity of every human being and condemns all forms of abuse or neglect of people of all ages. In regard specifically to minors, it is the policy of the Diocese of Lake Charles that abuse or neglect of minors is totally reprehensible and intolerable behavior. Any such conduct is to be considered, by its very nature, completely contrary to Christian morality and therefore is contrary to the duties and employment of all personnel serving within the Diocese and cannot be justified (Policy 701).

To report an occurrence of child abuse within any diocesan activity or by any diocesan personnel, a victim or other person aware of an abuse may contact the Victim's Assistance Coordinator, Rev. Whitney Miller. Father Miller is uniquely qualified to minister to victims because of his experience, his credentials, and his pastoral nature. All conversations with Father Miller will be confidential.

To contact Father Miller, call 337-436-7275, Ext. 238.

As an alternative, a victim or person aware of an abuse may contact the diocese by calling Bernell Ezell, Director of the Office of Child and Youth Protection, 337-439-7426, Ext. 15.

For John Paul II, Communion is Communication

VATICAN CITY — The culmination of communication is communion, a prospect that is possible thanks to Christ's redemption, says John Paul II in his new apostolic letter.

This spirituality of communication is one of the clearest contributions of the letter, entitled "The Rapid Development." It was published Monday, Feb. 21.

In the text, which is addressed to those involved in social communications, the Holy Father shares his experience as communicator. The themes of the text echo those of the Second Vatican Council

decreed "Inter Mirifica."

"The world of mass media also has need of Christ's redemption," the Pope begins by saying in the most reflective passage of the letter.

The Holy Father writes: "To analyze with the eyes of faith the processes and value of communications, the deeper appreciation of Sacred Scripture can undoubtedly help as a 'great code' of communication of a message which is not ephemeral, but fundamental for its saving value."

"Salvation history recounts and documents the communication of God with

man, a communication which uses all forms and ways of communicating," the letter says. "The human being is created in the image and likeness of God in order to embrace divine revelation and to enter into loving dialogue with Him."

"Because of sin, this capacity for dialogue at both the personal and social level has been altered, and humanity has had to suffer, and will continue to suffer, the bitter experience of incomprehension and separation. God, however, did not abandon the human race, but sent his own Son. In the Word made flesh communication itself takes on its most profound meaning: thus, in the

Holy Spirit, the human being is given the capacity to receive salvation, and to proclaim and give witness to it before the world."

The Pope continues: "The communication between God and humanity has thus reached its perfection in the Word made flesh. The act of love by which God reveals himself, united to the response of faith by humanity, generates a fruitful dialogue."

"Precisely for this reason, making our own in a certain sense the request of the disciples, 'teach us to pray,' we can ask the Lord to help us to understand how to communicate with God and with other human beings through the marvelous communica-

tions media."

From this perspective, John Paul II states, "The media provides a providential opportunity to reach people everywhere, overcoming barriers of time, of space, and of language; presenting the content of faith in the most varied ways imaginable; and offering to all who search the possibility of entering into dialogue with the mystery of God, revealed fully in Christ Jesus."

The Pope further notes that there is "a culminating moment in which communication becomes full communion: the Eucharistic encounter."

"By recognizing Jesus in the 'breaking of the bread,'

believers feel themselves urged on to announce his death and resurrection, and to become joyful and courageous witnesses of his Kingdom," he writes. "Thanks to the Redemption, the communicative capacity of believers is healed and renewed."

"The encounter with Christ makes them new creatures, and permits them to become part of that people which he, dying on the Cross, has won through his blood, and introduces them into the intimate life of the Trinity, which is continuous and circular communication of perfect and infinite love among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."