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† Most Rev. Thomas Wenski
Bishop of Orlando
August 22, 2006

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Our Sunday Visitor Curriculum Division
Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.
200 Noll Plaza
Huntington, Indiana 46750

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ISBN: 978-0-15-901840-8

Item Number: CU0954

7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 000287 15 14 13 12 11

RR Donneley, Menasha, WI, USA; December 2011; Job # 194924

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2 CHRIST with Us

WHAT'S the ISSUE?

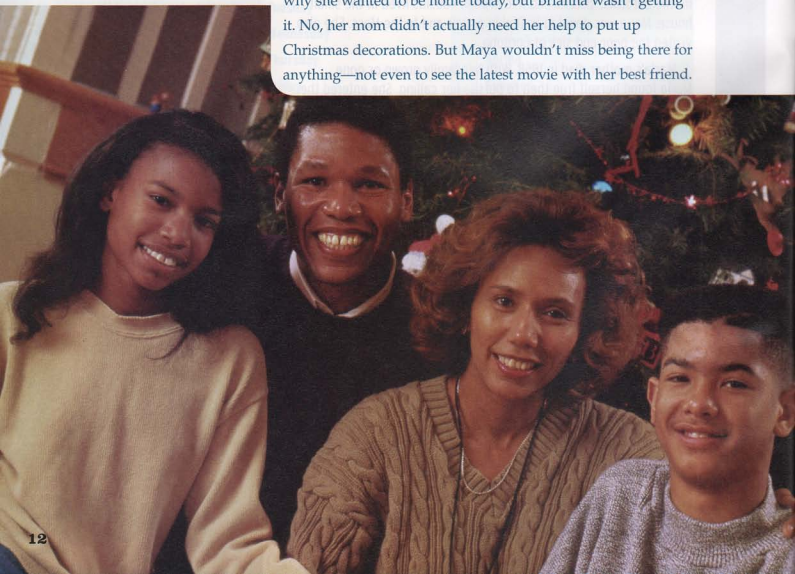
Some traditions I never want to stop.

I don't care if they seem silly or other people don't get it.

Somehow . . . a good tradition helps your heart.

“Oh, come on. I want to see this movie today. Everyone is talking about it. Why can't you come? Your mom can put up decorations without you, can't she?”

Maya's friend Brianna had been begging her to come to the movie today for about five minutes. Maya tried to explain why she wanted to be home today, but Brianna wasn't getting it. No, her mom didn't actually need her help to put up Christmas decorations. But Maya wouldn't miss being there for anything—not even to see the latest movie with her best friend.



It had been a tradition for as long as Maya could remember. Her family set aside a special day in December to put up Christmas decorations. Opening all the boxes of ornaments made over the years was special. Each brought back a different memory. There was the ornament from kindergarten—the lamb made with cotton balls. And the one she and her dad had made together just last year—it looked like a stained-glass window.

This year, her family would start the day as they always did. Each person—Mom, Dad, Maya, and her brother, Manuel—would make a new ornament. Then they would put all the lights and ornaments on the tree. Maya would probably have to give Manuel some advice about which ornaments should go where—and he would probably argue with her. But in the end, they would have a beautiful tree.

Maya's favorite moment was when her dad would take out the nativity scene and set up the manger. Then each person would take turns placing a figure in the scene. With the full scene in place, her dad would read the Christmas story. As he read, Maya could almost see herself there the night Jesus was born. It might seem crazy, but it made Christmas feel so real. Plus, it made her family feel closer. It was a real moment that seemed to touch something more than real.

"No, Brianna. Not today." The movie would have to wait.



God, open my heart to experience grace through the people around me.

WHAT ABOUT IT?

► Why is it important to Maya to be there for her family's Christmas tradition?

WHAT about YOU?

- What traditions do you have with family or friends that are special to you?
- Why do you think traditions are important?
- What Church traditions are especially meaningful for you?

WHAT does FAITH SAY?

CONNECT

Maya's family tradition of decorating the Christmas tree and setting out the nativity holds a deep and rich meaning for her. It is a way she experiences the presence of God with her family. Jesus Christ makes God the Father known to us, he makes it possible for us to share in divine life. We celebrate Christ's presence with us in the sacraments.

IT ALL STARTS WITH JESUS

How is Jesus the source of the sacraments?

The best traditions are always about the people who keep traditions alive with us. Sometimes a great tradition involves food or special events that come around only once a year. If you ever made a card or present for a friend or parent when you were a child, someone else probably provided the materials, cleaned up, and helped you wrap it.

It is the same way with Christ's presence in his Church and our experience of grace, which is God's help in coming to know and love him. We receive this gift of grace directly from God. There is nothing we can do to earn it.

The Sacraments

Although every good work is a work of the Church, the Church celebrates seven "masterworks of God": the seven sacraments. The sacraments are effective signs of God's grace given to the Church by Christ.

We, the People of God,

- ▶ perform the rituals (read, process, sing, anoint)
- ▶ provide the materials (plant wheat and grapes, sew priestly vestments, order hosts and candles)
- ▶ participate in the celebration (choir practice, seminary training, lector workshops).

We do these things to praise God and to offer Him thanks. Yet God took the initiative in sending his Son. We are totally dependent upon God in the celebration of the sacraments.

So where do we begin to understand the sacraments? We start with Jesus Christ. He is the first sacrament. He makes God known to us perfectly because he is God. Jesus said, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (*John 14:9*). Jesus is the perfect mediator between God and humanity, because he is fully God and fully man. So his actions have the power to save—whether it is healing a lame man or carrying his cross. His whole life from his Incarnation to the sending of his Spirit is sacramental: it shows us God, shares God’s life with us, and is the source of our salvation and new life.

Through Jesus, we have access to God the Father and God the Holy Spirit; from him, we receive God’s help in becoming his children.

The Church Is Sign and Source of God’s Life

Our tradition of the sacraments always starts with remembering the works of God the Father, and being thankful, and celebrating Christ’s presence. God the Holy Spirit helps us remember all that Christ said and did, and everything he taught about God the Father. In fact, the Holy Spirit, working with the Church, makes Jesus’ saving work present in the sacraments. Through the power of the Holy Spirit working in us and in the Church, we not only remember what brings us new life, but that new life is made available to us. The Holy Spirit unites us to the Son of God, drawing us into relationship with the Father as his adopted children.

In this way, the Church herself is “a sacrament of Christ’s action at work in her through the mission of the Holy Spirit” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1118). The Church is a sign of God’s love and action in the world.



SCRIPTURE

GO TO THE SOURCE

Read **John 14:1–10**. What does Jesus say about God’s works?

Faith Walk

The Father who dwells in me does his works.

John 14:10

God the Father’s most magnificent work is his Son, Jesus Christ. In Jesus, humanity reaches up and touches divinity. Jesus makes the Father known to us perfectly. How? Through his life he **shows** us God the Father, he **shares** divine life with us, and he is the **source** of new life. Jesus tells us: *if you know me, you know my Father.*

The work of God the Father is happening in Jesus. He wants the work of God to happen in you, too.

Next Step

THE FOUNDATION OF THE SACRAMENTS

How did Jesus institute the sacraments?

At Pentecost, the twelve Apostles became certain that they had to tell the Good News of Jesus. They knew they now had the strength from the Holy Spirit to

- ▶ carry out Jesus' command to teach and baptize
- ▶ remember him in the breaking of the bread,
- ▶ continue his work of forgiving and healing.

All the sacraments are rooted in the life of Jesus and show us something about him and eternal life. They each draw us into Christ's Paschal Mystery, connecting us to his suffering and his rising to new life. Through the work of the Holy Spirit we are made more like Jesus. We share in the divine life so that we can have the hope of life forever with God. Jesus wanted future believers to know him as his first followers did. This is why he told the Apostles to baptize, break bread, forgive, heal, and bless in his name. Jesus did not leave manuals with his Apostles, nor did he dictate the words and symbols to be used in each sacrament. In the Bible we will find the attitudes and actions of Jesus that are still those of the Church today expressed in the sacraments.



SCRIPTURE

GO TO THE SOURCE

Read:

John 2:1-11 **Matthew 8:1-4**

Matthew 16:19 **Luke 22:4-20**

John 21:15-17 **Acts 2:1-4**

Matthew 28:15-20

Which passage goes with which action or attitude of Jesus in the chart below?



SCRIPTURE

Read the Scripture passages in the "Go to the Source" above. Choose the Scripture that goes with the corresponding action and sacrament of Jesus to complete the chart below.

| Actions, Attitudes | Sacrament That Reflects Jesus | Scripture Passage |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| Jesus told Apostles to make disciples of all nations. | Baptism | |
| The Holy Spirit filled Jesus' Apostles with his Gifts so they could continue Jesus' work. | Confirmation | |
| Jesus ate the Passover meal as Last Supper with his disciples. | Holy Eucharist | |
| Jesus turned water to wine at wedding feast. | Holy Matrimony | |
| Jesus asked Peter to tend his sheep. | Holy Orders | |
| Jesus gave Peter the keys to the kingdom. | Reconciliation | |
| Jesus healed a leper. | Anointing the Sick | |

Following Jesus' Command

On the day of Pentecost the Apostles baptized nearly three thousand new believers. From Jerusalem they went out to share the message of Jesus. Everywhere the Apostles and disciples went, the Holy Spirit worked through them to establish the Church in small Christian groupings. They had to fit in houses when they gathered to celebrate the Eucharist in the evening after their day of work. They would gather for a meal followed by *eucharistia*, "giving thanks" with bread and wine in memory of Jesus. They still followed the Law of Moses and worshiped in the synagogues on the Sabbath. They were like the other Jews, but they believed in the Risen Lord.

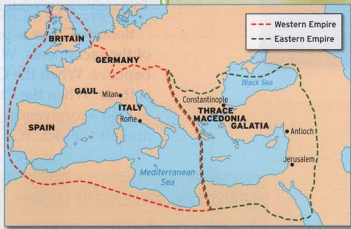
As people spread the Good News, they settled in other areas like Antioch where "the disciples were first called 'Christians'" (*Acts 11:26*). The Gentiles who became believers there wanted to be baptized as well. Eventually Christianity became a separate religion.

The Roman Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in A.D. 313, which permitted Christians to celebrate their religion. Sunday became a day of rest, and Christians celebrated Eucharist on Sunday mornings. Christians began to shape the Lord's Day; more importantly, the Lord's Day began to shape them. They now had a strong desire to be a serious part of their Church community.

WHERE IT HAPPENED



AS THE ROMAN EMPIRE grew too large for one ruler to oversee, it was divided into two empires. Byzantium (later named Constantinople) became the center of the Eastern empire. Milan became the center of the West. In A.D. 313, Constantine, together with Licinius, the emperor of the East, issued the Edict of Milan that legalized Christianity. When Constantine eventually defeated Licinius in battle over territory, Milan became a stronghold of the new religion.



Faith Walk

Think about it—when you participate in the sacraments, and live as Jesus did—with compassion, justice, healing, and forgiveness—you participate in God's life. You are God's masterwork, and he works through you to bring his kingdom of peace and justice to the world. He pours out his grace through the sacraments, allowing you to live as a disciple. This is called sacramental living.

Jesus showed us how to do this. Remember, all his words and actions point us to the Father. And he gives us Eucharist, "daily bread" for the journey.

Pray the Our Father slowly. Then reflect on how you can be a Eucharistic person. How can you show gratitude to God and others?

Next Step

WHEN THE CHURCH ACTS, CHRIST ACTS

How is Christ present today when we worship?

God created us to be human, so he knew that we really needed “stuff” to touch and smell and taste and count and hear. The seven sacraments involve symbols and rituals that we can see, touch, hear, taste, and smell. They help us grasp an invisible God who is hard to connect with sometimes.

- ▶ you taste the Host,
- ▶ smell the fragrance of incense,
- ▶ feel the touch of the chrism oil,
- ▶ hear the words spoken and sung,
- ▶ and see the light of a candle’s flame and the faces of the assembly gathered to pray.

Through our senses, we know the presence of Christ. To receive a sacrament is to meet Christ.

Because Christ is present, he is acting in the celebration of the sacraments. When the Church baptizes, Christ baptizes. When the Church witnesses a marriage, Christ is there. When the Church forgives sins, the power of God’s forgiveness is right there. When the Church anoints the sick, it is like Jesus curing the sick of his day.

CHRIST’S PRESENCE IN THE LITURGY

- Assembly** ▶ Day after day, the main place where we meet Christ is in the baptized members of the community.
- ▶ Next Sunday, look around at the assembled congregation to see the face of Christ.
- Priest** ▶ The priest gathers our prayers and leads our sacrifice of praise.
- ▶ Next Sunday, when the priest says, “Let us pray,” think of your needs.
- Word** ▶ When the Gospel is read, it is Christ who speaks to his People.
- ▶ Next Sunday, let the responsorial psalm and Gospel Acclamation show your belief that Christ is truly present in his Word.
- Eucharist** ▶ Most importantly, Christ is uniquely present under the forms of consecrated bread and wine.
- ▶ Next Sunday, really mean your “Amen,” and then know “you are what you received,” as Saint Augustine reminded us.

LOOKING BACK

Jesus was Jewish, and he followed the Jewish traditions of prayer and worship. He celebrated great feasts like Passover as a child with his family, and as an adult with his friends. The Apostles were also Jewish; so were many of the first people who came to believe in Jesus because of the disciples' preaching.

It's not surprising that the rituals that they would use to remember the presence of the Risen Lord would sound, and look like the traditions of their Jewish culture. Here are some connections between the Jewish liturgy and our Christian liturgy:

- ▶ At the Jewish synagogue service, the Torah is read and reflected upon. As the early Christians gathered, it was only natural to read Scripture. Maybe they even read a letter they just received from Peter or Paul! The structure of proclaiming and responding to the Word of God is now part of the Mass called the "Liturgy of the Word."
- ▶ Some Jewish prayers (*berakoth*) begin with the word "Blessed." Blessing God, calling him Blessed, is a significant part of our prayers, especially in the liturgy. We often say "Blessed be God for ever." During the beginning of the part of the Mass called the "Liturgy of the Eucharist," we hear the word "blessed."
- ▶ As part of their Jewish background, the Apostles and early Christians would have been quite accustomed to celebrating the weekly feast of the Sabbath from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. Sacred time became part of the Christian faith, too. Christians shifted to celebrating the weekly feast on Sundays—the day of the Resurrection and thus the Lord's Day—by breaking bread, discussing Scriptures, and honoring the Lord.



LIVE YOUR FAITH What is your favorite religious tradition? Explain why it appeals to you.

CATHOLICS BELIEVE

We know that Christ continues to be with us and take care of us in the sacraments.

- ▶ Christ is the first sacrament because he makes God known to us and makes it possible for us to share in God's life. The Church is a sacrament because in it we come to know God and share in his life through the seven sacraments.
- ▶ Christ instituted the sacraments so that we would always know and experience his welcoming, forgiving, healing, and nourishing power.
- ▶ Christ is present in the sacraments, through the assembly gathered, the priest presiding, the Scripture proclaiming, and most especially in the Eucharist, his Body and Blood.

WHAT NOW?

WHAT ABOUT IT?

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

What are some personal ways you can remember the presence of God's grace in your daily life? Share some ideas with a friend.

LIVE OUR FAITH

- * Recognize grace in your everyday life—in good times and difficult times.
- * Give thanks for the moments of grace God sends you.
- * Keep investing the time and effort in the traditions of your life that “help our heart.”
- * Start a new tradition that helps you “give thanks” or sustains your spirit.

Mnemonic devices are ways to remember facts for tests. Here are some mnemonic devices to remember that God's grace is always with you.

- ▶ Associate God's presence with an object you often see, like a watch, clock, door, or book. When you see this object, remember that God is with you. Perhaps you could say a prayer that uses the object; for example, when glancing at the time, you might say, “God, I give you my time. Help me to use it well.”
- ▶ Put a Bible near your bed. Before you sleep, read a paragraph. When you make your bed in the morning, read another. Think about these passages during the day.
- ▶ Place a small stone in your pocket. When you feel it, remember that God is your rock. (Remove the stone before laundering!)



PRAYER

Holy Father, you have given us your Son, Jesus, who shows us your wondrous works. Through your spirit in the sacraments, you pour out your grace on us and invite us to participate in your life. Help us recognize your presence all around us. Amen.

FAITH at HOME

Light a candle at home with your family. Recognize it as a sign of Christ's presence in your home. Spend a few minutes together in the quiet, thanking God for each other.



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Saint Ludmilla

Receiving the sacraments is one of the greatest gifts of our faith. When we receive them, it is our way of receiving Christ into our hearts and our lives. In

the United States today, we receive these sacraments openly. However, there are places in the world where practicing Christian faith means risking family, home, and life. Persecution faced by some in the world today is similar to the persecution Saint Ludmilla and many others like her faced in their time.

In the early Middle Ages in Europe, paganism was widespread. Persecution of Christians was common. It took great courage to keep the faith, but Saint Ludmilla was one of those who remained firm in her beliefs.

Saint Ludmilla was born around A.D. 860 in Bohemia, which is part of the Czech Republic today. In her time, it was an independent kingdom, and she was married to Borivoi, the first Christian Duke of Bohemia. The couple was baptized in 871 by Saint Methodius. They founded the first Christian church in Prague and tried to spread Christianity throughout Bohemia. Pagans who were hostile to Christianity drove them from their throne, but they soon returned. They reigned for another seven years, but then they gave up the throne to their sons.

Their second son, Wratislav, was married to a woman named Drahomira. She pretended to be a Christian but secretly practiced pagan rituals. One of Wratislav and Drahomira's twin sons, Wenceslaus, lived for a time with Ludmilla. She taught her grandson Christianity and the importance of experiencing Christ through the sacraments. (Wenceslaus later became a saint himself.) When Wratislav died in 916, eight-year-old Wenceslaus took his place. Because he was so young, Drahomira set herself up as Regent, to rule until Wenceslaus became an adult.

Jealous of the relationship between Ludmilla and Wenceslaus, Drahomira conspired to have Ludmilla murdered. She hired some noblemen to kill Ludmilla, and they strangled her with her own veil. However, despite her cruel death, Ludmilla's legacy of faith lived on through her grandson. Wenceslaus spread Christianity throughout Bohemia, where it remains a major religion today. He is celebrated in the song "Good King Wenceslaus," and Ludmilla is venerated as one of the Patron Saints of Bohemia.



Global Data

- Czech Republic consists of two major regions: Bohemia, which makes up two-thirds of the country and Moravia, which accounts for the other one-third.
- Czech Republic has a population of 10.3 million, 40 percent of which is Catholic.
- Czech Republic has an ancient history, dating back to the early Middle Ages, and its capital of Prague was an important cultural center of Europe.
- Czech Republic was part of the Republic of Czechoslovakia from 1918 through 1993 when it split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia. It was under the communist rule of the Soviet Union from 1948 to 1989.

