

## **Bishop Aquila addresses sacraments, Roman Missal at Open Forum**

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An important part of the God's Gift Appeal Open Forums that Bishop Samuel Aquila participates in each year is the time allowed for questions and answers.

At the Jan. 17 Open Forum at St. Timothy's in Manvel, one person asked why the sacrament of confirmation is celebrated in third grade, prior to First Eucharist, rather than at a later age as it was for several years in the Diocese of Fargo.

"The sacrament of confirmation was always celebrated before First Eucharist until about 1910," Bishop Aquila answered. He spoke of the transitions in the timing of the sacrament over the years, then told of Pope Benedict XVI's desire for confirmation to be restored to its original position among the three sacraments of initiation. "He believes that confirmation needs to be restored to where we have it today, so that it points clearly to the Eucharist as the sacrament that completes initiation into the Church."

In the last few decades, the sacrament of confirmation "became an instrument for keeping children in religious education programs," Bishop Aquila said, adding that no sacrament should be used as an instrument. He said the Catechism of the Catholic Church shows the order of the sacraments of initiation clearly: baptism, confirmation and Eucharist.

He told of the excitement of third grade students as they look forward to and receive the sacrament of confirmation. When he speaks to the children in his confirmation/First Eucharist Mass homily, he said, "The third graders will raise their hands, wanting to name the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit...Why should we deny our children these gifts...especially with what they face today?"

The Diocese of Fargo is not alone in restoring the order of the sacraments, he said. Bishop Aquila noted that one of the top five largest dioceses in the United States, the Diocese of Phoenix, implemented the restored order of the sacraments in recent years, placing confirmation before First Eucharist.

Someone questioned whether students can understand the sacrament at such a young age. Bishop Aquila said that "just as you understand the sacrament of reconciliation today much better than the day you received it" so, too, will these young people grow in their understanding of the sacrament of confirmation as their faith continues to deepen.

Part of the problem with confirmation preparation programs for older students is "they have all of these service hours attached to the sacrament, which communicates to the child 'I have to earn this sacrament.'" Sacraments are grace freely given by God, he said. Service needs to be taught, not in connection with a sacrament but, as "a part of who we are as a Catholic person."

Bishop Aquila also explained upcoming changes in the Roman Missal which will affect the responses the laity say during the Mass, as well as many of the prayers priests pray. The diocese will begin communicating these changes to the faithful in the coming months, with possible implementation in 2011. For example, he noted that the exchange: "The Lord be with you", "And also with you" will be changed to more clearly reflect the original Latin response: "The Lord be with you", "And with your spirit."

Some of the music in the Mass will be changed, as well, because the words of particular parts of the Mass, such as the Gloria, will change. Overall, the changes will help the faithful grow in appreciation and understanding of the Eucharist.

Three God's Gift Appeal Open Forums are yet to be held: Jan. 24, Holy Spirit, Fargo; Jan. 29, St. Philip Neri, Napoleon; and Feb. 5, St. John the Baptist, Wyndmere, all at 7 p.m. Please call the parishes for further details in case of inclement weather or other possible changes.