

FORTY HOUR DEVOTIONS

Excerpts from *Lex orandi/Lex credendi* by Rev. Michael Driscoll, O.Carm.

The Eucharist is understandably the heart of the Diocese of Palm Beach's 25th Anniversary celebration, which began on October 24, 2008 with Mass at the Cathedral of St. Ignatius Loyola and will culminate with Mass at the Palm Beach Convention Center on October 24, 2009. During the entire year, the Eucharist will be the central focus of all our celebrations. In each parish and mission in the Diocese, we will be thanking God for all the blessings that He has bestowed on our five county Diocese during special Forty Hours Devotions. A major Forty Hours celebration will be observed in our Cathedral of St. Ignatius Loyola during the Feast of Corpus Christi, the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, from June 14-16, 2009.

Some background on 40 Hours Devotion: Most historians say that the practice of Forty Hours Devotion originated in Milan around the year 1530, as a means of stirring up the faith of the people. The custom of having this devotion in one church after another in the Diocese of Milan began in 1537 and it soon spread all over Italy. In the United States, St. John Newmann (1811-1860), the fourth bishop of Philadelphia, was a strong promoter of the Forty Hour Devotion. The devotion was so successful, it was adopted by other dioceses nationwide. At the plenary Council of Baltimore in 1866, the Forty Hours Devotion was approved for all dioceses of the United States.

Following the liturgical reforms of Vatican II, most parishes dropped Forty Hours devotion as well as novenas and other pious devotions. The post-Vatican II world focused on the reception of the Eucharist and most liturgical reforms centered on the celebration of Mass. Pious devotions were often put on a back-burner. Now that these reforms and changes in the Liturgy are taken for granted, many Catholics miss and yearn for some of the devotions practiced in their youth. A resurgence of devotional life has come about in recent years.

Most young people and converts may not know what Forty Hours Devotion is. It is a special forty-hour period of continuous prayer made before the Blessed Sacrament in solemn exposition. The Forty Hours Devotion begins with a Mass of Exposition, which concludes with a procession and the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. The Blessed Sacrament remains on the altar in a monstrance throughout the 40 hours. During daily Mass, the Blessed Sacrament is reposed in the tabernacle and then returned for exposition after Mass. At the end of the devotion, the Mass of Deposition is offered, concluding again with a procession, benediction and final reposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle.

Why Forty Hours? While the number 40 is one of the more significant Biblical numbers, most historians base the Forty Hours Devotion on the period Jesus spent in the tomb from Good Friday to Easter Sunday. St. Charles Borromeo speaks of this practice as the period of watching, suspense and ardent prayer on the part of all His disciples. Today, we focus our Forty Hours Devotion not on the tomb, but on the Eucharist. Vatican II taught that the Eucharist is the "source and summit of the Christian Life" (*Lumen Gentium #11*) That same Council, as well as Pope John Paul II, highly recommended public and private devotion of the Blessed Sacrament, including processions on the feast of Corpus Christi and the Forty Hours Devotion. (*Inaestimabile Donum, #20-22*)

The faithful are urged to pray during these devotions for the grace of God to flow into their lives and their neighbors' lives. As in every prayer service, they pray for the needs of the world and local needs, as well as for themselves. During this, our 25th Anniversary year, we pray in a special way for the Diocese of Palm Beach – for Bishop Barbarito, our priests and deacons, religious and laity – that our Loving Father will continue to pour out His blessings upon us, rich in ethnic diversity, but one Body of Christ.