

Deacon from Portland says 'falling in love with Jesus' will lead to evangelization

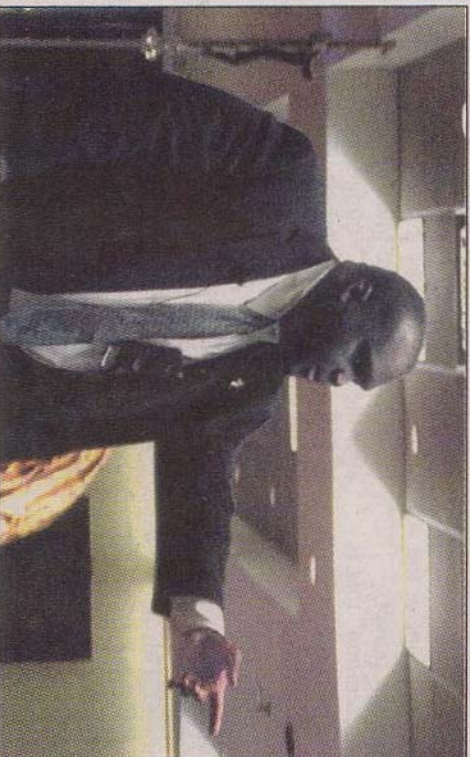
By Sean Gallagher

Opening up others to the work of the Holy Spirit and leading them to a greater sharing in the life of the Blessed Trinity is at the heart of the work of evangelization.

This was the primary message that Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers of the Archdiocese of Portland, Ore., delivered to the participants attending the National Black Catholic Convocation last week at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Indianapolis.

Basing his remarks on Pope John Paul II's 2001 apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* ("At the Beginning of the New Millennium") in which the Holy Father exhorts the faithful to continue the Church's work of evangelization, Burke-Sivers enthusiastically called his listeners to take up this call. He did this in the context, however, of lamenting the fact that so many people have walked away from a faith that they never knew in the first place, a

Photo by Sean Gallagher



faith that calls them to "fall in love with Jesus Christ.

"The goal and purpose of our spiritual life is to seek union with the Father in love," Burke-Sivers said, "through a deepening and strengthening of our relationship with Jesus Christ. So the key is falling in love with Jesus Christ."

He asserted that we come into contact with this love powerfully in the Eucharist

Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers, of the Archdiocese of Portland, Ore., spoke enthusiastically to his audience at the National Black Catholic Convocation on April 21 in Indianapolis, calling them to proclaim the Gospel in their daily lives.

and stated that if Catholics truly understood the power of the love in that sacrament, they would never walk away from the faith.

But he pointed out that this does happen and it is up to practicing Catholics to show those who walk away the power of God's love for us. Burke-Sivers told his audience that

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he had wondered for a long time what God's love for us was really like. He explained that he gained a profound insight into it during the birth of his first child.

She was not breathing when she was born and, at the same time, the medical professionals could not stop his wife's hemorrhage.

After his wife was stabilized, the two of them went to the neonatal intensive care unit to hold their daughter for the first time.

His wife, sitting in a wheelchair, was the first to hold her. Then it was his turn.

"I never knew what God's love must be like for us until I held that child in my arms for the first time," Burke-Sivers said. "I thought in that moment that God loves me infinitely more than I'm loving this child right now. That's the closest I've

ever felt to what God's love must be like."

Burke-Sivers explained that the life of the Trinity is what works in our world, drawing us closer to God in our life, here and now, in the particular events of our lives.

"We open their minds and their hearts so that they're willing to accept more of the Holy Spirit, who leads them closer to Jesus," Burke-Sivers said. "Jesus leads us to the Father, who gives us more of the Spirit, who leads us closer to Jesus, who leads us closer to the Father."

In the end, Burke-Sivers invited his listeners to look at the particular events of their lives and their relationships with others as opportunities that the Holy Spirit gives them to share the life of God with others.

"The Holy Spirit gives us opportunities, opens doors so that we can put our foot in it," Burke-Sivers said. "Give the people the Word, and let the Holy Spirit do the rest. That's what it means to be a disciple." †