



Word on Worship

Newsletter of the Worship Office, Archdiocese of Newark, NJ

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Editors Note:

The first two articles in this issue are based on presentations made by the authors during a training series for new pastors of the Archdiocese of Newark. Although the content reflects their focus on those exercising the role of pastor, we believe the articles can be of benefit to all of our readers.

Microsoft, IBM, Coca Cola, Merck, Toyota, and Sony are successful companies. We recognize their names. We can name the products they produce. We have a sense of confidence in their strength and in the items they offer for sale. I believe that we as pastors can learn from these companies.

How those companies operate, how they deal with their employees, and how they relate to their customers, can teach us how to be better leaders in the area of parish liturgy. It is in that business framework that I would like to examine the topic, "The Pastor as Liturgical Leader."

This topic will include: forming a staff for liturgy; forming liturgical ministers; budgeting for liturgy; and dealing with other practical matters that need to be addressed if liturgy is to be celebrated well in our parishes and truly be the source and summit of the Christian life.

Microsoft, IBM, Coca Cola, Merck, Toyota, and Sony. When we hear those company names, we know what they make. Microsoft specializes in

computer software. IBM manufactures computers, especially, large computers for businesses. Coca Cola produces a variety of soft drinks. Merck manufactures pharmaceuticals. Toyota mass produces cars and trucks, while Sony makes electronic equipment.

YOUR COMPANY NAME

When people hear your "company name," what do they think of? What do they think of when they hear the name of your parish? What comes to mind when they hear the name, St. Philip's, Annunciation, St. Paul's, OLC, Epiphany, or Blessed Sacrament?

People might think of various things, such as the church building, the school, the staff, services and programs that help people in need, or they might think of parish events, fairs, and festivals. But somewhere in their thought process they should think of liturgy. When they hear the name of your parish, when they hear the name of "your company, your small business," they should think of Sunday Mass, homilies, spiritual nourishment, and learning about God. They should think of the thing for which a Catholic parish exists. Parishes are formed so liturgy can be celebrated and ministry vivified.

The primacy of liturgy is evident when parish buildings suffer a natural disaster. The parish does whatever is necessary so it can come

together for liturgy, for Sunday Mass, not for school, not for bingo, not for Bible study, not for committee meetings, not for marriage preparation, not for religious education, not for anything else but Mass.

That means our company, our parish, has to give emphasis to what is most important. Companies that succeed emphasize what is most important. Businesses that fail, tend to move in different directions, they diversify too much, they spread their resources too thin, they forget their original and primary focus.

OUR PRIMARY FOCUS

We have to remember that the liturgy is the original and primary focus of a parish. The celebration of the liturgy is the most important "product" a parish offers. The documents of the Church tell us that. "The Sunday celebration of the Lord's day and his Eucharist is the heart of the Church's life." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2177*) The ordination rite tells us that. The Church ordained us as priests to celebrate the liturgy and to preach the word of God for the sake of the Christian people. At our ordination we resolved "to celebrate the mysteries of Christ faithfully and religiously as the Church has handed them down to us for the glory of God and the sanctification of Christ's people." And we further resolved "to exercise the ministry of the word worthily and wisely, preaching the Gospel and explaining the

THE PASTOR AS LITURGICAL LEADER

Learning from Microsoft

Catholic faith.” (*Ordination of a Priest, 15*)

For liturgy to be the primary focus in a parish, it has to be the primary focus and understanding of the pastor. For the pastor, as head of the business, is the one who sets the real vision of the parish.

We as pastors, and as potential pastors, have to ask ourselves, “what is our vision?” What do we believe is the most important thing we do? What is the most important thing we do for our parishioners?

To discover the answer, we have to listen to what our words say is most important; even more to the point, we have to examine what the investment of our time, our talent, and our treasure says is most important.

The celebration of Mass and the other sacraments and the preaching of the Word are the most important things that happen in a parish. And those are the things that people look for when they choose a church. It’s for that reason, those are things we need to see as the most important of all the things we do as pastors. That has to be our primary vision. It has to guide us, it has to direct the allocation of our time, our money, our energy, and our talent.

When I arrived as pastor of Our Lady of Czestochowa (OLC), Jersey City, NJ, in July of 1995, all I saw were things that needed to be done. The rectory was in need of repair and a good cleaning. The school needed attention if it were to remain viable. The convent had a list of maintenance problems a mile long. While there was some money in the bank, it was small in comparison to parish

needs. The celebration of the liturgy was a disaster. There was a dwindling congregation. There were no trained liturgical ministers, often the opening procession was composed of only one person, namely, the presider. The music ministry consisted of a nice 81-year-old man in the choir loft, who could no longer play or sing, yet was valiantly trying to do both. One man took up the two Sunday collections, he began collecting at the Creed and concluded with the Great Amen. The worship area was poorly maintained and cluttered with items that distracted from the liturgy.

Faced with that, I made a decision, I embraced a vision. And it was this. What happened on Sunday was most important. What happened on Sunday could have the greatest positive impact on the parish. The Sunday liturgy could create community. The Sunday liturgy could bring new life to the parish. The Sunday liturgy could draw new people to OLC.

I had a vision, but I also had the sense to realize that the vision would need time to happen. A pastor needs to know that liturgy is the most important product of his parish, he needs to recognize the primacy of liturgy, but he also needs to have the sense to realize that visions don’t become reality overnight. For example, when I arrived at OLC communion was distributed only by the priest, and only under the form of bread. It took three years to introduce eucharistic ministers to the parish and to begin offering the chalice at all Masses.

If a pastor has a vision, that vision will affect his decisions and where he decides to give

his time and effort. As someone said, “as you think, so shall you be.”

SHARING THE VISION

It is not just enough for the pastor, as the head of the company, to have the vision of the importance of liturgy in the life of the parish. That vision, that understanding, needs to be caught by the staff and by the people of the parish. Successful companies communicate their vision to their employees. The employees catch the spirit.

Before we can do that, we have to be able to articulate our vision of parish and liturgy in a clear, simple way. That vision could be stated in one of the following ways.

- Of all we do in the parish, nothing is more important than what happens at Sunday Mass.
- The source and summit of

parish life is the liturgy.

- The first priority of our parish is a well-celebrated liturgy that engages people and lifts their spirits to God.
- Sunday is “job one.”

As pastors we need to embrace the vision of liturgy as primary. We have to be able to state that vision simply and understandably, to our parochial vicars, to our pastoral associates, to our music director, to the school principal, and to whomever else is a member of the professional staff. We can do that formally by discussing the importance of the liturgy at staff meetings, by having the staff attend liturgy workshops together, or by reading and discussing articles on the liturgy that encourage them to share our vision.

We can also do that informally by the use of icebreakers and sharing questions at staff



meetings that invite staff members to reflect on the liturgy. For example, “What part of the Mass most engages you? What do people look for in choosing a parish? What area do we most need to address in order to improve the liturgy in the parish?”

The vision embraced by the pastor and the staff also needs to be communicated to key people in the parish – for example, to the members of the pastoral council, to spiritual life committee members, to the various liturgical ministers, etc. One way to do that is to have those people, along with the staff, attend workshops or talks, so everyone can hear and be inspired by the same ideas.

BEING ON THE SAME PAGE

Just as it is important for middle managers to understand the philosophy and the goals of the company, so that is true in the parish. People have to be on the same page. The staff and other key people in the parish need to be moving in the same direction as the pastor and moving with a shared enthusiasm and conviction.

We cannot have a parochial vicar or other staff member say, “We have to have communion from the cup because the pastor says so.” Or “we have to stand for the invitation to communion, but I don’t believe in doing that.” Or “I don’t like all that singing we’re doing at Mass.”

The vision can also be subtly undercut by a passing comment, a negative expression, or a convenient moment of forgetfulness. Parishioners know when a staff is not united; they know when the pastor is on one page, and key people are on another.

That vision of the primacy of

liturgy also has to be communicated and shared with the parish at large. We need to pay special attention to our readers, servers, eucharistic ministers, greeters, musicians, liturgy committee members, preparers, and decorators for they are the people, who along with us, make good liturgy happen. One simple way to do that is to take advantage of programs offered by the Worship Office. Often what people hear at a workshop carries more weight than what they hear in their parish.

We cannot forget to share the vision and understanding of liturgy with the parish at large. There are some simple ways to do this.

- We can use the Sunday bulletin. A short article on an aspect of liturgy, or some words in the pastor’s column can begin to open minds to new ideas.
- We can take time before the start of Mass to give a brief instruction on an aspect of liturgy. I have found this to be very effective. Take two or three minutes before the opening song and procession to speak to the people. This time can also be used to introduce the readings or remind the people of the importance of the role of the assembly at Mass.
- We can periodically devote a homily to the liturgy. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal not only speaks of preaching on the Word but also on the prayers of the liturgy.
- We can share ideas about the liturgy when we are asked to speak at parish meetings. Such informal comments at a meeting of the Rosary Society, Pastoral Council, School Association, etc. can be a subtle yet effective

method of adult education about the liturgy.

Of all things we as pastors can do, the most important is to celebrate the liturgy the best we can. We need to teach by example as well as by our words. We need to embody the vision. If I say liturgy is my most important priority and I don’t prepare for it, or I’m sloppy about it, my actions betray my words. We all know of companies that have a great vision, a great sales pitch, and then don’t deliver on their promises. Companies like that don’t succeed for long, and neither do parishes.

DEALING WITH RESISTANCE

At this point, I would like to address the question of how to deal with people who cannot embrace your vision of liturgy, who want the parish’s liturgical celebration to remain just as it is. We need to be kind to such people. We have to be willing to bend where we can, but not to compromise what is important. We also need to realize that we will never please everyone. Jesus could not, and neither can we.

When I arrived at my parish, I remember being told by some people, “Father, you can change anything you want — when we’re dead.” Obviously, I could not wait. If I did, not only would they be dead, so would the parish.

So things were changed, but in as diplomatic a way as possible. The 81-year-old organist was retired, given a wonderful party, and his years of service were featured in the local paper. The Sunday after he retired, new music ministers began working at OLC.

The decorating group that had been doing the same thing year after year, was expanded, new

members with new ideas were added. I attended their initial meetings to be sure that the new members were welcomed and treated kindly.

The Parish Council, which had some very resistant members, was given a sabbatical in order to study the variety of structures a council could take. The study, which lasted a year, paved the way for a new council with new members.

One further word of advice in dealing with resistant parishioners — never be nasty or negative, no matter what they say. In this way you avoid an argument, and you also make it possible for those people to return in the future without losing face.

Sometimes new pastors are told to wait a year before changing anything in the parish. I do not believe this is a good idea. After you go through a year without making a change, people may assume you approved of everything that took place. I made changes slowly, but I began right away with some things. For example, I changed the way the collection was taken up at Mass immediately after my first Sunday experience in the parish.

THOSE RESPONSIBLE

Let us now consider the person or persons responsible for the liturgy in the parish.

Ultimately we, as pastors, are responsible. To use the business model, we are the CEO, the Chairman, the Boss, and the buck stops with us. When there is a problem at IBM or Merck, the ultimate responsibility rests at the top, and so it rests with us. We all know that, for when a serious complaint comes to the Archbishop’s Office it’s not the eucharistic minister or

the pastoral associate who is called to give an account — we are. We are responsible for the liturgy.

I realize that some parishes divide up liturgical responsibilities. One person is responsible for readers, another for the eucharistic ministers, one person has responsibility for Advent, another person is responsible for the Christmas season, one person has Holy Thursday, another the Easter Vigil, etc. However, I believe it works better if one person coordinates all the various aspects of the liturgy with the help of various assistants and committees. This gives unity, it facilitates communication, and it provides a common approach.

I would like to offer a suggestion for committee structure that a pastor might consider to organize various aspects of his parish's liturgy. It is a structure suggested at Worship Office workshops, and one I use at my parish.

In this suggested structure, the parish has the following committees associated with the liturgy; Directors of Ministry Committee, Music Committee, Liturgy Preparation Committee, Spiritual Life Committee, and an Environment Group.

- The Directors of Ministry Committee care for the recruiting, training, scheduling, and updating of liturgical ministers.
- The Music Committee works with the Director of Music Ministries in evaluating the sung prayer of the parish and offers suggestions.
- The Liturgy Preparation Committee uses a seasonal approach to prepare the Sunday liturgies.

- The Spiritual Life Committee evaluates the spiritual needs of the members of the parish and suggests ways of meeting those needs.
- The Environment Group is responsible for enhancing the worship space, particularly during the primary seasons of the liturgical year.

All these committees report to the pastor, or the person delegated by him. It is also helpful if these committees share some common membership. This helps to facilitate communication and co-ordination.

RECRUITING

One of the big problems that companies like IBM, Merck, McDonald's, and K-Mart have today is finding good employees, and that certainly is a problem in most parishes when it comes to finding liturgical ministers. In fact, in speaking to several priests, one of the most frustrating things they deal with is finding and training ministers.

In the early years after Vatican II finding liturgical ministers was much easier. That certainly was so in my experience. I think this was the case because we were going to the "labor pool," so to speak, for the first time. People were ready for ministry and excited about doing things they could never do before.

Now it is not so easy, we have gone to the same labor pool many times. People also seem to be much busier. More people are working full time. Life is hectic. And the novelty of lay liturgical ministry has worn off.

Today, we cannot rely on just announcements in the bulletin

any more than companies can rely just on newspaper ads. Businesses are being more creative in finding new employees. Companies today make their current employees recruiters by offering them bonuses for finding new employees. They offer higher salaries to attract people. They offer perks. They give signing bonuses. While we can't do all those things, we can try different approaches.

When placing an announcement in the parish bulletin, don't just say we need liturgical ministers. Instead, speak about a great opportunity, explain what a person will gain by serving as a liturgical minister, such as growth in faith, friends, fun, an opportunity to do something for others and God, a chance to make a difference.

We can encourage present liturgical ministers to suggest new candidates for ministry who then can be personally invited by us or other staff members to participate in a particular ministry.

We can invite present liturgical ministers to speak at the end of Mass about what their ministry means to them, and about the training and preparation that are provided for such ministries. If this is done, forms should be available so people can respond immediately after the presentation. Such forms need a follow-up phone call or note as soon as possible.

At OLC, we annually have two of our liturgical ministers speak about what their liturgical ministry means to them. We then distribute forms to those in the pews so they can respond. These forms also have an area for suggestions and comments on the liturgy in general. In this way, the entire

congregation is involved with the form. The music ministry, rather than having speakers, once composed a song about their need for new members. The song clearly indicated their need for additional singers, and it showed being part of this ministry could be both serious and fun.

TRAINING & UPDATING

While we can train liturgical ministers in our parishes, training can also be provided through the many workshops offered by the Archdiocesan Worship Office. Just as companies have specific departments to train and orient new employees, the Worship Office can be that department for individual parishes. Of course, there would need to be at least one local training session at the parish to make the more general training provided by the Worship Office specific to an individual community.

Companies provide more than initial training for employees, they retrain and update their employees, so we need to do the same with our ministers. Pastors need to encourage, to thank, and to bring ministers together periodically for motivation and renewal. At OLC, we have found Saturday mornings the best time for such gatherings. We begin with breakfast and end by 11:30 AM. People are fresher on a Saturday morning than after a full day of work. Also having such gatherings in the morning does not disrupt the entire day.

We as pastors, as "employers" (to use our business model), have to be responsible for the "care and feeding" of our liturgical ministers. Of course one ministry we must not forget is the one that is central, the ministry of the assembly. Unlike companies that have

customers, our “customers” are also part of the company, part of the parish. We have to address the liturgical education of the assembly. One simple way to do that is to take two or three minutes before the start of Mass to encourage the participation of the assembly, to give a little liturgical education and to provide an introduction to the scripture reading that will be proclaimed during the Mass. I have been doing this for the past twenty years, and have found it effective, and well received by the people. Also, as I mentioned, don’t overlook the value of concise information placed in the bulletin.

SPENDING MONEY

Another thing successful companies do, beyond recruiting, training, and encouraging their employees, is to spend money. They spend money to make money. They know they have to spend money to do research, to make the best product, to get the best employees, and to advertise. And they cannot wait to do that until they have the money, or they will never have the money. They will go out of business.

As pastors we have to spend money, and we have to be willing to spend money we may not even have. I had to do that at OLC. When I arrived the Sunday collection fluctuated between \$1,100 to \$1,700. We needed every penny of that collection. We also had no music ministry. While it would have been logical to wait until we had the money before we hired music ministers, we did not wait. We could not wait. We knew if the parish were to attract people, the liturgy had to be good. So we hired an organist and leader of song at a cost of \$400 per Sunday. We decided to “spend

money to make money.”

As pastors we need to adequately budget for liturgy. This is not the area to shortchange, for it is the one area, looked at in a purely business sense, where we make our money. The major part of parish revenue is collected during the celebration of the Sunday liturgy. That liturgy also reaches more people in the parish and affects their spiritual lives more than anything else we do.

As someone once said, if you want to know what a parish really believes is important, don’t read its mission statement, read its budget. If we say the celebration of the liturgy and the proclamation of God’s Word are the most important things we do, then as pastors, as liturgical leaders, we need to see that those priorities are reflected in our parish budget.

That means, if we need a better sound system, we go and buy it, and we get the best we can. After all, we are in the “word business.”

If we need better lighting, we go and buy it, and we get the best we can. After all, people need to be able to see the action of the liturgy and the text of the songs they sing.

If people need a better environment for good worship, we do our best to provide it.

Companies like Microsoft or IBM or Toyota spend money on items that make it easier for the customer to do business with them and to make their business environment more consumer friendly. We need to do the same. We have to spend for liturgy. Consider how much money we give to our parish schools, or to religious education programs for

children, yet these areas affect a minority of our parishioners. Liturgy affects the largest part of our parish, the largest part of our “customer base.”

Speaking of money, I have found that if you ask parishioners to give money for specific items, especially items that will benefit them, improve their church, and enhance the liturgy, they tend to be more generous than if they are simply asked to give more in the collection.

One way we do just that at OLC, is to give our church a special gift each Christmas. The Pastoral Council chooses a particular gift for the church building. Then all funds received in the Christmas collection above the amount projected for that collection are set aside for the gift. In 1997 we were able to give our church the gift of a new sound system. In 1998 the gift was the restoration of the church pews and the installation of new kneelers. In 1999 the Christmas gift was the installation of a restroom on the main level of the church. The 2000 Christmas gift was the restoration and renewal of the pipe organ in the church.

THE MUSIC MINISTER

Before concluding, I would like to address one key area of expense, namely that associated with music. If we want good liturgical music, we need to be ready to spend money. A good director of music and/or organist costs money. Yet we have to make the investment. People who come to our parishes generally evaluate two things, the quality of our homilies and the quality of our music. If either one is poor, they may not return.

Once we find a good liturgical musician we need to do more than invest money in that

person. We need to invest time and attention in him or her. We need to make sure the music minister shares our vision of liturgy, and together we need to evaluate the sung prayer in our parish and we need to plan for its continuing growth. A company always invests money, time, and attention in its most valuable employees. The music director is one of the most valuable employees we have. As pastors we need to make an investment of money, time, and attention in our music directors.

SUMMARY

As pastors we are the liturgical leaders in our parishes. A business model can help us to remember some important things we need to do as liturgical leaders.

We need to keep our attention focused on the liturgy — it’s our most important product. We need to embrace a vision of liturgy that can be expressed in a simple, understandable way. We need to recruit, train, and retain “employees” who can help us make the vision a reality. We need to continually share our vision of liturgy with all those who are part of our “company,” part of our parish. We need to be willing to spend money to make the vision happen.

Think of the effort that companies, like Microsoft, or Coca Cola, or Merck, or Sony, give to producing and selling something that is here today and gone tomorrow. Think of the effort we should be giving as pastors, as liturgical leaders, who are in the business of offering something that is here today, and that lasts forever.

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The Sacramental Identity and Mission of the Parish Priest

One of the greatest achievements of the Second Vatican Council has been the recovery of the centrality of baptism in Christian life and the universal call to holiness of all believers. Baptized Christians participate in the priesthood of the faithful; at worship they constitute the ministry of the assembly and are encouraged to “full, active, and conscious participation in the liturgy.”¹ Moreover, we should no longer speak of volunteers in the Church, rather Christians exercising the mission entrusted to them at baptism as full-fledged members of the Church. And all this has further led to an exciting involvement of many lay ministers, men and women, serving their church in a full or part-time capacity.

What then is the place of holy orders, the ministerial priesthood within the people of God? Younger – and not so young – priests sometimes ask: “Where do we fit in?” In response there have been important clarifications from John Paul II in his *Pastores dabo Vobis, The Directory for the Life and Ministry of Priests, Priests and the Third Millennium*. This teaching is best summarized in the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC 1547):

The ministerial or hierarchical priesthood of bishops and priests, and the common priesthood of all the faithful participate “each in its own proper way, in the

one priesthood of Christ.” While being “ordered one to another,” they differ essentially. In what sense? While the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace – a life of faith, hope, and charity, a life according to the Spirit –, the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood. It is directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians. The ministerial priesthood is a **means** by which Christ unceasingly builds up and leads his church. For this reason it is transmitted by its own sacrament, the sacrament of Holy Orders.

In other words, the ministerial priesthood exists within the general priesthood of the faithful. It is called ministerial or serving, because it is entrusted with empowering the general priesthood of all the baptized faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ.

Here is another situation that has to be factored in. When one looks at the real life experience of the Church, there are fewer priests today, yet no slackening in the volume of sacramental activity: baptisms, Masses, funerals, weddings, anointings – everything except the sacrament of penance! In other words, there are a greater number of Catholics to be served at the same time we are suffering a decline in vocations to the ministerial priesthood.

There even exists an official rite for the universal Church called *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*. What is the place of the sacramental ministry in the priesthood? Is this all the ordained priest is called to do? The ordination rite speaks of a ministry of Teacher (Word), Priest (sacramental), and Shepherd (pastoral or serving spiritual leadership). A proper theology of priesthood must strive to carefully integrate all three of these dimensions, an increasingly difficult challenge for the future.

Finally, this sacramental identity needs to be closely bound up with the overall priestly identity, as opposed to a kind of functionalism.² The priesthood is not defined in terms of what you do, but rather who you are. The sacramental ministry flows from the priestly identity. The late Cardinal Bernardin spoke of the priest as “bearer of the mystery of God.” He put it this way:

The priest of Jesus Christ is in a pre-eminent way the one who bears the mystery of God and initiates others into it. At the heart of the Christian faith is a confrontation with the all-encompassing mystery of being – that is, with God. The believer is grasped, shaken, overwhelmed by that powerful, fascinating force, which in Jesus Christ is revealed as unconditional love. The priest is the one who in his ministry and very being leads the people of

God into an ever more intimate contact with it. In carrying out this task, one is most authentically a priest.³

Cardinal Bernardin’s theologian, Robert Barron, elaborates on this concept of the priest as “bearer of mystery” or mystagogue.

The mystagogue... is the artist and poet who fires hearts with the power of the Catholic imagination, the shaman who lures people into confrontation with Mystery that suffuses and transcends all our experience. The priest is not so much psychologist or social worker as he is spiritual leader, pastor of the soul, the one who leads people to a discovery of the deepest self which is in living contact with God.⁴

This vision is very much in keeping with the emphasis given in the new Catechism in its teaching on sacraments and liturgy; for example, the distinction between celebration and the mystery celebrated. Before becoming a celebration, the liturgy is first of all an event, a manifestation of the mystery of Christ. In Part II of the Catechism, devoted to the sacraments, “The Celebration of the Christian Mystery,” the first consideration is the paschal mystery in the age of the Church (Chapter One), thereafter follows the sacramental celebration of the paschal mystery (Chapter Two).

What light does all this shed on the sacramental identity of the parish priest? There are at least seven applications we can draw.

**SACRAMENTAL CHARACTER:
THE PRIEST ACTS IN PERSONA
CHRISTI CAPITIS**

The Catechism (1121) speaks of the sacramental character in these words:

The three sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders confer, in addition to grace, a sacramental character or “seal” by which the Christian shares in Christ’s priesthood and is made a member of the church according to different states and functions. This configuration to Christ and to the Church, brought about by the Spirit, is indelible: it remains for ever in the Christian as a positive disposition for grace, a promise and guarantee of divine protection, and as a vocation to divine worship and to the service of the Church. Therefore these sacraments can never be repeated.

Can we speak of an ontological change? A change in being? The teaching of Romans 6 and elsewhere in the New Testament seems to indicate this for baptism, baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection and becoming a new creation. Likewise, the Church speaks of the ordained priest acting in the person of Christ as the head of the Church, *in persona Christi Capitis* (CCC, 1548). Far from being a kind of “metaphysical clericalism”, the doctrine of the sacramental character of holy orders serves as a safeguard against functionalism in the priesthood. The priest is a mystagogue, a bearer of mystery.

**OPUS OPERATUM EFFICACY:
CHRIST ACTS IN THE
SACRAMENTS**

The *opus operatum* refers to the intrinsic objective efficacy of the sacraments. As developed by St. Augustine in his disputations against the Donatists in the fifth century and defined by the Council of Trent in the sixteenth, this doctrine means that Christ will always have his heart in the sacramental encounter despite the unworthiness of the minister. Negatively, the *ex opere operato* efficacy means that the bestowal of grace is not solely dependent upon the faith and holiness of the minister and recipient. Positively, it means this act is Christ’s free act; *opus operatum* respects the priority of God’s action in the sacraments. The priest is once again the mystagogue, the bearer of a mystery much greater than himself. The new Catechism reinforces this understanding:

Celebrated worthily in faith, the sacraments confer the grace that they signify. They are efficacious because in them Christ himself is at work: it is he who baptizes, he who acts in this sacraments in order to communicate the grace that each sacrament signifies. The Father always hears the prayer of his Son’s Church which, in the epiclesis of each sacrament, expresses her faith in the power of the Spirit. As fire transforms into itself everything it touches, so the Holy Spirit transforms into the divine life whatever is subjected to his power. (CCC, 1127)

This is the meaning of the Church’s affirmation that the sacraments act *ex opere operato* (literally: “by the very fact of the action’s being performed”), i.e. by

virtue of the saving work of Christ, accomplished once for all. It follows that “the sacrament is not wrought by the righteousness of either the celebrant or the recipient, but by the power of God.” From the moment that a sacrament is celebrated in accordance with the intention of the Church, the power of Christ and his Spirit acts in and through it, independently of the personal holiness of the minister. Nevertheless, the fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them. (CCC, #1128)

**INTENTION: PAY ATTENTION
TO WHO YOU ARE AND WHAT
YOU ARE DOING**

It is so important that the priestly minister pay attention and be mindful of what he is about. The stirring words from the ordination address remind us: “Know what you are doing

and imitate the mystery you celebrate.” The older scholastic manuals contained hair-splitting theories about the quality of intentionality necessary for a valid celebration of the sacraments. Could the use of a foreign language (Latin) in the liturgy have provoked this? My personal intentionality before administering any sacraments, a kind of spirituality of ministerial stewardship, consists of three things. First of all, use your gifts well: God has given you gifts, especially the gift of ordination; otherwise you would not be here. Do the best you can. Secondly, your ministry is not to impress others, but to serve them: to love them, the members of the Body of Christ. Finally, the goal of our worship is to glorify God. Strive for purity of intention. Where is the heart of the sacramental mystagogue?



**LITURGICAL PREACHING:
ALSO THE MYSTERY OF
CHRIST**

I can recall attending a diocesan workshop on the new Catechism. There was an apparent conflict between preaching from scripture and incorporating the doctrinal content from the Catechism. I felt the discussion was missing the point. The overarching issue is that of the mystery of Christ made present first in Word, then in Sacrament. The mystery of Christ is paramount. We are fed from two tables: the table of the word and the table of the Eucharist. Without this vision, the Mass becomes a ritual within which a message or homily is inserted. And homilists should strive to make reference to how the liturgy of the Eucharist continues the celebration of the mystery of Christ proclaimed in the Word. Poet Annie Dillard captures something of this quasi-sacramental efficacy of the mystery of Christ in the Word:

On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea of what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return.⁵

**EUCCHARISTIC PRESENCE
BUILDS UP THE BODY OF
CHRIST**

It has been said the Church makes the Eucharist, and the Eucharist makes the Church. As stated in the Vatican Decree on Priests #6: "No Christian community can be built up unless it grows from and hinges on the celebration of the Most Holy Eucharist." To be sure, in the enlarged vision of the reformed liturgy Christ is present in the gathering rites where two or three are gathered in his name. Christ speaks to us when the scriptures are proclaimed. He is present in the priest acting *in persona Christi*, and most especially in the forms of bread and wine transformed into the sacrament of the Lord's Body and Blood – the real presence *par excellence*. Christ is present body and soul, humanity and divinity, in the elements of bread and wine. The Church calls this change transubstantiation: it is a mystery of faith.

Christ is present to be received as food and nourishment within a sacramental meal: communion. "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks by blood remains in me and I in him." All the desires and longing of the human heart press toward union with God, ultimately the messianic banquet of heaven. The most tangible and visible realization this side of eternity is sacramental communion. Theologians call this change transsignification: a change of meaning or significance in the eucharistic elements.

But there is more still. Holy Communion transforms, changes us. Unlike ordinary food that is ingested and becomes part of us, the Eucharist makes us part of the Body of Christ, the Church.

Paul the Apostle tells us: "Because the loaf is one, we, many though we are, are one body for we all partake of the one loaf." St. Augustine advises us when we receive communion: "Be what you see and receive what you are." And Thomas Aquinas insists that the grace of Holy Communion is first of all the unity of the Church. Theologians call this transfinalization. The ultimate reason why the bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ is so that we the communicants may be transformed into the Body of Christ which is the Church. Thus do the Eucharistic Body and the Mystical Body of Christ go together. To return to our central theme of the sacramental identity of the priest as mystagogue, the ministry of the priest in making present the Body and Blood of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit serves to build up the Body of Christ the Church.

**SACRIFICE OF THE MASS:
HOW THE REDEMPTIVE
MYSTERY IS MADE PRESENT
AND APPROPRIATED**

St. Paul writes in I Corinthians: "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes." Small wonder that this strong affirmation of faith has been taken over as one of our memorial acclamations. The Mass is a sacramental sacrifice, more specifically, a memorial sacrifice or anamnesis. The Mass recalls and makes present Calvary, the sacrifice of Christ, his perfect self-offering to the Father on our behalf. The paschal mystery of Jesus' dying and rising constitutes the salvation of the world from all its pain and suffering, alienation and brokennes, from sin and death itself. The Mass

as sacrifice is first of all a gift from God we accept with praise and thanksgiving: listen to the words of the eucharistic prayer. The Mass as sacrifice is also a challenge that we respond to the sacrifice of Christ by appropriating its meaning into our lives. Christ's offering is unique and complete. The only reason for making the mystery of Christ present sacramentally is so that we can be in touch with the same experience of dying and rising at work in our lives and say yes to this paschal mystery. When we pray that our sacrifice "may be acceptable to God our Almighty Father," we mean not only the sacrifice which is being recalled and made present on the altar in the sanctuary of the church. We mean also and most especially the sacrifice and offering taking place in the sanctuary of our hearts. The ministerial priest has an opportunity to identify with Christ in a special way in the words of institution—"This is my body," "This is the cup of my blood" – as he acts *in persona Christi*, and offers himself with Christ.

**LITURGICAL PRESIDENCY:
HOW THE MYSTERY OF
CHRIST IS MEDIATED**

Liturgical designer Robert Rambusch has remarked that once the liturgy was revised in the vernacular and the altar turned around facing the people, two questions arose. First of all, does the priest mean it? Is he really praying, communing with the mystery of God? Secondly, can he share this experience with others? Is he a facilitating mystagogue? Which brings us to the two essential qualities of a good liturgical presider: prayerfulness or a sense of reverence, and hospitality.

Prayerfulness means the priest is imbued with a liturgical spirituality totally immersed in

the mystery he is mediating. It means there is conviction behind his words and actions. He knows the importance of pauses and prayerful silence. The Mass is not just something to get through, but is the center of his day. Someone once said that the criterion for an effective presider was that he looked like he needed it too! The scripture readings from the Lectionary from which the homily is drawn can also serve as a kind of *lectio divina* or spiritual reading in the personal prayer life of the bearer of mystery. Hospitality includes as sense of graciousness: a personal presence to the people with whom the mystagogue is sharing the mystery. Sometimes there exists a tension between hospitality and a sense of awe and reverence: at least appear to be happy to be with God's people exercising the ministry you are doing! Communication is another characteristic of hospitality: a desire to communicate that extends from the depths of one's being to the tip of your fingers! The communication consists of words, addressed at times to God especially in the presidential prayers, at other times to the people or even with them. It also consists of non-verbal gestures, which are usually an even stronger

vehicle of communication than words. Be familiar with the Sacramentary, the priest's participation aid, if you will. Memorize whatever recurring texts you can so as to be freed up from an over-dependence on the written words. Wait for the people's responses in a dialogical manner that presumes and expects their participation.

We have tried to show how the sacramental identity of the parish priest is bound up with his identity as a mystagogue or bearer of mystery. We have made seven applications from traditional sacramental theology and liturgy to demonstrate this approach. We close now with a quote from Marva Dawn on how God is always the object of worship:

Many theologians follow Kierkegaard in comparing worship to the theater. Whereas many worship services allow congregants to be an audience viewing the pastor and musicians as actors, genuine worship happens when everyone knows that God is the audience. Musicians and pastors are the prompters or coaches or stage managers, but all of us are the actors and all our worship acts are directed to God. And yet, we must add paradoxically,

because God is the subject, we always remember that we can only be actors because he acted first.⁶

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¹ *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 14.

² See William P. Sheridan, "Functionalism Undermining Priesthood," *Human Development*, vol. 20, no. 3 (Fall, 1999), 12-16.

³ Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, "Priest: Religious Leaders, Doctors of the Soul," *Origins* vol. 25, no.2 (May 25, 1995) 25.

⁴ Robert E. Barron, "Priest as Doctor of the Soul," in *Priesthood in the Modern World*, ed. Karen Sue Smith (Sheed & Ward, 1999) 101. See also in the same volume "Priest as Bearer of Mystery," 93-100

⁵ Annie Dillard, "Expedition to the Pole," *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (Harper & Row, 1982), 40-41.

⁶ Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down* (Eerdmans, 1995), 82.

Editor's note:

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The Second Sunday of Easter

Divine Mercy Sunday

The concept of an “octave” has a long tradition in the liturgy. It is a way of celebrating a truly great feast by extending its observance through an entire week and in a sense “recapitulating” the feast on “the eighth day.” Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the treatment of Easter in our current liturgical calendar. The “first day of Easter” (Easter Sunday) leads into an entire week of solemnities — days we rank as highest in importance. Then comes the octave day, the Second Sunday of Easter.

Appreciation for this intimate relationship between the Second Sunday of Easter and Easter itself is important for interpreting a small adjustment that we will see in the title used for the octave day of Easter. **In the preparation of the third typical edition of the Roman Missal, a new subtitle has been added to this day. It will now read, “Second Sunday of Easter or Divine Mercy Sunday.”** (This is similar to what now appears in the missal for “Passion Sunday [Palm Sunday].”)

The decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, dated 5 May, 2000, indicates that this is the sole extent of the change and that “the texts assigned for that day in the...Missal and the Liturgy of the Hours of the Roman Rite are always to be used for the liturgical celebration of this Sunday.”

FIRST, SOME CAUTIONS

Many of us are familiar with a particular devotion to the Divine Mercy originating with Saint Faustina Kowalska and increasing in popularity first in her native Poland and then in our own country. Followers of Saint Faustina celebrate this devotion year-round, but especially in the time between Good Friday and the octave day of Easter.

There is good reason to think that this devotion contributed to the decision of Pope John Paul II to make this adjustment in the language of the calendar. However, it is also important to point out that this change in the missal stands on its own. It implies nothing more than what it says and does not endorse or call for any other elements of Saint Faustina’s devotion.

Some enthusiastic members of the faithful may interpret this adjustment of the missal as official approval or even requirement of this devotion for the whole Church. This is not true. The visions of Christ by Saint Faustina and the messages and disciplines flowing from them remain in the category of private revelation. The Church’s doctrine about God’s mercy and the mystery of forgiveness as well as its ritual practice are of another order entirely. Indeed, a recent letter to bishops from the John Paul II Institute of Divine Mercy (a chief promoter of Saint Faustina’s devotion) pointed

out, “We are aware that some of the laity may be telling your priests what they ‘must’ do to celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday.” The letter goes on to clarify what is, in fact, “required” by this action of the Holy See and what otherwise remains optional.

NOW, POSITIVELY

Is not the paschal mystery — celebrated in special solemnity and overflowing joy in the Easter Triduum and the Fifty Days of Easter — all about divine compassion and God’s merciful deeds on behalf of the world? Look at the opening prayer for the very Sunday we are discussing (Second Sunday of Easter):

God of mercy,
You wash away our sins in water,
you give us new birth in the Spirit,
and redeem us in the blood of Christ.
As we celebrate Christ’s resurrection
increase our awareness of these blessings,
and renew your gift of life within us.

And what words and images come from God’s word on that day? In the three lectionary cycles we find: the loving, accepting, outreaching and healing community of the disciples at Jerusalem. “Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love is everlasting.” “His mercy endures forever.” “Blessed be...God...who in his great mercy gave us a new

birth.” “You rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy as you attain ...the salvation of your souls.” “Peace be with you...Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them.” “The victory that conquers the world is our faith.” “Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last, the one who lives.” “These are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ... and...have life in his name.”

And, finally, how do we teach about the true meaning of Christ’s passion, death, and glory?

God takes the initiative of universal redeeming love.

By giving up his own Son for our sins, God manifests that his plan for us is one of benevolent love, prior to any merit on our part...God “shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ dies for us.”

The desire to embrace his Father’s plan of redeeming love inspired Jesus’ whole life, for his redemptive passion was the very reason for his Incarnation.

By embracing in his human heart the Father’s love for men, Jesus “loved them to the end,” for “greater love has no man than this [to]...lay down his life for his friends.” In suffering and death his humanity became the free and perfect instrument of

his divine love which desires the salvation of men.

Christ's death is both the Paschal sacrifice that accomplishes the definitive redemption of men...and the sacrifice of the New covenant, which restored man to communion with God by reconciling him to God through the "blood of the covenant, which was poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 604, 607, 609, 613)

These sources make it abundantly clear that the merciful action of our God is at the heart of the Church's paschal faith. The Easter Triduum is nothing if not the liturgy's most amazing expression of that mercy. And in response, the Church is moved both to hushed worship and to its most ecstatic hymns of praise.

This is the night...

This is the night when the pillar of fire destroyed the darkness of sin!

...What good would life have been to us had Christ not come as our Redeemer?

Father, how wonderful your care for us! How boundless your merciful love! To ransom a slave you gave away your Son.

...Night truly blessed when heaven is wedded to earth and man is reconciled with God!

Therefore, heavenly Father, in the joy of this night, receive our evening sacrifice of praise, your church's solemn offering.

(Easter Vigil: the *Easter Proclamation*)

Such praise for God's boundless mercy echoes through the octave and the whole Fifty Days of Easter. This is ancient faith. It is not a novelty or innovation. It is the bedrock of our liturgical life. Seen in this light, it is quite fitting to entitle the octave day of Easter "Divine Mercy Sunday." It is also proper, in preaching and other forms of pastoral formation, to speak from the scripture and prayer of that day about the mystery of divine compassion that underlies the Church's Easter faith.

This is precisely the motivation for this small adjustment in the new missal, as is clear in the actual language of the decree of 5 May, 2000.

Merciful and gracious is the Lord (Ps 111:4), who, out of great love with which he loved us (Eph 2:4) and unspeakable goodness, gave us his Only-begotten Son as our Redeemer, so that through the Death and Resurrection of this Son he might open the way to eternal life for the human race, and that the adopted children who receive his mercy within his temple might lift up his praise to the ends of the earth.

In our times, the Christian faithful in many parts of the world wish to praise that divine mercy in divine worship, particularly in the celebration of the Paschal Mystery, in which God's loving kindness especially shines forth.

Acceding to these wishes, the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II has graciously determined that in the

Roman Missal, after the title "Second Sunday of Easter," there shall henceforth be added the appellation "(or Divine Mercy Sunday)," and has prescribed that the texts assigned for that day in the same Missal and the Liturgy of the Hours of the Roman Rite are always to be used for the liturgical celebration of this Sunday. (*Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments*)

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

A. It is acceptable to refer to the Second Sunday of Easter also as Divine Mercy Sunday and to approach the preaching ministry with that in mind.

B. Remember, though, that the granting of this title by the Church is in no way equivalent to the creation of a new solemnity or feast in the Church calendar.

C. The Second Sunday of Easter or *Divine Mercy Sunday* does not celebrate a new or separate mystery of redemption (the way the liturgical rites of the Easter Triduum or the solemnities of the Ascension or Pentecost unfold the events of our salvation in Christ). Instead, the day sums up the Easter octave and leads into the continuing celebration of the Easter season.

(This is important in view of some interpretations of the message of Saint Faustina about the grace of the "Feast of Divine Mercy" as bestowing extraordinary remission of sins and punishment in a way superior even to that of normal sacramental reconciliation and Church-authorized indulgences.)

D. The integrity of the Easter season and the preeminence of the Easter Triduum must be maintained.

E. In no way should it appear that the Triduum and the Easter octave are "leading up to" Divine Mercy Sunday.

F. In the liturgical environment of the entire Easter season, the Easter Candle has pride of place. It is the chief visual image of Christ risen and living among us.

G. Other images of Christ (including the picture of Merciful Jesus associated with the Divine Mercy devotion) are not to replace or diminish the prominence of the Easter Candle.

H. With regard to special requests or even expectations that followers of Saint Faustina might have, the following should be kept in mind.

1) The apparitions of Christ recorded by Saint Faustina remain in the category of private revelation. They are not promoted in any official way by the Church. At the same time, individual members of the faithful are free to embrace this devotion and adopt its disciplines of prayer.

2) "Popular devotions...are to be highly endorsed, provided they accord with the laws and norms of the Church... But these devotions should be so fashioned that they harmonize with the liturgical seasons, accord with the sacred liturgy, are in some way derived from it, and lead the

people to it, since, in fact, the liturgy, by its very nature far surpasses any of them.” (Second Vatican Council, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 13)

3) Pastors may accord the followers of Saint Faustina’s devotion the same positive and careful accommodation offered to adherents of other popular devotions — with special concern in view of the extraordinary nature of the Easter Triduum and the Easter season.

4) It should be clear that the parish’s life of prayer over the course of the Triduum revolves around the Church’s liturgical celebrations and that any prayer times arranged for the followers of the

Divine Mercy Devotion are of a subordinate nature.

5) Of special importance in this devotion is prayer at the three o’clock hour and the reception of Communion on Divine Mercy Sunday (preceded by sacramental reconciliation). Note that, in fulfillment of the requirements for the Divine Mercy devotions:

- Nothing beyond participation in the Mass of the day and the reception of communion is strictly necessary.
- It is not necessary that a Mass be celebrated in the afternoon of that day.
- It is not necessary to

provide the sacrament of Penance on Divine Mercy Sunday itself. (Opportunities for this sacrament should be offered beforehand, usually as part of the penitential life of the whole parish.)

- No special Divine Mercy prayers need or should be joined to the celebration of Mass.
- There need not be any public gathering for devotional prayer on Divine Mercy Sunday.
- The pastor may consider requests for Eucharistic Exposition. If celebrated, the usual norms apply with regard to arrangement of the rite, content of the prayers, etc. (Note

that the image of the Merciful Jesus may not be presented for veneration in conjunction with Eucharistic Exposition. Recall as well that the Liturgy of the Hours for the day has a special place in the Church’s prayer.)

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