

Word on Worship

Newsletter of the Worship Office, Archdiocese of Newark, NJ

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In 1994 when the Archdiocesan Center opened in Newark, there was an open house for families of Archdiocesan employees. My family came for the day of touring, which began for us in the chapel. It was here that my sisters came upon a contemporary rendering of Mary that was totally different from any statue of Mary that they had ever seen. The chapel in the Archdiocesan center has a unique, commissioned statue of the young maiden, Mary. This artist's rendering of Mary was so completely out of my sisters' realm of familiarity, that they assured me it **could not** be an image of Mary. The Mary they knew was Our Lady of Lourdes. The Mary they knew was always and forever on a pedestal. That incident forced them to encounter the person Mary beyond a statue! The episode forced **me** to a renewed devotion to Mary.

On December 8, 2004 the Church celebrates the 150th anniversary of the solemn proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate

Conception; the doctrine, which holds that "the Most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin." (Pius IX, Dogmatic bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, of Dec. 8, 1854.)

Why take note of such an observance? The sesquicentennial of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception can be an opportunity for the Church to encounter the person of Mary beyond an image on a pedestal! As the Church focuses on its image of Mary it fosters renewed devotion to Mary. Such renewed devotion does not necessarily show itself in an increase in the quantity of prayers said but implies a relationship with Mary, which is established by prayer and reflected in imitation of Mary. Thus the Church prays on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, "Trace in our actions the lines of her (Mary's) love, in our hearts her readiness of faith...."¹

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR EVANGELIZATION

The Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* written at the conclusion of the Great Jubilee Year by Pope John Paul II gives some direction on how such anniversaries /

events have the potential to affect the Church and how they have the potential to touch people's hearts. First and foremost, to mark the 150th anniversary of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is a providential opportunity for renewal which leads to a fresh enthusiasm for the Church's mission to evangelize. Thus begins the Good News of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, "*Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a Son and they shall call him Emmanuel*" (Is 7:14) ,... "*and the virgin's name was Mary*" (Lk 1:27)... "*of her was born Jesus who is called Messiah*" (Mt 1:16). By observing the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary as a solemnity, the Church is not only reminding us of the Incarnation event but also stirring hearts to be "filled with wonder at the nearness of her God."² A celebration appropriately marking the sesquicentennial anniversary is an opportune moment of evangelization for the Church and an opportunity to publicly declare that in Christ the time of fulfillment has come.³ In addition, the celebration of this anniversary becomes an opportunity for the Church to publicly declare the dignity and vocation of women in the Church, for when the time had fully come, "*God sent forth his son, born of woman*" (Gal

O MARY, CONCEIVED WITHOUT SIN: WHY CELEBRATE THE ANNIVERSARY OF A DOGMA?

4:4). A woman is to be found “at the centre of this salvific event”. With Mary begins “the central event, the key event in the history of salvation”: the Lord’s Paschal Mystery.⁴ The liturgical celebration of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception is an annual reminder that Mary, indeed all the women of the Gospels are declared “astounding” “for they had indeed seen.... And announced that he was alive”. (see Lk 22-23)

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CATECHESIS

The Holy Father also reminded us in his numerous messages throughout the Great Jubilee celebration that marking such anniversaries is always a moment for catechesis. The experience of contemplating the image of Mary should inspire in us new energy in Christian living. In *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (58) the *Magnificat* is extolled as the expression of Mary’s spirituality. A day does not go by that the Church does not pray the *Magnificat* as the Gospel canticle of Evening Prayer. The song of the Virgin Mary is declared as the Church’s song of thanksgiving. Mary is acclaimed and represented in the liturgy as the “Seat of Wisdom,” for in her the “wonders of God” that the Spirit was to fulfill in Christ and the Church began to be manifested.⁵ This Marian anniversary serves to remind the Church not only of its obligation to pray the hours⁶ but of the Church’s need to pray the *Magnificat* so as to cultivate in the hearts of all the People of God an understanding and a desire for the coming of the Kingdom of God, “a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace—the reign of God.”⁷ The prayer of Mary of Nazareth is the “prayer of the lowly... it does not reach its goal ... till the Most High responds, judges justly and affirms the right, and the Lord will not delay” (Sir 35:17-18). Such catechesis based on the *Magnificat* is foundational to the Church’s prayer stance, *Thy kingdom come!* This is no less true for children. The Gospel canticle of Mary needs also to be the song of our youth, for the Kingdom of God is a “kingdom for all ages” (Ps 145:13).

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR REMEMBERING, LISTENING, BECOMING

In the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* we are also reminded that in marking such great events / anniversaries of the Church like this Marian sesquicentennial, is not only as a remembrance of the past, but also as a **prophecy of the future**. It was in the soil of history that God chose to establish a covenant with Israel and so prepare the birth of the Son from the womb of Mary “in the fullness of time”

out not only an event in salvation history but a turning point proclaiming a new creation, a new heaven and a new earth and salvation in Christ. The “fullness of time” is an ongoing reality and through the power of the Holy Spirit our becoming is the ongoing dynamic of holiness — the living reflection of the face of Christ. In reflecting on Mary we come to know that this holiness is inconceivable without a renewed active listening to the Word of God. Mary lived with eyes fixed on Christ, treasuring his every word: “She kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk 2:19; cf. 2:51).⁹ Celebrating this anniversary event, storing in our hearts the treasures of this very special time allows us to go back to our ordinary routines with our gaze ever more firmly set on the face of the Lord.

The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary celebrates the “splendor of an entirely unique holiness” Mary is “full of grace.” The Father blessed Mary more than any other created person “in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” and chose her “in Christ before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him in love” (Eph 1:3-4).¹⁰ It is a spiritual blessing which is meant for all people and which bears in itself fullness and universality (“every blessing”). It flows from that love which, in the Holy Spirit, unites the Son to the Father. At the same time, it is a blessing poured out through Jesus Christ upon human history until the end: upon all people.¹¹ The baptized people of God, the people who were once no people but who are now God’s people (1 Pt 2:10), are the people “full of grace.” In marking this anniversary of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, the Church once again announces that Mary is our Mother, the mother of the members of Christ since she cooperated out of love so that the Church might be born: “for those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name” (1 Jn 12). The remembering of this past event calls the Church to the prophetic response of Marian wonderment: “How can this be” with that eternal surety proclaimed at the Annunciation even; “nothing is impossible with God!” (see Lk 1, 34, 37)

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR RENEWED APOSTOLIC ENTHUSIASM

The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary celebrates Mary as *Handmaid of the Lord* (Lk 1:38) servant of the *word* “made flesh who made his dwelling among us” (Jn 1:14). This Marian anniversary reminds us that God’s invitation to the table of the word is a summons to be active listeners of the word. We nourish ourselves with the word in order to be servants of the word. Remaining firmly anchored in Scripture, we open ourselves to the action of the



Spirit, "to the mysterious bonds of the Spirit which develop from hearing and keeping God's word."¹² The Holy Father reminds us that marking a jubilee event is a time of contemplation. The experiences of contemplating the image of Mary should inspire in us new energy which is borne out of being called "blessed," for "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Lk 11:28). Through faith Mary continued to hear and to ponder that Word, in which there became ever clearer, in a way "which surpasses knowledge" (Eph 3:19), the self-revelation of the living God and the Messianic mission. Mary's response as a "handmaid" of the Lord becomes redefined to mean servant and disciple. *The Word was made flesh and made his dwelling among us* (Jn 1: 14), *we have seen it and testify to it and PROCLAIM IT ...so that our joy may be complete* (1 Jn 1 ff.)

OPPORTUNITY FOR REIMAGING MARY

In this celebration of the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, the Church is invited to listen to the exhortation of Christ on Calvary, "Behold your Mother" (Jn 19:25), with new ears, with new enthusiasm. The image of Mary docile, quiet, lenient has been a dominant image in the Church. "Behold your Mother!" She is not reticent, passive and docile; a figure, insulated from human struggle and pain. The Church proclaims a "new motherhood of Mary," generated by faith, as the

fruit of the "new" love which came to definitive maturity in her at the foot of the Cross, through her sharing in the redemptive love of her Son.¹³ This celebration is an opportunity for a new image of Mary to emerge and become dominant. This image of Mary is a young woman whose lips proclaimed the greatness of the Lord after journeying from the Annunciation to the garden to Calvary to Pentecost and is based on the fullness of her life. "Behold your Mother!"

O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you!

Perhaps the encounter with the commissioned statue of the young maiden did exactly what an artistic rendering of Mary should do. It shouted "Behold Your Mother!" On December 8, 2004 the one hundred and fifty year anniversary of *Ineffabilis Deus* the Church continues to proclaim "Behold your Mother". She is a living witness of God's unchanging love. She inspires us by her heroic life and she helps us by her constant prayers to be the living sign of God's saving power.¹⁴

Sr. Sandra DeMasi, SSJ
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Endnotes:

- ¹ Alternate Opening Prayer for "Immaculate Conception" *Sacramentary*, 752.
- ² Alternate Opening Prayer for "Christmas - Mass at Dawn," *Sacramentary*, 42.
- ³ On December 8, 2004, there will be an Archdiocesan celebration in the Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart, Newark, NJ.
- ⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 3.
- ⁵ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 721.
- ⁶ A model of a cathedral / communal celebration of Evening Prayer from the Common of the BVM is available at www.rcan.org/worship.
- ⁷ Preface for "Christ the King," *Sacramentary*, p.475.
- ⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 11.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 492.
- ¹¹ See Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 8 and *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 492.
- ¹² See Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 20.
- ¹³ Ibid, 23.
- ¹⁴ From Preface: "Holy Men and Women II, *Sacramentary*, 513/

ARCHDIOCESAN CELEBRATION

150th Anniversary Dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart
December 8, 2004
Mass • 8:00 PM

CAROLING THE PASCHAL MYSTERY

"It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas, everywhere you go...." Radios and store PA systems have been reminding us of this for weeks, but as Christians we know there is a deeper meaning for the excitement than store windows, caroling folks or even the snow on the ground. We gather for liturgy in these weeks before December 25 with an air of expectancy, singing our own songs of "Patience, People;" "Come, O Lord;" and "For You, O Lord, My Soul in Stillness Waits." Yes, "soon it will be Christmas Day" and our churches will be filled with mangers and choirs telling the story of the birth of the babe in Bethlehem, and we will celebrate and sing along the carols from of old. But in all this, have we, too, lost sight of something more integral as we celebrate each week? How do these Sundays of waiting for Christmas, indeed the Solemnity of Christmas itself, the birth of Jesus, integrate with the idea of Sunday celebration each week as resurrection anamnesis — remembrance made present?

PASCHAL MYSTERY AND SUNDAY

Lex orandi, lex credendi. This liturgical principle reminds us that as we pray, so we believe. From *Dies Domini!* we recall that we celebrate Sunday as the First Day, the Day of Resurrection, wherein the whole of salvation was realized. Each week in the liturgy, we actualize "the reality of

Christ's paschal mystery."²² We remember the past redemptive deeds of Jesus: "obedient life, humiliation, suffering, death, resurrection and ascension"²³ even as we experience them anew through both the ritual actions we perform and our eschatological hope in the kingdom to come.

Furthermore, as this anamnesis occurs within each liturgy, the Church sets Sunday as the paradigm for all liturgies and establishes its own seasonal year. "Within the cycle of a year, the Church unfolds the whole mystery of Christ, from his incarnation and birth until his ascension, the day of Pentecost, and the expectation of blessed hope and of the Lord's return."²⁴

Thus we contemplate anew each week through the liturgical year this complete mystery. This is certainly easy enough to grasp as we focus on the Eucharistic prayer that reminds us "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again." However, we need to remind ourselves also that the whole liturgy, from gathering to sending, is an experience of this mystery. The prayers, the readings, even the songs, if properly chosen, reflect this theme of Paschal Mystery as well.

For a moment, consider the second Sunday of Advent. We gather by singing "Come Lord Jesus, Come," settle down for the readings and are suddenly jarred by a story told of John the Baptist beginning his adult

ministry. No child here. The Word of God comes to John — hills and valleys should be leveled and all paths should be made straight for the coming of the Incarnate word of God to all. We are startled, not into preparing a manger for a Baby's birth, but into preparing ourselves for the Word of God, an adult Jesus, beginning his ministry of calling us all into a life of dying and rising with him. The old theme ideas of **watch, wait, rejoice, prepare** meld into the overall theme of Paschal Mystery. "We wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ" becomes more than a casual phrase.

PASCHAL MYSTERY AND CHRISTMAS

And so we reconcile this Word who was with God from all ages with the birth of a child from a virgin in the celebration of the Incarnation. However, themes of manger, stars, and shepherds are all too simplistic in light of the actuality that we face. In his collection of three essays, *An Adult Christ at Christmas*, Raymond Brown examines the infancy narratives from Matthew and Luke and shows how they, in fact, represent a miniature synthesis of the whole Gospel. These stories, written certainly after the resurrection of Jesus, announce the Good News, tell of its "acceptance by the disciples," "rejection by most of Israel," and "extension to the gentile world." Robert Taft continues the thought: "It is

not the story of baby Jesus in Bethlehem, but the meaning of Christ for humankind in the era of the post-Pentecostal Church, that is behind the narratives.”⁵ It is the story of Emmanuel — God with us — “inaugurating the age of salvation” through which Christ became one with us so that we might become one with him.

Similarly, other readings and prayers of the Christmas liturgy speak of the messianic hope that has been fulfilled this day. Images and words abound to remind us constantly of the larger picture — Paschal Mystery: “Jesus Christ our Light,” (Opening Prayer) “His dominion is vast,” (Is 9) “Jesus Christ who gave himself for us,” (Ti 2) “We might be justified by his grace,” (Ti 3) “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.” (Jn 1) There are certainly many more examples, but let’s look particularly at the carols sung through this season.

PASCHAL MYSTERY AND CAROLS

Like the infancy narratives, these songs, at first inspection, tell the simple story of the birth of Jesus, yet a closer examination of the words reveals “the everlasting Light: the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.” (“O Little Town of Bethlehem”) This song con-

tinues “God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven,” and asks the Child of Bethlehem to “cast out our sin and enter in: Be born in us today.” The very notion of Incarnation lies well beyond the stars and angels who surround this sleeping town.

“O Come All Ye Faithful” reminds us that the Lord “born this happy morning” is “the Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing.” “Joy to the World” tells of the King, the Savior who reigns and “the glories of his righteousness.” Even the lullaby “Silent Night” reminds us that it is “Christ the Savior” who is born “with the dawn of redeeming grace.” “God Rest You Merry Gentlemen” calls us back from thoughtless celebration of a feast unconnected to the Paschal Mystery as we realize that Christ was born “to save us all from Satan’s power when we had gone astray.”

Several of the Christmas carols tell the story from the infancy narratives a little more completely. “The First Noel,” “We Three Kings,” and even “Angels from the Realms of Glory,” each contain separate verses telling of angels, shepherds, and kings who “come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ, the newborn King.” But with Raymond Brown’s essays as reference, these songs are per-

meated with new meaning and give a fuller insight into the birth event, for as noted before, Incarnation is but the beginning of the Paschal Mystery which continues with us in likewise roles — as angels, shepherds, and kings.

Other songs spell events out more succinctly, but perhaps we sing them less attentively than we should. The words to “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” are startling when we realize exactly what we are singing:

“Hail the heav’n-born Prince of Peace!

Hail the Sun of Righteousness! Light and life to all he brings, Ris’n with healing in his wings.

Mild he lays his glory by, Born that we no more may die, Born to raise us from the earth, Born to give us second birth...”

Maybe verse 3 needs to be as much a part of our repertoire as the other verses.

Perhaps most telling are the words to “What Child Is This.” Music publishers have changed the refrain to be more palatable (I suspect) but the original words of Verse 2 were:

“Why lies He in such mean estate
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear: for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.

Nails, spear shall pierce him through,
The cross be born for me, for you:
Hail, hail, the Word made flesh,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.”

How can we sing these words and not connect the scene in the manger with the reality of the life Christ lived and the reality of the liturgy that we celebrate? We cannot narrow the whole idea of the Incarnation to the simple characters in the nativity scene any more than we can narrow the theme of a liturgy to a symbol or idea and not embrace the totality of the whole Paschal Mystery which we celebrate each time we gather for Eucharist.

So “let it snow, let it snow, let it snow.” We can rejoice that once again the “O Holy Night” will soon be upon us wherein the Paschal Mystery is yet again proclaimed.

Susan Zarembo Malone
Director of Music Ministry
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Endnotes:

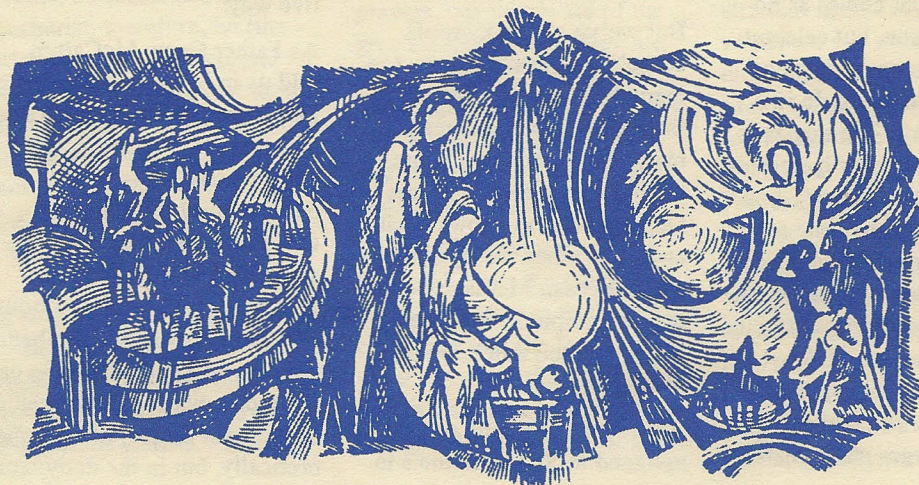
¹ In May 1998 Pope John Paul II issued an Apostolic Letter “to the bishops, clergy and faithful of the Catholic Church on the keeping of the Lord’s day holy.”

² Irwin, Kevin, *Context and Text* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press) 1994. p 46.

³ *Ibid.*, p 47.

⁴ Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: On the Sacred Liturgy (Vatican II, 1963) 102.

⁵ Taft, Robert, “The Liturgical Year: Studies, Prospects, Reflections.” *Between Memory and Hope: Readings on the Liturgical Year*. Ed. Maxwell Johnson. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press) 2000. p 12.



GIRM 2002, A Priest's Guide for Praying the Mass

This article is adapted from a presentation given by the Worship Office of the Archdiocese of Newark in late 2003.

Of all the things we do as priests, there is nothing more important than the celebration of Mass. There is no ministry that we perform for the sake of God's people more important than leading them in the celebration of Mass.

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (16) states, "The celebration of Mass ... is the center of the whole Christian life for the Church both universal and local, as well as for each of the faithful individually. In it is found the high point both of the action by which God sanctifies the world in Christ and of the worship that the human race offers to the Father, adoring him through Christ, the Son of God, in the Holy Spirit. In it, moreover, during the course of the year, the mysteries of redemption are recalled so as in some way to be made present. Furthermore, the other sacred actions and all the activities of the Christian life are bound up with it, flow from it, and are ordered to it."

That statement comes as no great revelation, but celebrating Mass can easily become just another thing to do in a very busy day. The demands of ministry are ever increasing. I know that as a pastor I find the majority of my time and energy is consumed in dealing with parish administration, paperwork, worrying about the financial situation of the parish, school issues, employee situations, responding to phone messages and e-mails,

and handling all those things that eventually end up on the pastor's desk. And the life of a parochial vicar is not much different. I sometimes think that administration is my job, and spirituality is my hobby.

So when confronted by this new edition of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, we can think of it as just another set of directions sent from on high to make our already busy lives more complicated.

WHY TINKER WITH IT?

We judge the liturgy is working fine in the parish. Why tinker with it? And besides, in the long scope of things, what difference will it really make anyway? Whether we stand, or sit or kneel at this time or other in the Mass; or whether extraordinary ministers pick up chalices by themselves or receive them the priest or deacon; or whether we now call the Penitential Rite, the Act of Penitence - those are nice things for people to consider with time on their hands.

But we've got leaky roofs, complaining parishioners, too many bills chasing after too little money, a maintenance man who spends two hours buying a new mop at Home Depot, and God knows what awaits us when we open the Archdiocesan Message Folder on our computer. We have a lot, in fact too much, on our plate.

When I was a young priest assigned to St. Catharine's in

Glen Rock, I remember one cold winter morning walking from the rectory to the church for the 6:45 am Mass. As I was walking, I was thinking about all the things I had on my schedule that day. There were so many, that I was wondering how I could find time for prayer. Suddenly, the thought struck me, what was I going to do in just a few minutes when I got to the church — but pray. I was going to pray the Mass. But for me, it was just another thing to do among many, too many, other things.

OUR PRIMARY PRAYER

The Mass is our primary prayer as priests, granted there is the need for private prayer, but if the Mass we celebrate each day, or more correctly, the Masses we celebrate each day, are not our own prayer, there is something wrong. And, if we as priest celebrants are not deeply engaged in prayer as we celebrate the Mass, then the prayer of assembly is affected in a negative way.

As Father Gerry McCarren told us in his talk, the *General Instruction* does give us some adjustments to make in how we celebrate Mass in the parish. But I think the *General Instruction* does something more important than that. It gives instructions to priests on how we can better pray the Mass, so the Mass can more deeply become the center of our own prayer, not just theoretically, but in the daily real-

ity of our spiritual life.

If we believe, as I am sure we all do, that the Mass is the most important thing we do as priests, then whatever instruction the Church offers us in praying the Mass should be of primary concern to us.

Before we consider what the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* says about individual parts of the Mass and how what is said can help us to pray those parts more deeply, let's first consider some general points that apply to the entire celebration.

The Second Chapter of the Instruction dealing with the structure of the Mass says that at Mass, "the People of God is called together, with a priest presiding and acting in the person of Christ, to celebrate the memorial of the Lord, the Eucharistic Sacrifice... Christ is really present in the very liturgical assembly gathered in his name, in the person of the minister, in his word, and indeed substantially and continuously under the Eucharistic species. (27) Those words powerfully remind us that at the liturgy we are to be Christ for those who have assembled.

CONVEY THE LIVING PRESENCE OF CHRIST

This same point is stated later in the document in a way I find even more challenging, "When he celebrates the Eucharist, therefore, he (the priest) must serve God and the people with dignity and humility, and by his bearing and by the way he says the divine words he must convey to the faithful the living presence of Christ." (93)

In celebrating the Mass we act in the person of Christ, and we must do so in a way that conveys to the people the living presence of Christ. An awe-

some responsibility, which if kept in mind, will keep us attentive to each moment in the liturgy.

At the same time, the *General Instruction* reminds us that we priests also meet Christ in the liturgy. We meet him in word, sacrament, and in the assembly. Remembering that Christ is coming to us will further increase our attention to prayer. At Mass, we bring Christ to people, and Christ comes to us through those very same people, as well as in word and sacrament.

ATTENTION TO WORDS

The *General Instruction* also tells us that in praying the Mass we must be conscious that the prayers we offer, such as the collect, the Prayer over the Offerings, the Prayer after Communion, and above all the Eucharistic Prayer, are not our private words to God. They are prayers addressed to God in the name of the entire holy people and all present. These "presidential prayers" must, as the Instruction says, "be spoken in a loud and clear voice" so that all may listen with attention.

Consider the care each of us would give if we were asked to give a talk to several hundred people. We would carefully speak each sentence so that our ideas would be understood and appreciated. In praying the presidential prayers, our words are of the greatest importance, they are being addressed to God and being addressed in such a way that they can be appreciated and embraced by our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Our words must not only be loud and clear; the *General Instruction* directs us to be conscious that the tone of our voice must suit the genre of the text, the size of the assembly, and the solemnity of the

celebration. Mass on Monday morning with 20 people should not sound like Mass on Sunday morning with 500 people. The Gospel reading should not sound like the Eucharistic Prayer.

How we speak the prayers of Mass should fit the awesome thing we are doing and should be related to the text and to the assembly before us. To put it another way, we cannot just go on automatic pilot when we celebrate Mass. Yet that can happen so easily. We've said the words many thousands of times that our mouths can speak them while our attention can be focused somewhere else. The *General Instruction* calls us to be attentive to the words we are saying.

PREPARATION

This attention to the words we pray at Mass can be increased if we take time to prepare the words we are going to say at Mass. A few moments ago I said that if we were going to speak to hundreds of people, we would be careful of the delivery of our words. In addition, we would prepare whatever we were going to say. The *General Instruction* encourages us to prepare the words that we going to pray at Mass. Such preparation involves choosing among the options given us in the *Sacramentary*.

We can easily fall into a pattern that makes attention to the words we say at Mass even more difficult for us. For example, our pattern can be to say Eucharistic Prayer II on weekdays, and Eucharistic Prayer III on Sundays, and to use the Orations from the previous Sunday on weekdays without an obligatory memorial or feast. Yet the *General Instruction* encourages us to prepare Mass. "The pastoral effectiveness of a celebration will be greatly increased if the

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texts of the readings, the prayers, and the liturgical songs correspond as closely as possible to the needs, spiritual preparation, and culture of those taking part. This is achieved by appropriate use of the wide options" (given in the *Roman Missal*). Harmonious planning and carrying out of the rites will be of great assistance in disposing the faithful to participate in the Eucharist." (352) And I would add, it will also be of great assistance to us as priests.

Ideally, after considering the readings of the day and the liturgical calendar, we should choose an Act of Penitence, orations, a Eucharistic Prayer, appropriate introductions, and so on, that correspond to the readings, the liturgical season, and to the needs of the people who will gather before us. Such consideration goes far beyond choosing Eucharistic Prayer I for the first week of the month, and Eucharistic Prayer II for the second week of the month, and so on.

Section 364 of the *General Instruction* reminds us that in the Roman Rite the Eucharistic Prayer is enriched by its many prefaces. If we consider all those available, we have well over 130 prefaces available for our use. We also have 10 Eucharistic Prayers, excluding those for Masses with Children. We have the four we are most familiar with, two for Masses of Reconciliation, and four versions that come from the Eucharistic Prayer for Masses for Various Needs and Occasions. By choosing a preface and Eucharistic Prayer related to the readings and the calendar we can increase our own attention at Mass, enrich our own prayer and better serve the assembly.

GESTURES & POSTURES

The *General Instruction* also

reminds us that as priests we communicate not only with our words, but also with our bodies. "The gestures and posture of the priest ...ought to contribute to making the entire celebration resplendent with beauty and noble simplicity, so that the true and full meaning of the different parts of the celebration is evident and that the participation of all is fostered." (42)

Being aware of our gestures and postures can also help us as priest celebrants to better pray and to be more attentive to the moment. Simply asking myself "Why is my body in a particular posture at a certain time of the Mass?" can help me to stay focused and prayerful.

For example, at Mass we lift up our hands in the *orans* position during the Our Father, a traditional posture of prayer that we use throughout the Mass as we pray the presidential prayers. A few years ago I read a meditation on that classical posture of prayer which has helped me to pray the Our Father with even greater attention and meaning. The meditation stated that during the Our Father, the lifting up our hands can be reminiscent of a little child reaching up its arms to its father or mother and saying, "Pick me up. Give me a hug." As our lips say "Our Father who art in heaven," our bodies reinforce that message as arms lifted in prayer proclaim, "Father pick up your people. Lift us to your kingdom. Deliver us from evil." The *General Instruction* calls us to be aware of our gestures and the postures of our body. Doing so can help us to pray.

I would now like to consider certain parts of the Mass in order to show that what the *General Instruction* says about those particular parts can help us to better pray them during

Mass.

SINGING IS PRAYER

The opening song, referred to as the Entrance chant, opens the celebration of the Mass. This is its first purpose. It also fosters the unity of those who have been gathered, introduces their thoughts to the mystery of the liturgical season or feast, and accompanies the procession of the priest and ministers. (47) The Entrance chant is designed to do those things for the people and for the priest. So obviously, the priest needs to sing.

Singing is prayer. This is highlighted in this particular edition of the *General Instruction* by the fact that each time a song or chant is mentioned, the *Instruction* gives guidance as to what songs may be sung and what texts are acceptable. Just as the Church guides our spoken prayer as Mass, so it guides our sung prayer at Mass. Not just any song will do for the Entrance chant, anymore than just any words will do for an oration.

As we sing the words of the entrance song, you and I should do so with attention to the thoughts being expressed. We should be present to the meaning of the sung prayer, which often is based on God's inspired word in Scripture, and make it our prayer.

In the Greeting, following the Sign of the Cross, we signify the presence of the Lord to the community gathered before us. By their response, "And also with you," the people challenge us to remember the Lord is with us. The people call upon us to be conscious that we are to be for them the living presence of Christ, in whose name we give praise to our Father in heaven.

SACRED SILENCE

The first moment of silence in the liturgy follows in the Act of Penitence. Here we need to give ourselves, and the people who we lead in prayer, sufficient time to recollect themselves. We need, as the *General Instruction* states, to observe that sacred silence which is part of the celebration.

This sacred silence has to be given sufficient time. The best way for us to judge the length of this time, or any time of silence at Mass, is for us as priest celebrants to simply do what we have asked the people to do. At the Act of Penitence we should recall our own sinfulness and the wonder of God's mercy. Following the "Let us pray" before the collect, we should take the time as the *General Instruction* says to be conscious we are in God's presence and to mentally formulate our own petitions. (34) We need to silently express our stake in this Mass that we are celebrating. I would suggest that in either the sacred silence of the Act of Penitence or before the collect we recall the admonition that traditionally was found in many sacristies, "Priest of God, celebrate this Mass as if it were your first Mass, your last Mass, your only Mass."

The *General Instruction* also says that following the Greeting and leading to the Act of Penitence, the priest "may briefly introduce the faithful to the Mass of the day." (50) Such an introduction, which needs to be well prepared, can motivate us to greater preparation for Mass. It can also lead us to ask ourselves what is the Church celebrating this day, and what does this particular celebration mean to the people and to me. Such an introduction can be another help to keep us from

falling into habit and routine as we stand at the altar.

GOD SPEAKS

During the Liturgy of the Word, the *General Instruction* says that "God speaks to his people, opening up to them the mystery of redemption and salvation, and offering them spiritual nourishment." (55) For us as priests, those scriptures can easily become "so many words that we have listened to before." Just consider how often you and I have heard the Gospel of the Beatitudes. It takes real effort to hear it anew, to hear it as God's message for me, today.

After the readings, when the acclamation "The word of the Lord" or "The Gospel of the Lord" is proclaimed, we might ask ourselves, "What exactly was God's message for me as a priest?" Obviously careful preparation of the homily will have put us in contact with those scriptures, but if we truly listen as the readers proclaim them in the assembly, we may hear something new and fresh. At Mass the table of God's word and the riches of the Bible are not only opened for the congregation, but for us as priests. (57) We are to listen, rather than simply wait to fulfill our role.

Here again, sacred silence is called for during the liturgy. Such silence may occur before and after the first reading, after the second reading and following the homily. This sacred silence allows us as priests, as well as the people, to grasp the word of God with our heart. (56).

I should note that the *General Instruction* makes a point of saying that "The Liturgy of the Word is to be observed in such a way as to promote meditation, and so any sort of haste that hinders recollection must clearly be avoided." (56)

The *General Instruction* points out that "The Gospel reading is the highpoint of the Liturgy of the Word." This is symbolically made clear by the use of the *Book of the Gospels* and the Gospel procession. As we carry the *Book of the Gospels* from the altar to the ambo, "the assembly of the faithful welcomes and greets the Lord who is about to speak to it in the Gospel." We as priests make present the living Christ who now proclaims his Gospel message to his gathered people.

The homily, which is basically recommended whenever we celebrate Mass with a congregation, then follows. The *General Instruction* makes it clear that "the homily is part of the Liturgy and is strongly recommended for it is necessary for nurturing the Christian life." (65) We might consider



that we who are honored by the title of "Father" are to spiritually nurture the people entrusted to our care. One way we do such nurturing, such "fathering" is through the words of our homily. Preparing a homily for each Mass we celebrate also does something else. **It makes us prepare for each Mass we celebrate.**

When the Liturgy of the Word concludes with the Profession of Faith and the Prayer of the Faithful, we then come to the Preparation of the Gifts. As the bread and wine, which will become the Body and Blood of Christ, are being presented, we should consider our own particular gift to the Lord at this Mass. What act of ministry, what moment of service and self-sacrifice, what act of charity, is represented by the bread and wine being brought forward to the altar? Since my last celebration of Mass, what of my life, my ministry, is symbolized by those simple gifts being brought to the altar?

THE CENTER AND SUMMIT

After the Preparation of the Gifts, the *General Instruction* tells us that "the center and summit of the entire celebration begins: namely, the Eucharistic Prayer, that is, the prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification. The priest invites the people to lift up their hearts to the Lord in prayer and thanksgiving; he unites the congregation with himself in the prayer that he addresses in the name of the entire community to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the meaning of the prayer is that the entire congregation of the faithful should join itself with Christ in confessing the great deeds of God and in the offering of Sacrifice." (78)

Center and summit — that's how the *General Instruction* describes the Eucharistic Prayer. Yet, if someone with no knowledge of the Catholic faith were to observe the celebration of the Mass, that person would probably not use that particular description for the Eucharistic Prayer. Often the congregation does not appear that it knows this to be the center and summit of the

Mass. And if we are honest, sometimes we, as priests, do not convey the impression that we know are now at the center and summit of the entire celebration. The Eucharistic Prayer is a challenge, and the *General Instruction* gives us guidance on how we can help ourselves and our people to meet that challenge and so be more actively engaged in the center and summit of our prayer.

WORDS OF INTRODUCTION

In section 31 the *General Instruction* says the priest may give an introduction before the Eucharistic Prayer begins, that is before the Preface dialogue. Such an introduction can help us, as well as the people, better understand and prepare for what we are about to do on a particular Sunday. I started incorporating such an introduction some three years ago, and have found it extremely helpful in my own celebration of Mass, and from my observation, so have the people.

For example, on the Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica, before beginning the Eucharistic Prayer, I said,

"The God of all space and time, the God whom all the universe cannot contain, has chosen to dwell among us in this church.

Before we thank God for dwelling with us in this sacred place, and for blessing us with his presence, let us pause in silence to consider the many generations of people who have come before us, people of faith who once stood in the very places we now stand.

For united by faith with them, and with all the saints and angels of heaven, we will offer our praise and thanks to God in the Eucharistic Prayer."

On the Sunday on which the Gospel related how Jesus cured the deaf and mute man, I

used these words to introduce the Eucharistic Prayer. *"They were exceedingly astonished. In today's Gospel, that was the reaction of the crowds to the action of Jesus. If we were truly conscious of the action of God in our life, and in our world, we too would be 'exceedingly astonished' and moved to give praise and thanks to God.*

Before we begin the Eucharistic Prayer, our Church's prayer of praise and thanks to God, let us pause in silence to recall the wonderful, the exceedingly astonishing things, that God has done, and continues to do, for us."

Such introductions help us to focus our attention on what we are about to do. They also connect the word we have heard to the Eucharist. For moved by the word, we now give praise and thanks to God.

ELEMENTS OF THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

Being conscious of the various elements contained within the Eucharistic Prayer can also make us more attentive and prayerful celebrants. The *General Instruction* tells us that each Eucharistic Prayer contains the following elements: thanksgiving, invocations of the Holy Spirit upon the gifts and upon the people who will receive them, the institution narrative and consecration, anamnesis or memorial of Christ's saving actions, offering, intercession and the final doxology. Keeping these elements in mind can help this prayer from becoming a long procession of words that lead to, and then away from, the consecration.

I have found it interesting that at different times in my spiritual life, different parts of the Eucharistic Prayer have touched my spirit. At this time, the offertory aspect of

the Eucharistic Prayer is most challenging.

In offering the spotless Victim to the Father, the *General Instruction* says "The Church's intention, however, is that the faithful not only offer this spotless Victim but also learn to offer themselves, and so day by day to be consummated, through Christ the Mediator, into unity with God and with each other, so that at last God may be all in all." At each Mass we are to learn how to more fully offer ourselves like Jesus Christ, so that like Christ, we may be filled with new life by the Father.

I would also like to bring your attention to the last word of the Eucharistic Prayer, namely the "Amen" proclaimed by the people. By that "Amen," the *General Instruction* says, the people confirm and conclude the glorification expressed to God by the priest.

We might say that we as priest celebrants propose the prayer, which the people ratify and make their own by their "Amen." I remember once reading a meditation that said that God hears and answers the Eucharistic Prayer only when the people have approved and ratified the words of the priest by their "Amen." The people in a sense, vote it through. While that meditation may not

be theologically exact, it does encourage us as priests to pray the Eucharistic Prayer with such faith and attention as to solicit a "Great Amen" from the assembly before us.

HOLY COMMUNION

The Our Father and the Sign of Peace then lead into the Communion Rite of Mass. Here the *General Instruction* forcefully reminds us, as we have heard from Father Gerry McCarren and Monsignor Charles Gusmer, that "it is most desirable that the faithful, just as the priest himself is bound to do, receive the Lord's Body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass and that, in the instances when it is permitted, they partake of the chalice, so that even by means of the signs Communion will stand out more clearly as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated." (85)

The requirement that the priest must receive what has been consecrated at the same Mass is further reinforced in #157 which says that "the priest genuflects, takes the host consecrated in the same Mass, and, holding it slightly raised above the paten or above the chalice..." says "This is the Lamb of God..."

The *General Instruction* does

not mention distributing hosts taken from the tabernacle since priests and people should receive the fruit of their prayer. They should receive back from the Lord the gifts they have given, now transformed and made holy. If we as priests are bound to receive bread and wine consecrated at the Mass we have celebrated, should not the people of God whom we have lead in prayer have that same privilege and right?

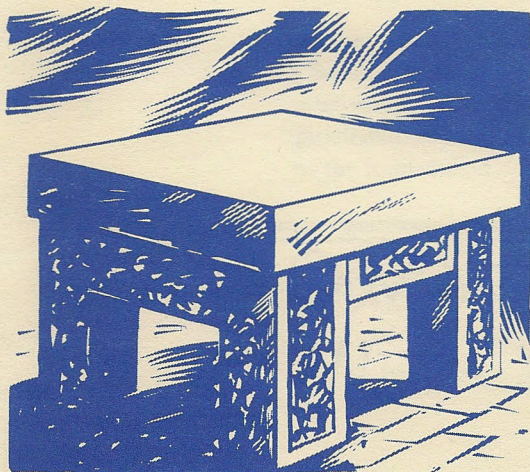
Following the distribution of Holy Communion, the purification of the vessels is better left until after the conclusion of the liturgy. The *General Instruction* says "a sacred silence may now be observed for a period of time." (164) While a psalm, canticle of praise, or hymn may be sung, it is probably more effective for silence to be observed for a period of time. As priests we should gage this silence not by use of our watch, but by our own private prayer. We need time to become recollected and conscious of our own holy communion with the Lord and with our brothers and sisters. And so do the people.

Following the Prayer after Communion, the liturgy quickly comes to an end with the Concluding Rites. We send out the people, as Christ sent out his apostles, to carry his presence and his Gospel to the world.

At that same time, we as priests depart from the altar to continue to be the living presence of Christ. But now we must convey that living presence of Christ without the aid of vestments, without a place of honor in the sanctuary, without the support of choir and ministers. We must convey that living presence of Christ by our words and actions, by who we are and by

how we are. And we will be able to do that; we will be able to convey the living presence of Christ if we have truly prayed the Mass. Of all the things we do as priests, nothing is more important for ourselves, and for the People of God, than our celebration of Mass.

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