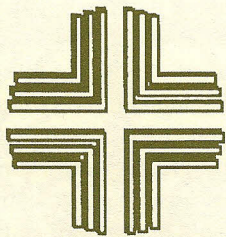


Word on Worship

Newsletter of the Office of Divine Worship, Archdiocese of Newark, Volume 25, No. 3, 2008

EUCCHARIST: CHANGING ME TO CHANGE THE WORLD

Rev. Michael A. Saporito
Pastor
St. Joseph
Maplewood



This issue of Word on Worship contains the text of two talks. The first, "Eucharist: Changing Me to Change the World," was given by a priest of the Archdiocese of Newark, Rev. Michael Saporito, at the Festival of Faith in Newark on September 29, 2007. The second, "Liturgy Forty Years After the Council," was given by Cardinal Godfried Danneels on April 17, 2007, at Boston College.

How many times have we all walked down the aisles of our Churches waiting in line to receive Communion, taken Christ in the Eucharist and walked back to our place as a matter of routine? We may say a quick prayer, if we even do that; and then rush to let ourselves get back to the real business of life, if we even stay in the pew. How many times have priests celebrated Masses, hurriedly unprepared or in a habit of rote recitation? I want to light the fire within us again to realize that receiving Communion is not just about taking the sacred species or receiving it because that's what "Catholics do." Hardly! Christ lives and this gift of Eucharist holds so much potential for us and for the world in which we live. Eucharist is an amazing gift!

This story which was adapted from an article in *Connections* reflects on the power of the Eucharist:

"Every week she would bring Communion to Frank, a member of the parish. Frank had been critically ill with leukemia. The prognosis for Frank was not good. Over the course of the next few months, he courageously tackled both his disease and chemotherapy. Frank was a person of much prayer and faith, but sometimes it all became too much for him. "God, why me?" had become the core of much of his prayer. Sometimes Frank's discourse would overwhelm him.

Another parishioner was added to her Communion list at some point after bringing Communion to Frank. Ben was also diagnosed with leukemia. On her next visit, she told Frank about Ben's leukemia – the same type as Frank's. Each week during their Communion service, they would offer prayers for Ben and Ben's family. Praying for Ben had quite an effect on Frank. It gave him new perspective and a renewed outlook. When she arrived with Communion, Frank would immediately ask how Ben was doing. Frank began finding appreciation for all the good things God had given him in his long life. His prayer began to focus on Ben's recovery, even before his own.

And each week, during her visit with Ben, they would always offer a prayer for Frank and his family.

After several months of prayers for each other, Frank and Ben finally had the opportunity to meet. Ben ran to meet Frank when he came to the door. The two hugged like old friends. Then Ben took Frank by the hand to show him his room, replete with Tonka trucks, toy model cars and other prized possessions. Seven-year-old Ben had much to share with 75 year-old Frank, as Frank had shared so much with his little brother in Christ!"¹

In this issue:

- Eucharist: Changing Me to Change the World
- Liturgy Forty Years After the Council

Have you ever stopped in the middle of doing something to ask, "What am I doing?" As we celebrate our Catholic identity, what really identifies us most strongly as Catholic Christians? It is our belief that the Lord Jesus lives with us in the Eucharist!

How many times have we heard in the course of talks about the Eucharist the following line quoted from the Vatican II document, *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* Paragraph 10 begins, "The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the source from which all its power flows."²² This is an incredible statement! If this is true, why do so many people stay away? The answer to that question is not simple, but I would like to suggest one. The connection between *what we say we believe* and *what goes on in our lives* is far too tenuous. Liturgy and life need to be clearly linked together. The more they are correlated, the more true to the Council's statement the liturgy will become.

Fr. Bill Bausch, preaching on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, declared, "The real presence in the Eucharist exists only to make the real presence in the world. If you break that connection, you wind up with empty, in-house piety and the absence of Jesus' mission in the world." This feast, he says, "is less about what the Eucharist is than what we who celebrate it and share in it – do with it!"²³

Good liturgy not only respects the proper following of rubrics, it ignites us to respond with lives poured out for Christ and for others. Is this what goes on in your parish? Is this what goes on within all of us as we attend Mass? When was the last time - priest or assembly - that through our participation in the Eucharist we were inspired to really do something; that we could not wait to make that a reality in our lives? Consider the opening story about "Communion." Eucharist and faith opened up Frank to look past his own concerns to those of Ben, and offered him a new perspective and outlook. Meeting and talking together, actually expressing the mutual support then became necessary. Regardless of age difference, there is unity. There is friendship where it did not exist before and, right

there in the middle of it all, is the living presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. It was not just belief in principles that brought these two together. It was action - the action of faith!

And so, let us all contemplate changing – first ourselves – and then making those real life connections that can bring change to the world.

FIVE CONSIDERATIONS TO LINK LITURGY AND LIFE

FIRST – BRING AN ATTITUDE OF FAITH:

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy states, "Before people can come to the liturgy, they must be called to faith and conversion."²⁴ This is why local parishes often try to encourage people to cultivate a spiritual life in addition to attending Mass. Bible study groups, prayer and faith experiences, and participation in small faith sharing groups are promoted in order to build a living faith. We are called to worship a God whom we know on some level. Last Lent, our parish held a mission and the most memorable parts of that mission were not the talks or the words that were preached. Rather, the most unforgettable moments were the ritual actions that gave expression to the faith. They involved the people by making them put their whole self, their bodies, minds and hearts to work. The rituals engaged them and the participants remembered the actions with great clarity.

"Who do you say that I am?" Christ asks. We must personally answer that question. Often Catholics are scared or offended by other Christians who want to know "Are you saved?" or "Is Jesus your personal Lord and Savior?" While Catholics may use different terminology, the question is very important for each of us to answer. *What part is Christ going to take in my life?* One needs to desire communion with the Lord. We have to be ready, searching for it, being excited by it, and seeking the inspiration we need. We show up at sporting events early, wearing our team colors, and filled with anticipation. We long to see a play we have heard about or go to a movie shaped by a favorite book that we have read. In other words, we bring something to the encounter. We invest ourselves and our senses in what is going to take place. We

show it in different ways. Where is our eagerness at Mass? Are we ready to come and gather at Eucharist because we long to encounter the power and inspiration of Christ? An *attitude* of faith is essential.

SECOND – RECLAIM THE IMPORTANCE OF SUNDAY

Pope Benedict XVI in *Sacramentum Caritatis* asserts, "On the Lord's Day, each Christian rediscovers the communal dimension of his life as one who has been redeemed. Taking part in the Liturgy and receiving the Body and Blood of Christ intensifies and deepens our belonging to the one who died for us... Communion always and inseparably has both a vertical and horizontal sense. It is communion with God and communion with our brothers and sisters."²⁵

It's important that we are present to honor the Lord on Sunday but active, conscious participation involves more. It involves us deepening our bonds as his chosen people. We gather as a people redeemed. Therefore, the lives of the people that form our parish communities take on added significance. They are not just bodies that fill seats but relatives in faith. This bond brings with it the responsibility of genuine caring and concern. We can walk in and out of Mass as a matter of duty but are we aware of the others in our community? Do we welcome the stranger? Do we miss the ones we have not seen in a while? Are we concerned about the mission of the community? In what ways are we actively supporting that mission with the gift of our selves? Someone recently reminded me that their prayer list contained the names of many people, most of whom were obtained because they had come together at the table of the Lord and shared their story or asked for prayer. Let us not forget the origins of the gathering together, to tell the stories of faith and to support each other in living the faith.

We cannot make our faith relevant to our lives if we have chosen to relegate it to the margins of our existence. The culture of Sunday needs to be chosen and cherished. Today, youth sports, which almost never took place on Sunday morning, now do. Our personal errands and shopping are done on weekends. Commitment to a job requires some people to work even on

weekends. Attending Mass can seem like an extra something done only if there is time, only if there is nothing more important to be accomplished. I have often found that as busy as we all are, we will always find time for those things we think are important. We need to reclaim the importance of Sunday worship, not as an extra, but as an *essential* element of linking liturgy and life. Sports, daily duties, work schedules – choose to reclaim Sunday!

THIRD – DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME

More than the simple recollection of past events, this invitation from the Lord calls for a response. Christ offers himself to us anew in every Eucharist. Do *what* in remembrance? Observe religious ritual? No! We are invited to *offer ourselves to God through Christ!* Why should we offer ourselves? We must communicate gratitude as an outward expression of our acceptance of the Lord's invitation. How should we offer ourselves? We should be filled with exuberance and joyful acceptance and awe at what Christ's gift means to us. This concept changes the reason

why we welcome each other at Mass, why we create an atmosphere of hospitality and why we try to create an environment where the Word of the Lord is proclaimed and heard. In addition, it clarifies why we should be working hard to preach inspirational messages and engage one another in meaningful reflection, and why care and reverence are important, as we share at the eucharistic table. Also, it defines why music that is well chosen and easily sung, as well as an environment creatively and tastefully decorated, mean so much. All of these considerations collectively connect us to Christ in very tangible ways.

We validate this insight from the Gospel of John where the focus of the Last Supper is not on the institution narrative, but on service. It is here that we see Jesus wash the feet of his disciples. Every Holy Thursday, we renew that intimate connection that Christ made with his apostles. Chapter 13 begins, "Now before the festival of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end."⁵ Make no mistake about it.

This encounter with Christ was deeply imprinted on the hearts of those who were present, and as a result, their hearts stirred to go out and do as he had done! Jesus could not have been more clear when he said, "You call me teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example that you also should do as I have done to you!"⁷

No one who encounters Christ remains passive. When the Lord touches our life, our response is freely and energetically chosen. Becoming active

requires little coercion. Effective eucharistic celebrations thrust us into acting and into responding to what we have received. We cannot limit ourselves to just *celebrating* Eucharist. We must *become Eucharist for others!*

FOURTH – EMBRACE THE AUTHENTIC EUCHARISTIC MISSION

Times of change, uncertainty and crisis force us to consider what we are really all about. To come together about where we are and what we really believe is important! Sometimes, that means being radical! Did you ever consider how those first Christians succeeded? They were outnumbered, lacked any real power, and were mocked by those who thought, at best, that they had come up with a great story about resurrection from the dead. How did they convince people to leave paganism behind and to follow Christ? Their beliefs were very obvious by what they were doing with their lives.

In recent years, the Church as an institution has suffered damage and lost some of its credibility. Our young people and young adults are a major concern because they see the Church as irrelevant and remain indifferent or apathetic about our faith. We are struggling with outdated models of religious education; we are grappling with those for whom faith is important, but feel that the Church is unnecessary. What will restore confidence among the people? Faithfulness to the mission will.

Benedict XVI in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Paragraph 89 affirms, "The union of Christ brought about by the Eucharist also brings newness to our social relations... I cannot possess Christ for myself, I can only belong to him in union with all those who have become, or who will become, his own. The relationship between the Eucharistic Mystery and social commitment must be made explicit."⁸

This past summer at my parish, a visiting priest spoke, requesting funds for the missions. He gave an outstanding talk and, as a result, a youth mission trip was launched. God touched people's hearts and activity flowed from that stroke. The faithful came hungry and left satisfied and ready to do for others. We need to tell



these stories. We need to make the presence of Christ unequivocal. People will value their eucharistic experience with much more fervor than just, "I'm going to Mass," when the experience is committed to tangible results.

The Gospel of Luke, 19, tells the amazing story of Jesus and Zaccheus. After having received the unmerited presence of the Lord when Jesus exclaimed, "I want to dine with you, Zaccheus," his life completely changes. His encounter with Christ leads him to give half his possessions to the poor. Further, Luke's Emmaus story describes *hearts burning* when there was a realization of who was speaking, and a drive to tell others. There are so many narratives that fill the pages of Scripture with this simple formula: *an encounter with Christ leads to action*. The link is evident. Therefore, the eucharistic meal takes on greater meaning and significance.

FIFTH – SHARE OUR EUCHARISTIC LIFE

Evangelization is a way of life now. It is our responsibility. What we receive in the Eucharist is the living God, not just a blessed and holy object. In John's eucharistic discourse in Chapter 6 of his Gospel, he reveals, "Jesus said to them, Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have *life* within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me."¹⁰

Vatican II illuminated the role of the Church in its *Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People*, stating that "The Church was founded so that by spreading Christ's kingdom throughout the world to the glory of God the Father, every man and woman may share in the saving work of redemption so that through them the entire world may truly be directed towards Christ."¹¹

Therefore, we not only receive something simply to take it, but we are also given real life now and for all eternity. That life calls us to active involvement. No flourishing relationship can be satisfied by one-sided taking. There is always a give

and take, a sharing that defines a solid bond. In the Eucharist, we are fed with real life *at the altar* so that we can *take it from the table*. That is why we process toward the altar during Communion in the act of receiving, and proceed from the table back to the assembly to take that life to the world in which we live. We can carry it into our homes, which need to become faith centered again; to our jobs; to our communities. What are the issues that plague our communities? Violence, gangs, drugs, hatred, a lack of safe places for children to play – you can identify them. How can people filled with the life of Christ creatively assist and help the betterment of others?

The document continues, "In the Church there is diversity of ministry, but unity of mission. To the apostles and their successors, Christ has entrusted the office of teaching, sanctifying and governing in his name and by his power. Lay people, too... play their part in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world. In the concrete, their apostolate is exercised when they work, to evangelize others and make them holy; it is exercised too when they endeavor to have the Gospel spirit permeate and improve the temporal order... Charity, which is the soul of the apostolate, is given to them and nourished in them by the sacraments and especially the Eucharist!"¹²

How often have you heard the mantra, *Time, Talent, Treasure?* Stewardship efforts in our parishes over the years get us all to look at our lives through the lens of faith. We have been given much for which to be thankful. This ongoing effort is not just about more volunteers for our Church programs or more money to pay our bills, but it is about our responsibility to use what the Lord has given us. How many of us sit back and criticize famous people or wealthy sports figures, demanding that they offer some of their big money to others? In fact, some do and that gesture garners a lot of publicity. Some corporations involve their employees; some even require their employees to be engaged in community service. At times, publicity on television and on the internet lures people to give and get involved.

Going to Church often leads to a different experience. *Why go to Church?* When

we are there, we can seem listless, distracted, and overly concerned about ourselves and our plight. But something more is waiting for us. Faithful to our baptismal call, we can use the gift of life that Christ gives in the Eucharist to commit ourselves to others, changing their lives. People can be of assistance to the bereaved, the divorced, caretakers, those who deal with disabilities, those who lack hope, the fearful, those who need love, and those who are truly poor. People are living longer and support for our elderly and their families can be such a blessing. These are real life gifts to others that flow from our connection to the living presence of Christ!

Eucharist is not simply an event we attend to watch, to seek entertainment, to discern a commentary on life. We must go to receive and to have our time with the Lord so that we can answer the challenge with enthusiasm. Eucharist is a call to action! We are transformed to be more and more like Christ...*to change ourselves to change the world*.

Let us all bring our fervor, our hope, our failings, our suffering, and our lives to offer to the one who can make impossible things happen. Christ lives *in* the Eucharist. Christ lives *through* the Eucharist. *And he is alive through all who will go out into the deep and follow every day!*

¹ Adapted from *Connections*, ed by Media Works, Londonderry, New Hampshire; (personal copy)

² "Sacrosanctum Concilium" in *The Basic Sixteen Documents Vatican II*, ed Austin Flannery, O.P. (New York; Costello Publishing, 1996); pg. 122: 10

³ William J. Bausch, *Brave New Church Connecticut* : Twenty- Third Publications 2001;pg. 231

⁴ Flannery, pg. 122 : 9

⁵ Benedict XVI, Post- Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (22 February 2007); 76

⁶ John 13:1 (New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition)

⁷ John 13: 13-15 (NRSV)

⁸ Benedict XVI ; 89

⁹ Luke 19: 5

¹⁰ John 6: 53-57

¹¹ "Apostolicam Actuositatem" in *The Basic Sixteen Documents Vatican II*, ed Austin Flannery, O.P. (New York; Costello Publishing, 1996); pg. 405: 2

¹² *Ibid* pg. 405-406: 2-3

LITURGY FORTY YEARS AFTER THE COUNCIL

Godfried Danneels
Cardinal Archbishop of
Mechelen-Brussels, Belgium

Boston College Canisius Lecture:
April 27, 2007 by Godfried Danneels
August 27, 2007.

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tion information, call 1-800-627-9533 or
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It must be difficult to imagine, for those who have not experienced it for themselves, just how much liturgical praxis has changed in less than half a century. The evolution which has taken place in the last thirty years is barely perceptible nowadays since the new liturgical model is considered evident practically everywhere. Such a situation is certainly gratifying but does it mean that the profound intentions of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* have thereby been realized? Perhaps now is the appropriate moment for an evaluation.

It is evident that the last half century has brought about a major change in the relationship between the minister and the people in the liturgy. The situation might be roughly stated as follows: prior to the liturgical reforms the distance between the minister and the people was clearly designated. This was even given material expression in the ordering of church buildings: the distinct choir area reserved to the priest, the altar oriented to the East, priest and people separated by a communion rail. Even more questionable than the features of church architecture was the parallel configuration of the celebration: it being frequently the case that the priest celebrated the official liturgy while at one and the same time the people set about their personal devotions. The use of Latin, of course, had a significant role to play in this parallel configuration.

The consequence of all this was the fact that the liturgy came to be considered untouchable, an entity regulated by rubrics to be performed with great obedience and respect. Liturgy was simply a given, and a good liturgist was seen for the most part as an observant performer. The people assisted, of course, but took little or no part in the liturgy itself.

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

From its very beginnings, the aim of the liturgical movement, which originated in Belgium in 1909, was to close the gap between the official liturgy of the priest and that of the people. The term 'active participation' was born out of this movement and has since become part of our common usage. It became a key term in the liturgical constitution of Vatican II. Active participation was first promoted through the circulation of the people's

missals which contained the Sunday liturgy: the faithful were at least able to follow along. Before long, however, a desire for more than just following in the book emerged: people wanted to participate and join in. Vatican II satisfied this desire by introducing the use of the vernacular, by simplifying liturgical symbolism to make it more transparent, by returning to the praxis of the early church and dropping elements which had later come to overshadow the essentials, and by a correct distribution of roles in the service of the liturgy. The result was a far greater involvement of the people, even to the very heart of the liturgy.

FROM RUBRICISM TO MANIPULATION

The active involvement of the people in the liturgy is, of course, an unparalleled gift from the Council to the People of God. As with every worthy reform, however, there is a shadow side. Active participation in the liturgy, preparing together, concern to get as close as possible to the culture and sensitivity of the faithful can lead imperceptibly to a sort of taking possession of the liturgy. Participation and mutual celebration can lead to a subtle form of manipulation. In such an event the liturgy is not only set free of its untouchable quality—which in itself is not a bad thing—but it becomes in a sense the property of those who celebrate, a terrain given over to their "creativity." Those who serve the liturgy—both priests and laity—become its "owners." In some cases this can even lead to a sort of liturgical "coup" in which the sacred is eliminated, the language trivialized and the cult turned into a social event. In a word, the real subject of the liturgy is no longer the Christ who through the Spirit worships the Father and sanctifies the people in a symbolic act. The real subject is the human person or the celebrating community. The exaggerated emphasis from before the 1950's on discipline, obedience, fidelity to the rubrics, the reception and entering of a pre-existent entity is replaced by self-will and by the elimination of every sense of mystery in the liturgy. In this case the liturgy is no longer "leit-ourgia": the work of the people and for the people with respect to their relationship with God, it becomes a purely human activity.

Fortunately, the trend we have outlined is

not universal. Nevertheless, any attempt to evaluate liturgical praxis in our time would be wrong to ignore it.

THE LITURGY IS BEYOND US

There is a liturgical ground rule which runs as follows: the liturgy is first "God's work on us" before being our work on God. Liturgy is datum or prior given in its very essence: it is beyond us and has already existed for a long time, long before we could participate in it. The acting subject of the liturgy is the risen Christ: He is the first and only High Priest, the only one who is competent to bring worship to God and to sanctify the people. This is not only an abstract theological truth: it must become evident and visible in the liturgy. The core of the liturgy is already given in the Lord's acts of institution. This does not mean that the individual and the celebrating community are neither capable nor permitted to make a creative contribution. The community is creative, but it is not an "instance of creation." Otherwise the liturgy would no longer be the epiphany of the Christian mysteries through the service of the Church, the continuation of his incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection, the "incarnation" of a divine project in history and in the world of human persons via sacred symbols. In such a situation the liturgy would become nothing more than the community celebrating itself.

The liturgy "pre-exists": the celebrating community enters into it as into a pre-established, divine and spiritual architecture. To a certain degree this is also determined by the historical location of Christ and his sacred mysteries. The Eucharist as such is not a "religious meal" but rather the making present of a particular meal: that of Christ with his disciples on the night before he suffered. So, we are not creators, we are servants and guardians of the mysteries. We do not own them nor did we author them.

THE FUNDAMENTAL ATTITUDE OF THE 'HOMO LITURGICUS'

This entails that the fundamental attitude of the "homo liturgicus"—both individually and collectively—is one of receptivity, readiness to listen, self-giving and self-relativizing. It is the attitude of faith and of faithful obedience. It is not because a

particular caricature of this attitude of obedience led at one time to slavish and nonsensical dressage and rubricism, that the sense of "entering in to what transcends us" has to be so diminished.

The "homo liturgicus" does not manipulate, nor is his or her action restricted to self-expression or auto-realization. It is an attitude of orientation towards God, readiness to listen, obedience, grateful reception, wonder, adoration and praise. It is an attitude of listening and seeing, of what Guardini called "contemplating," an attitude so alien to the "homo faber" in many of us. In short, the fundamental attitude of the "homo liturgicus" is none other than an attitude of prayer, of handing ourselves over to God and letting his will be done in us.

It should not surprise us, then, that in a period of history like our own, with its active intervention in everyday reality and its submission of that reality to our scientific thinking and our technological expertise, it will be particularly difficult to be genuinely liturgically-minded. The "contemplative" dimension of the human person is no longer evident these days. This being the case, the core of the liturgy is even less evident. Active participation, therefore, has to be situated within this "contemplative" attitude, in which case it must also bear the particular characteristics of such an attitude.

THE INCOMPREHENSIBILITY OF THE LITURGY

One of the primary concerns of Vatican II and of the Church is and remains that the liturgy be understood by the celebrating community. Every reform proposed by the Constitution is rooted in that concern. "Understand what you do" is a basic demand of everything we do, including what we do in the liturgy.

The incomprehensibility of the liturgy was blamed, in the first place, on language. Immediately after the introduction of the vernacular, however, it became apparent that it had to do with more than just language usage: the content of the liturgy itself was equally unfamiliar.

The liturgy, of course, is almost entirely structured on the bible. It is said that the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament is particularly unfamiliar to us. Everything takes place in an agrarian context which barely

applies nowadays in many parts of the world. At the same time, the biblical texts are rooted in a rural culture, and a peculiarly Mediterranean one at that. Many images, such as shepherds, flocks or water wells are no longer part of the day to day vista of the modern city dweller. In other words, the bible uses a language from a bygone era.

The non-biblical texts in the liturgy are also strange, however. The Latin collects with their succinct and metrical structure are simply un-translatable, not so much because the words cannot be transposed into a modern language but because the mentality and culture from which they stem has disappeared. A great many texts, when detached from their musical setting, end up seeming extremely archaic; think, for example, of the *Salve Regina* and the *Dies Irae* or even the ordinary sung Gregorian Introids and Communion Antiphons leaving aside the archaic image of God which such texts maintain (the God who sleeps, the God of wrath etc.)

Certain symbols—although secondary—no longer seem to function: the drop of water in the chalice, mixing a particle of the host with the wine, the lavabo, the washing of the feet. One frequently hears reproaches such as "old fashioned," "passé," "medieval" and "monastic."

ABBREVIATE OR ELIMINATE?

People often opt for a short term solution, which barely touches on the real problem. In the case of the liturgy certain terms were replaced with other more understandable terms. There are biblical terms, however, which cannot be replaced. What do we do, for example, with words like "resurrection," "Easter," "Eucharist," "metanoia," "sin"? They are part of a sort of biblical and liturgical "mother tongue" which simply cannot be replaced. They have to be learned. It is hard to imagine an orthodox Jew using nowadays a different term for "shabbat" or "pesach."

Certain biblical images are, indeed, barely perceptible in our modern urban culture. The sight of shepherds and flocks is no longer an every day occurrence. Does this mean, however, that such images are no longer comprehensible in themselves? Is it because no one has ever met a seraph that the metaphorical power of this angelic messenger no longer speaks to us? Half

of the poetry ever written makes use of images and terms which are not part of the daily life and environment of the reader. A great many symbols from medieval German culture were taken up in the Roman Pontifical.

People sometimes opt for alternative, poetic texts, especially for weddings and baptisms. Leaving aside the fact that there is a profound theological distinction to be made between an aesthetically valuable text and a biblical text, it is also true that many such texts belong to an even more limited culture than the bible which, it would appear, possesses a much greater universality.

The remedy employed in most cases often does not help. Most of the time it is limited to questions such as: "What can we drop?" "How can we abbreviate?" "What would function better to express what is going on in our lives as individuals and as a community?" Is the latter question justified, however? What precisely do we have to say in the first instance? What is going on in our lives? Or what God is saying to us? In a manner, of course, which we can understand.

There appears to be only one solution: if the liturgy is not simply a structuring of common human religiosity, but rather the epiphany of God in human history (from Abraham to Christ), then we cannot avoid the need for catechesis and initiation. Liturgy demands schooling because it is both proclamation and celebration of mysteries, mysteries which have occurred in the history of Judaism and Christianity.

WHAT IS UNDERSTANDING?

What exactly is understanding? It is evident that if the liturgy is the epiphany of God's dealings with his Church then the deepest core or heart of the liturgy will never completely be open to our grasp. There is indeed a hard core in the liturgy—the mystery—which is ungraspable. One can only enter into it in faith.

There is more to say about understanding, however. Our contemporaries often conceive understanding as the ability to grasp at first hearing. Something is understandable if we can grasp it immediately. Such an approach is valid for the ordinary objects of our knowledge which can only be grasped at a purely cognitive level but

this is more a question of registering than understanding. Where the depths of human—and divine—reality are concerned this approach does not work. Love, death, joy, solidarity, knowledge of God, can never be grasped at once and on first inspection. In these cases, understanding is more a question of the biblical notion of "knowing-penetrating." It is a lengthy and progressive process of becoming familiar with a particular reality. The same is true for the liturgy. It is not an object of knowledge in the commonplace sense of the word. It is not an object of knowledge at all, rather it is a source of knowledge, a source of understanding. This is why analysis is out of place here, only a prolonged listening and familiarization is appropriate. This implies also that the liturgy will only be open to understanding from a perspective of "empathy." The liturgy lets itself be understood only by those who have faith in and who love it. For this reason it remains inaccessible and incomprehensible outside of the faith.

In addition, the liturgy is only understandable with a certain repetitiveness. Profound realities only gradually yield their full significance. This is why we have the phenomenon of "ritual" in the liturgy; and whoever speaks of "ritual" speaks of repetition.

Many changes in the liturgy in order to make it understandable have been inefficient because they focused on the immediate, cognitive, informative aspect of understanding. They wanted to explain everything, to provide commentary, to analyze. They never lead to familiarity with the liturgy. They are surgical and medical interventions (abbreviating, replacing, scrapping, describing) on a dying reality, a sort of palliative care which can never heal the sick individual. The only approach is the "dialogical" approach: allowing the liturgy time to say what it has to say; listening attentively to its harmonics and allowing its deeper meaning to unfold; not looking for an alternative but letting the liturgy speak for itself and expose its own virtualities.

OUR DISRUPTED RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LITURGY

The incomprehensibility of the liturgy is not so much due to the unintelligibility of its major symbols. Indeed, all of us are

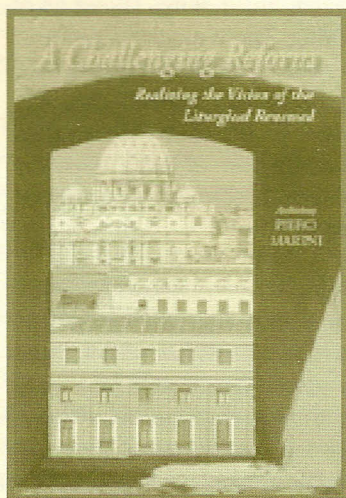
well able to grasp the deep fascination which flows forth from symbols such as fire, light, water, bread, wine, laying on of hands, anointing. These major (natural) symbols speak to us all in our archetypal imagination. Secondary symbols can, of course, be more problematic. At the same time, however, they are of lesser importance and Vatican II correctly discarded a number of them.

A more significant contributor to the problem of understanding is the fact that the symbolic universe within which such symbols functioned has been lost. Removed from its proper context, a liturgical symbol is like a fish out of water, and is left bereft of much of its vitality. Proof of this fact can best be found in what one might call "contrary" situations, where the symbolic universe continues to thrive even today. Why is it so that short Latin phrases and Gregorian refrains continue to function in Taizé but not in the parishes? Because they are in their proper place within the religious community of Taizé and its monastic liturgical life. Why is it that the symbols we have been discussing continue to function in the abbeys, the monastery churches and the charismatic communities? For the same reason! Why does a Gregorian requiem function well at a funeral? Liturgical comprehensibility also depends on a number of non-liturgical surrounding elements. It is our entire relationship with the liturgy—even outside the cultic celebration—that makes so much possible.

The incomprehensibility of the liturgy is not only due to the liturgy itself but in part to us. Our own attitude needs to be worked on. We need to examine our global relationship with God, our faith, our lifestyle, etc. Does the liturgy give meaning to these dimensions of our life or does it turn them into a *corpus extraneum*? We need to be aware of the fact that understanding the liturgy is far more than a cognitive exercise; it is a loving "entering in." At the same time our vision or contemplative gaze is weak. Since the Renaissance we have lost our disinterested contemplative ability; it was pushed aside to make way for analytic observation.

(Continued in the next issue of Word on Worship)

A CHALLENGING REFORM



In these pages Archbishop Piero Marini reveals the vision, courage, and faith of the pastors and scholars who struggled to implement the Second Vatican Council's teachings on the liturgy. While in some circles it is fashionable to propose "a reform of the liturgical reform," any such revision needs to take into account the history of the consilium – the organism established by the Holy See to carry out the initial liturgical changes. This story of the work of the consilium offers a fascinating glimpse into the struggles and tensions that accompanied the realization of the council's dream to promote the "full, conscious and active participation" of the faithful in Roman Catholic worship.

Piero Marini was ordained on June 27, 1965. He became the personal secretary for Archbishop Annibale Bugnini in 1975 and in 1987 was appointed the head of the Office for the Liturgical Celebrations of the Supreme Pontiff. In 2003, Marini was appointed Titular Archbishop of Martirano. He also served as the Master of Pontifical Liturgical Celebrations from 1987-2007. Paper, 224 pp., 6 x 9 .

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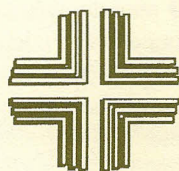
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