



# Word on Worship

Newsletter of the Worship Office, Archdiocese of Newark, NJ

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One of the first events planned by Pope Benedict XVI after his election in April, 2005, was a special meeting of children who during the year had received their first Communion. This meeting coincided with the October 2005 gathering of bishops from around the world for a synod to close the Year of the Eucharist. The purpose of the synod of children was to further efforts to draw children into the observance of Sunday, the day of the Church and the “source of the true Christian spirit.”<sup>1</sup> For baptized Catholics, a fully Christian life is inconceivable without participation in Sunday.<sup>2</sup>

As a Church we must seek to reawaken in believers, young and old, a wonder toward Sunday Eucharist, for we cannot live without Sunday.<sup>3</sup> Together with the Holy Father, it is the adult Church that has the obligation of handing on the tradition that was handed on to us from the apostles, that Sunday is the day the Church cannot live without! This tradition has its origins from the very day of Christ’s resurrection which bears the name the

Lord’s Day.<sup>4</sup> On Sunday the assembly celebrates all that it means to be Christian. Sunday is the day to be Church. It is the day to be what God calls us to be and to do what is most important to us, mainly, to assemble and hear the word of God; to intercede for the needs of the world; to gather the gifts for the poor and the Church; to give thanks and praise over bread and wine and to share in the body and blood of Christ. There is no substitute for Sunday! There is nothing “regular” about Sunday. It is a special event in the life of the Church. Sunday is the fount — source of the Church’s identity and spirituality. We cannot live without Sunday!

It is no wonder that the Church considers it ideal to celebrate first Communion on Sunday.<sup>5</sup> A parish decision to have first Communion on any other day but Sunday is to compromise the “special significance” of the day. That would be a pastoral decision that the Church cannot live with!<sup>6</sup> There is no pastoral justification in the reasoning that a Saturday morning celebration of holy Communion for the first time is acceptable because it is **just** for the first time. Eucharist is the repeatable sacrament. We receive holy Communion for the first time and we continue to partake of holy Communion Sunday after Sunday, plunging us deeper and deeper into the Christ event. So although first Communion is “special” in that it is the first time, it is the beginning of a life-long experience, a holy Communion that

continues and grows. It is very important that our sacramental scheduling and preparations with our children not reflect a one-time event message.

First Communion is a sacrament of initiation that is to be celebrated on the pre-eminent day of the liturgical assembly, the day of the Christian family and the day of joy,<sup>7</sup> Sunday, preferably a Sunday of Easter.<sup>8</sup> The gathering with the believing community on Sunday is the key formative experience in the initiation journey. When a child is admitted to full eucharistic Communion, when he/she is allowed to receive at the table of the Lord for the first time, the Church initiates them into a lifelong pattern<sup>9</sup> of worship and living, shown in its most meaningful way at the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist.

The presence of the parish community at first Communion is of great significance,<sup>10</sup> “for the parish community receives for the first time its smallest children at the Lord’s Table.”<sup>11</sup> There is no pastoral merit<sup>12</sup> in sacramental scheduling and preparation with our children that reflects sacraments as celebrations of a specific part of the community rather than celebrations of the entire Christian community that gathers on Sunday. While the families of those specifically receiving sacraments are certainly in attendance at these celebrations, sacraments are not private events involving only immediate families. The

## FIRST COMMUNION: WE CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT

sacrament of the Eucharist received for the first time is a Church event. It is not a school event or a graduation event that focuses on seven-year-olds standing next to classmates. Sacraments are moments that express the faith of the entire Christian community and first Communion, in particular, “is a step of great importance for a life committed to the path of holiness, full of charity, joy and peace.”<sup>13</sup> We cannot live without Sunday!

### LITURGICAL CATECHESIS

The Holy Father saw the gathering of first communicants as “an opportune and beautiful circumstance to confirm the essential role that the sacrament of the Eucharist has in the formation and spiritual growth of children.”<sup>14</sup> Pope Benedict gathered those children who had most recently received the sacrament for the first time thus emphasizing both pre-sacramental catechesis and post-sacramental catechesis.<sup>15</sup> This synod of children was convened for mystical reflection or post-sacramental catechesis. What Pope Benedict highlighted by his decision to gather first communicants was that sacraments are not single moments in time or endings, but instead a beginning. Post-sacramental catechesis or mystagogical catechesis is a means of unleashing our sacraments from graduations to thresholds. Pope Benedict’s initiative emphasizes the inspirational value of initiatory catechesis and affirms the formative power of liturgy as “the privileged place for catechizing the People of God.”<sup>16</sup>

The Christian formation of children hinges on the privileged place for catechesis, the Sunday liturgy. Celebrating first Eucharist on Sunday is

good liturgical catechesis. Sunday must be celebrated well because the celebration of the Lord’s Day and the Eucharist are at the heart of the Church’s life.<sup>17</sup> Good celebrations will always foster faith but it takes careful planning and preparation. The aim of the liturgy and the aim of all our efforts in catechesis is one and the same: the full, conscious and active participation of the people of God in the life, mission and worship of the Church on Sunday. This includes first Communion. So today and for ages to come the Church’s sacramental catechesis hands on to her children the exhortation of the martyrs: on the Lord’s day leave everything and run eagerly to your Church, for she is your glory.<sup>18</sup>

### **We cannot live without Sunday!**

Sr. Sandra DeMasi, SSJ  
Pastoral Associate for Adult Formation, Our Lady of Czestochowa, Jersey City  
Pastoral Associate for Liturgy, St. Rose of Lima, Short Hills

<sup>1</sup> *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Directory for Masses with Children*, 8.

<sup>3</sup> The words expressed before death by the 49 martyrs of Abitene, a city of the Roman province of “pro-consular Africa,” present-day Tunisia, in the year 303, at the time of Diocletian’s persecutions.

<sup>4</sup> *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 106.

<sup>5</sup> It is not particularly appropriate for first Communion to be administered on Holy Thursday of the Lord’s Supper. Another day should be chosen instead, such as a Sunday between the Second and the Sixth Sunday of Easter, or the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, or the Sundays of Ordinary Time, since Sunday is rightly regarded as the day of the Eucharist.... *Redemptionis Sacramentum: On certain matters to be observed or to be avoided regarding the*

*Most Holy Eucharist*, 4, 87.

<sup>6</sup> In some places the perpetration of liturgical abuses has become almost habitual, a fact which obviously cannot be allowed and must cease. *Redemptionis Sacramentum: On certain matters to be observed or to be avoided regarding the Most Holy Eucharist*, 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1167.

<sup>8</sup> See *Lectionary for Masses with Children*, 34; *Circular Letter Concerning the Preparation and Celebration of the Paschal Feasts*, 103.

<sup>9</sup> See *Philippians 2*

<sup>10</sup> *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, 151.

<sup>11</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, VATICAN CITY, June 12, 2005 in announcing plan of Meeting With Children on Eucharist Catechetical Session to Coincide With Synod.

<sup>12</sup> Liturgical abuses “contribute to the obscuring of the Catholic faith and doctrine concerning this wonderful sacrament.” See *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 6 and Pope John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 10: AAS 95 (2003), p. 439.

<sup>13</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, VATICAN CITY, June 12, 2005 in announcing plan of Meeting With Children on Eucharist Catechetical Session to Coincide With Synod.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Sacramental catechesis has traditionally been of two kinds: preparation for the initial celebration of the sacraments and enrichments following their reception. The first is elementary or general in nature; its aim is to introduce catechumens to the teaching of Scripture and creed. The second is to reflect on the meaning of the mysteries and explore their consequences for Christian witness. Preparatory sacramental catechesis can be for a specified period of time — the catechesis that follows is a lifetime matter.

<sup>16</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1074.

<sup>17</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2177.

<sup>18</sup> *Didascalia of the Apostles*.

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# FIRST COMMUNION: CELEBRATING IT WELL

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**F**irst Communion! At least that is what we hope—that there will be many, many more after this one; that truly it will be the first of a lifetime of communions with the community of faith. Should we then not strive to convey that in the very way we celebrate the first one?

Yes, we want the celebration to be special but that does not necessitate being separate from the Sunday assembly. On the contrary, it is most appropriate for children to receive first Communion at the Sunday Mass at which they ordinarily worship. What could be more natural and appropriate than to receive the Eucharist for the first time with those who have seen them grow up? What is special is that we are bringing the young members of our community to the table of the Lord to dine with all those who celebrate the paschal mystery as the body of Christ.

This understanding needs to be part of the catechesis of both the families of those receiving first Communion as well as the Sunday assembly. The assembly needs to be aware that when they gather for Mass they are here in part to evangelize and initiate. Their presence and the way in which they worship communicate the Gospel message. The corollary is also true. The Sunday assembly's faith is enriched and made joyful by seeing the children who have been with them each week

receive the body and blood of Christ for the first time.

We also know that there are some who do not regularly worship with the Sunday community. We do not want to convey that first Communion is just part of a checklist of sacramental requirements but is related to what the faith community does each and every week in order to experience the salvation that is offered to us in Christ Jesus. First Communion can, in part, be a call to those who are on the fringes to renew their faith commitment. That is best accomplished by celebrating first Communion at Sunday Mass as well.

Of course, we have all those practical concerns that come to mind such as the length of Mass and how people will react. Well, it need not take that much longer than usual and should not if we stay focused on what this event really is about. We should not be looking to add anything to make it “special.” Good liturgy done well is all that is necessary to make it a memorable day for the first Communion families.

We certainly need to be careful not to make the eucharistic celebration the equivalent of a school concert or show. While we don't need to plumb the depths of the serious nature of the mystery of salvation at first Communion, we also don't want to trivialize what they are being brought into by

giving the appearance that there is not much difference between the eucharistic celebration and a school pageant or kindergarten graduation.

## HOW IS IT DONE?

There are several ways in which first Communion can be celebrated at the Sunday Mass. In one parish, families were given a choice to have their children receive at any of the weekend Masses during the Easter season. For those who were adamant about the “large group” experience, one Sunday Mass was designated, but over the years that became less and less a desire as families saw how first Communion was incorporated into the weekly worshipping assembly.

Those receiving first Communion were part of the entrance procession, but they sat with their families. They were given the option to dress in white and most of them did. The opening remarks after the sign of the cross and greeting included mention of those present who were receiving for the first time. With the small numbers present, they could be mentioned by name. At the end of Mass, after the prayer after Communion, they were brought up into the sanctuary, introduced to the assembly and congratulated. This certainly made them feel that this was their special day.

Some questions may arise with this approach. Do you preach on first Communion every single week? No, you do not. An appropriate homily based on the readings, season or liturgy can be given, with a small portion addressed to the first communicants, or a reference to the reception of the Eucharist and its meaning. Since the Eucharist is the “source and summit” of the entire Christian life, could there be a homiletic theme that would not be connected to the Eucharistic celebration? (See *Dining in the Kingdom of God* by Eugene Leverdiere)

The creed can take the form of the renewal of the baptismal promises of the candidates for first Communion. “After the homily the candidates stand and the presider questions them. At the conclusion of the questioning the presider affirms the candidates’ profession of faith by proclaiming the faith of the Church. The whole congregation responds, ‘Amen.’” The candidates may then be sprinkled with holy water. (*Liturgical Principles for Planning the First Communion of Children Baptized as Infants*, 22) This highlights, once again, those receiving first Communion and has them seen as being “special” in a liturgically appropriate way. If first Communion is being celebrated during the Easter season and the sprinkling rite is normally the introductory rite each week, then it is more liturgically proper to keep the sprinkling at the beginning of Mass and omit it after the renewal of the baptismal promises.

A word could be said to the first communicants before they receive as is done at the Easter

Vigil for those being fully initiated. After the breaking of the bread, before “This is the Lamb of God...” the children can be addressed in these or similar words: “Dear children, the Eucharist you are about to receive for the first time unites you more fully to all those who believe that Jesus is risen and becomes present in the bread and wine. Jesus gives us himself to be our food for our journey to God. He asks us that we remember his death and resurrection until he comes again by celebrating the Eucharist so that all people can know God’s love and come to eternal life with God in heaven.”

What is of primary importance in celebrating first Communion on Sunday is keeping the focus centered on the children becoming part of the usual Sunday assembly. This is a special and privileged place to be. Focus on quality liturgy that is the normal Sunday experience rather than trying to add things that are not part of the normal Sunday.

See *Liturgical Principles for Planning the First Communion of Children Baptized as Infants* for norms and suggestions. This document is available from the Office of Divine Worship (Archdiocese of Newark). Especially keep in mind the following directives from *Liturgical Principles*:

- First communicants are not to proclaim the Scripture readings or the general intercessions. Choose ministers that already function in liturgical ministries, not simply relatives of those receiving Communion unless they are properly trained ministers. (12)
- Some first communicants should be involved in the presentation of the gifts.

This is best done along with adult members of the assembly. “Only bread and wine for the Eucharist — and possibly an offering for the poor — are presented at this time.” (12)

- It is very important that Communion under both kinds should be given. (26)
- In order to maintain the sense that the children are being more fully initiated into the Christian community and its worship, the music does not have to be children’s songs. (14)

You do not need to over simplify the music for the celebration of first Communion. This would leave out the assembly from participating. Just make good choices from the assembly’s repertoire that children can handle. For instance, you would not do *Festival Canticle* by Richard Hillert but *Rise Up with Him* by Janet Vogt (OCP) works very well for everyone and can even include clapping which the children really enjoy as does the assembly. Music by Christopher Walker can work well for the adult assembly and children. As much as possible try to draw music from your usual repertoire and in future music planning include songs that you know will work well for the occasion of first Communion at Sunday Mass. Under no circumstances should the first communicants do a performance piece. The sacrament is not a school pageant and they are not a “class.”

All the decisions that are made for the celebration of first Communion need to be rooted in what we are truly doing and what we are about each and every week: “First Communion is a sacrament of initiation. It is the first time the children are admitted to the

table to share fully in the banquet of the Lord with the rest of the assembly.” (RCIA, 217) “The first communicants are being initiated into a lifelong pattern of worship and living. The community gathers to initiate these young members into the community’s normal Sunday worship.” (*Liturgical Principles*, 3) With good catechesis and careful liturgical planning, first Communion can be both a memorable event for the children and their families and an enriching experience for the entire faith community where all come to see that the Eucharist is truly the source, summit and center of Catholic life.

Rev. Michael C. Santoro  
Pastor, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church  
Jersey City

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# THE EVOLUTION OF A READER

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“Tom, I want you read at Mass.” Those words made my heart stop for a moment. They were spoken to me by one of my parish priests when I was a freshman in college. It was the fall of 1967, and I had just begun studies for the priesthood at the minor seminary at Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey. The priest thought it would be good for me to get involved in the liturgical life of the parish, so he invited me to read at Mass. Actually, he told me I was going to read. If he had invited me I would have said, “NO!” I was deathly afraid of speaking in front of a group of people. Of course, I knew that if I ever became a priest I would have to do just that, but I guess I assumed that the grace of ordination would remove my fear of speaking in public.

“Tom, I want you to read at Mass.” Then he went on to give me the date of my first assignment and a book containing the Sunday Scripture readings. That was my preparation for something that I would have sold my soul to avoid.

I went home and began to prepare the readings. I read them silently. I read them aloud. I even recorded them and then listened to myself reading. Listening to that recording only made me more hesitant about getting up before the congregation. I sounded terrible.

When the day to read arrived, I did show up. I guess I was

more afraid of disobeying my parish priest than I was afraid of reading in public. I was assigned to the 11 am Sunday Mass in the grammar school auditorium. It was a liturgy for those who could not be accommodated in the church.

I don't remember much of the experience, except that I did survive. I was then given a schedule for the next few months. I was assigned two Sundays each month. Each time I read, I prepared the best I could. And each time I read my fear began to lessen.

## BEYOND FEAR

Soon, I actually enjoyed getting up before the congregation and having a special role in the liturgy. Since there was a shortage of readers, and some were not too dependable, I began to read very often. I was taking words off a page and delivering them to a waiting congregation.

As I continued my studies for the priesthood, I was required to take a course in oral interpretation. The course taught me that there was much more to reading in public than I had realized. I learned about inflection, pacing, modulation, tone, interpretation, etc. I learned that the human voice was a wonderful instrument and the printed words were like notes on a sheet of music. A human voice could do wonderful things with those “notes.”

At this point I began to take what I learned in oral interpretation and apply it to my reading at Mass. I studied the text.

I learned that exclamation points, periods, commas, hyphens and quotations marks had to be conveyed by my voice, for they could not be seen by the listener. I learned that words often sounded like what they meant, words like “hush,” “bang,” “thundered,” “whispered.” I tried to bring the readings to life.

## APPRECIATING THE SCRIPTURES

My reading was getting better, but reading was still a matter of words, even if they were handled with much more respect and care. I then began my Scripture courses. I learned that the Bible was not just a book, but a library of books containing different types of writing, composed at different times, written for different purposes and directed to particular audiences. I began to appreciate that the Scriptures were not words dictated by God to human secretaries. They were divine, life-giving messages “inspired” into human hearts and then touched and affected by the human knowledge, learning and experiences of their writers. I also began to understand the history of the chosen people and that of the first Christians. That knowledge helped me to appreciate the world about which I was reading, the world from which the Scriptures came.

I began to truly understand the texts I was reading. I tried my best to convey their meaning. I was like an actor who not only had studied acting techniques, but also had an under-

standing of the character he was portraying. My reading improved.

#### A MINISTER OF THE WORD

The next evolution in my life as a reader took place when I studied liturgy. I began to more fully comprehend the structure of the liturgy of the word. I began to see how the readings were related to one another and to the liturgical year. Most of all, I came to recognize the fact that during Mass, God was feeding his people from two tables, the table of his word and the table of the Eucharist. Just as the two disciples on the road to Emmaus met the Risen Lord as he spoke to them and as he broke the bread, so the Risen Lord meets his people in word and in sacrament during the Mass.

As a reader, I was a minister of that encounter with the Lord. Just as the minister of holy Communion gives the Lord as he or she proclaims “The Body of Christ,” “The Blood of Christ,” so I was giving the Lord not in bread and wine but in human language. I was proclaiming “The word of the Lord.” This certainly heightened my sense of responsibility and reverence for what I was doing. God was using my lips to convey his word of life to his people. It was amazing to consider that the God who revealed himself in the majesty of creation, the God who appeared to Moses in the burning bush and showed his power in the Exodus, the God who took on flesh in Jesus Christ, had decided to speak at this time in such an utterly ordinary way – through my human voice.

#### NOT JUST FOR THEM

Up to this point, my ministry as a reader was about doing something for the assembly

and for God. As I continued to read and to grow in my relationship with God, I began to realize that I was not “just doing something for them,” I was also being confronted, challenged and changed by the word. The readings were God’s message to me as well. The more I tried to discern what God was trying to tell me, the more I reflected on the readings, and the richer those readings became for me, the better I proclaimed them. They were readings that had touched my heart. And we always speak most lovingly, reverently and eloquently of things that have found a home in our heart.

The most recent stage in my growth as a reader has been the insight that I am an instrument of God. While that might sound similar to what I said earlier about a reader giving voice to God’s inspired word, it’s something more. When I speak about being an instrument of God, I mean allowing myself to be used by God, allowing the Spirit of God to move in me, to speak through me and to touch people through me.

#### THE SPIRIT IS WORKING

There are times when reading that I am aware of the Holy Spirit at work. For example, there are times when reading at the pulpit that I hear something I never heard before in a particular passage. There are times when I give an unplanned intonation or emphasis to a phrase and a new insight flashes to mind. As I read, there are moments when the silence and concentration of the assembly lets me know that something has seized their attention. There are times when I am awed by the knowledge that the words I am proclaiming are the divine thoughts of the Holy One for

this time, for this assembly. At those moments, I believe the Spirit of God is working in me, calling people to new life.

In proclaiming the word of God for some forty years, I have evolved as a reader, and I believe that evolution happens in every reader, who strives to be a worthy minister of God’s word.

- We begin by worrying about speaking in public.
- We overcome that fear or at least learn to manage it.
- We begin to enjoy standing before the assembly.
- We learn technical skills that make us better readers.
- We study more about the Scriptures and their history.
- We begin to understand the liturgy in which the reading of God’s word has a major role.
- We realize that we are the voices God has chosen to deliver his message.
- We come to see that we are reading not only for the assembly, but for our own good as well.
- We realize that the Spirit of God is present in us.
- We open ourselves more and more to the God who works through our weakness.

As I continue to read the Scriptures at Mass, I am excited over the next evolution that God has in store for me as a reader of the word. Little did I know the process of evolution my parish priest started when he told me, “Tom, I want you to read at Mass.”

Rev. Thomas B. Iwanowski  
Pastor, Our Lady of Czestochowa  
Church, Jersey City  
Associate Director of Parish Life,  
Office of Divine Worship

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#### Staff

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Rev. Thomas A. Dente

##### Design/Layout

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##### Contributors

Rev. Thomas A. Dente

Sr. Sandra DiMasi, S.S.J.

Rev. Thomas B. Iwanowski

Rev. Michael C. Santoro

and the staff of the Worship  
Office

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**Website:** [www.rcan.org/worship](http://www.rcan.org/worship)

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# DOING IT RITE

## THE READER AT MASS

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### BEFORE

- Read the passages aloud at home (see Workbook for Lectors and Gospel Readers or [www.usccb.com](http://www.usccb.com) “daily readings”).
- Spend some time in prayer with the selections.
- Dress appropriately – “Sunday Best!”
- Arrive 15 minutes early. Check intercessions and announcements if necessary.
- Make sure the correct Lectionary is in the ambo and open to the readings of the day.
- Check that the ribbon is in the correct place in the *Book of the Gospels*. In the absence of a deacon bring it to the place of procession.

### PROCESSION

- If there is no deacon, carry in the *Book of the Gospels* directly in front of the priest(s). Walk in at least “two pews” behind the ministers of Communion and the second reader.
- Hold the Gospel book so that the bottom is just above the sightline.
- The second reader walks behind the ministers of Communion, but in front of, not next to, the Gospel book.
- The second reader bows to the altar and takes his or her place.
- The Gospel bearer does not stop or bow at the altar. Walk directly to the altar and place it flat on the center of the table. Bookstands should not be

used for the Gospel book on the altar.

- When a deacon is present, he carries the Gospel book. The readers process together behind the ministers of communion.

### LITURGY OF THE WORD

- Participate in all of the parts of the Mass fully and consciously. Sing the Mass parts and listen attentively to the prayers, readings and homily. As a liturgical minister, be a role model for the other members of the assembly.
- When moving to the ambo to proclaim a reading, it is only necessary to bow to the altar if passing in front of or behind it. Never bow to the priest or genuflect to the tabernacle.
- The Scripture should be read exactly as it is printed, including the introduction and the closing. “A reading from the...” at the beginning and “The word of the Lord” at the end. Do not ad lib!
- Proclaim the Scriptures with feeling but not in an overly dramatic, insincere way. The reader should sound familiar with the text and not be stumbling over words.
- Volume and pacing is very important. Words should be pronounced loudly and clearly. The reading should not sound rushed or painfully slow.
- After each reading, there should be a brief period of silent prayer.

- After the second reading, the reader removes the Lectionary, taking it to an appropriate place to make room for the Gospel book.
- If there is no deacon for the intercessions, move to the ambo towards the end of the creed so that there is no gap between the introduction to the prayer of the faithful and the announcing of the first intercession.

### LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

- Participate fully in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. This includes listening to the prayers, singing the eucharistic acclamations, praying the Lord’s Prayer and exchanging the sign of peace. Readers should receive communion as members of the assembly, not with the ministers of Communion.

### CONCLUDING RITES

- Readers may process out at the end of Mass.
- If processing, bow to the altar with the priest and follow the ministers of Communion.
- The *Book of the Gospels* is never, never carried out in procession. It is only carried in at the beginning of Mass.
- Afterwards, it would be helpful to reset the Lectionary for the next Mass.

Rev. Thomas A. Dente  
Director, Office of Divine Worship



# CHILDREN'S DAILY PRAYER 2006 - 2007

This volume of LTP's best-selling annual resource for praying in the classroom includes a clear, easy to follow format for prayer for every day of the school year, along with mealtime prayers and a prayer for the end of the day. New items for the 06-07 edition include reproducible psalm response pages, many prayers and services for feasts and special occasions and extra psalms and canticles. Paper. 364 pages.

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