

# NTR

WORD AND WORSHIP

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## **Liturgical Spirituality Is an Ecclesial Spirituality**

The thesis of this article is that liturgy should be seen as integral to and integrating of the spiritual lives of all Christians, but in particular for pastoral ministers—ordained, religious, and lay. All liturgy is pastoral in that it is always celebrated with and for the church as part of its pastoral mission and life, and all liturgy should reflect ongoing pastoral care and the sustaining of relationships between parish leaders with the parishioners they serve.

### **Recently Ordained Priests**

Two recent publications about the ordained priesthood help to frame this assessment of the impact which the reformed liturgy has had and can have on ministerial spirituality. The first is Dean Hoge's study of newly ordained priests, entitled *The First Five Years of the Priesthood* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2002). When listing sources of satisfaction among those polled, Hoge writes that "clearly the greatest satisfactions for priests come from what might be called the 'big three': administering the sacraments, presiding over the liturgy, and preaching the Word" (22). In addition to being sources of satisfaction for those ordained fewer than five years, he continues, "past research has

found the same" for priests ordained longer. This finding can be read as a confirmation of the Liturgy Constitution's oft cited assertion (no. 10) that "the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fountain from which all her power flows."

However, a caution is placed over this apparent rosy picture when the recently ordained are asked about sources of polarization in their seminary training. Two causes for polarization are liturgy and the nature of the priesthood. "Seminary faculty report a growing polarization of students along ideological lines. The main battlefields are the nature of the priesthood, liturgy, devotions, and adherence to orthodoxy" (3–4). And after ordination "the main problems reported by happy priests—those who were certain that they will remain in the priesthood—are too much work and too much polarization among the priests over ecclesiology and ministry" (39). Interestingly, it was the recently ordained diocesan priests (as distinguished from the religious) who were the most insistent "that ordination confers on the priest a new status that makes him essentially different from the laity, that a

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priest should see himself as a ‘man set apart’ by God, and that it is essential to emphasize the distinction between priests and laity. . . .” (27).

Such language raises difficulties with some of those who are ordained longer. Specifically, those ordained in the 1960s and 1970s react to an emphasis on the “essential difference” between the lay and ordained members of the Church. My own assessment is that what is called “cultic” language and a language about priesthood as men “set apart” need not be so polarizing, given what the Council said about ordination and the role of the baptized in the celebration of the liturgy, especially the Eucharist. With regard to ordination, the Constitution on the Church states: “Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated. Each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ” (no. 10). This teaching has been reasserted regularly since the Council and is a hallmark of the theology of ordination articulated by Pope John Paul II.

In addition, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy clearly asserts that “Christ’s faithful . . . should not be there [at the liturgy] as strangers or silent spectators . . . they should give thanks to God . . . by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, [and] they should learn to offer themselves too” (no. 48). The fact that the revised General Instruction on the Roman Missal refers specifically to the “baptismal priesthood” and the role of the baptized as active participants in the liturgy, along with the ordained bishop or priest, reflects both this essential distinction and at the same time calls for each to participate in enacting the liturgy. That all share in Christ’s unique

high priesthood and that this high priesthood is what makes the liturgy what it is would seem to be the real point at issue theologically and pastorally.

That the priest acts *in persona Christi Capitis*—that is, in the person of Christ the Head [of the Church]—is clearly noted in our theological and, especially, our contemporary magisterial tradition. That it has received particular emphasis in recent papal teaching is also clear. That it presumes the priest to act *in persona ecclesiae*—that is, in the person of the Church—is clearly illustrated in almost all of the words the priest speaks at liturgy. In fact all liturgical prayer is both christological (“we ask this through Christ our Lord”) and ecclesiological (“we ask . . . we pray . . . we come to you Father . . .”). When the christological and the ecclesiological are put in relationship with one another, then a less polarizing understanding of liturgy and the nature of the priesthood can emerge. If, in fact, American priests of all ages attest to the importance of presiding and preaching, then, could not an appreciation of what these tasks involve in terms of both Christology and ecclesiology, among other things, offer a way to bridge the perceived gap between the recently ordained and all others?

### **Diocesan Priestly Spirituality**

The second recent publication that helps put the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy into perspective today is *Quickening the Fire in Our Midst* by George Aschenbrenner, S.J. (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2002). Subtitled “the challenge of diocesan priestly spirituality,” this book reflects decades of work that the author has engaged in with diocesan bishops, priests, deacons, and seminarians. Clearly, Aschenbrenner wants to urge diocesan priests toward deepening their personal interior lives. Tried and true practices are recast for the diocesan priest

(e.g., the particular examen, 166–97) with a keen awareness of their apostolic ministry in and for the church. Throughout, his stated aim is clear: “to root the many aspects of diocesan priesthood in a spirituality that does not create a clerical superiority but does reveal the beauty and distinctiveness of the diocesan priesthood in relation to all other types of Christian identity and service in the church” (xix). Aschenbrenner is very clear about the need for priests to develop an interior life and that any kind of functionalism in diocesan ministry can lead to living the fallacy that “work is my prayer.” He is very realistic in assessing the many demands made on diocesan priests and is utterly sympathetic to the pressures they face daily in their ministry.

Aschenbrenner devotes chapter 5 to “the priest as leader of prayer.” In it he describes the role that the celebration of the sacraments and the praying of the Liturgy of the Hours has in the priest’s spiritual life. He readily admits that the hours, when prayed on one’s own, is a very different experience than when prayed in common, e.g., when the diocesan priest is in formation in a seminary, or when prayed as a mainstay of the liturgical prayer of monks, mendicants, etc. He describes the responsibility that the priest has to pray for and “in the name of the church,” especially through the hours. This reflects the traditional admonition given to priests trained before Vatican II, that their recitation of the (then) breviary was an act of intercessory prayer for the whole Church and that the priest had a particular responsibility for it.

At the same time, one needs to recall the “sea change” ushered in with the Liturgy Constitution’s assertion (nos. 26–27) that “liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations of the Church, which is the ‘sacrament of unity,’ namely,

a holy people united and organized under their bishops.” “It is to be stressed that whenever rites, according to their specific nature, make provision for communal celebration involving the presence and active participation of the faithful, this way of celebrating them is to be preferred, as far as possible, to a celebration that is individual and quasi-private.” Certainly this vision has not been implemented in any universal way for the Liturgy of the Hours, despite the fact that the General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours (nos. 7, 9, 20, 21, 23) presumes its communal celebration, even daily, in parish churches. Not a few parish ministers experience a “disconnect” between their personal praying of the hours and communal celebrations, with the latter preferred as an expression of the church at prayer. Intercession on behalf of the Church through the hours is always a characteristic of this liturgical prayer. When the hours are celebrated in common, this is more clearly expressed and experienced. (It is something of a paradox that the hours, which was envisioned to be the daily staple of liturgical prayer for the whole Church, in addition to the Eucharist, in effect has become the liturgical prayer used on special occasions, e.g., Vesper services weekly in Advent, Lent, etc.)

### **The (Whole) Church At Prayer**

The key liturgical and theological point here is that all acts of liturgy are the privileged prayer of the whole church and that, when pastoral ministers preside and preach in these contexts, there is a harmony experienced and expressed about prayer, work, and spirituality. Has the fundamental shift in understanding liturgy and liturgical prayer as inspired by the Liturgy Constitution, that is, from praying for the Church to praying with the Church, been accomplished? There are important theo-

logical, ministerial, and spiritual themes that derive from this post Vatican II shift in how one appreciates the liturgy.

Both liturgy and preaching (sources of priests' satisfaction) presume that the priest is committed to and works with the parish community. These "cultic" functions presume relatedness to a number of people and what the liturgy does is to articulate and shape those relationships. Aschenbrenner is particularly helpful when he addresses the importance of prayer, in addition to the liturgy, to deepen the priest's personal relationship to God. Indeed any "summit and source" needs a firm base. That part of this base is ongoing personal prayer is clear. But, in addition, I would argue that another part of the base which liturgy presumes is a set of relationships that the liturgy articulates. These include relatedness to God, the diocesan bishop, other priests, other church ministers, and the parishioners one serves. This is the context in which the liturgy is celebrated.

There is a real difference when the liturgical rites revised after Vatican II speak about what a "priest" does and what the responsibilities of the "pastor/parish priest" are. This latter term is commonly cited and is the preferred way of looking at what liturgy and sacraments do in terms of building up the Church. For example, the General Instruction on Christian Initiation asserts that "it is the duty of pastors to assist the bishop in the instruction and baptism of adults entrusted to their care. . . ." (no. 13). The rite of infant baptism speaks of the role of the "parish priest (pastor)" in helping to prepare parents for the baptism of their child (no. 8). The rite of marriage states that "as far as possible the pastor himself or the one he delegates to assist at the marriage should celebrate the Mass . . ." (no. 72). The rite for the anointing of the sick speaks of the duty of "priests, particularly parish priests

(pastors) . . ." (no. 35) when caring for their sick parishioners. The General Instruction on the Roman Missal states that "pastors . . . should take into account the many and diverse circumstances of those who are present at a liturgical celebration. . . ." (no. 385).

Each of these documents also speaks about other "offices and ministries" in the church, which adds another dimension to the presumed pastoral relationships which the liturgy articulates and celebrates. Among the things that one can derive from these assertions is that the liturgy is about enacting the saving mysteries of Christ with and among the people. And that this "summit and source" of priestly satisfaction has a great deal to do with his pastoral ministry outside the liturgy. Another of the bases for appreciating the liturgy as the "summit and source" of the Church's activity is found in the day in, day out pastoral encounters which themselves are part and parcel of parish life. They are certainly part and parcel of what the liturgy as the saving act of Christ is all about.

### **Liturgy in Context**

Some of these daily encounters concern education and formation in the faith. One need only reflect on the phenomenon of the Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults with its stages of evangelization, catechumenate, immediate preparation for sacramental initiation, and mystagogy as providing the proper ecclesial and pastoral context for the celebration of the rites of initiation themselves. When parish staffs, including the pastor, and those engaged in the process of instructing and working with candidates in the catechumenate celebrate sacramental initiation at the Easter vigil, they are keenly aware of the sets of relationships reflected in and by that celebration of the liturgy. Similarly, when parish staffs, the pastors, and other ministers

regularly visit the sick and dying and then come to the celebration of the funerals of those to whom they ministered in life, they cannot help but experience the presumed sense of relationship that the funeral liturgy presupposes. Ongoing pastoral care is part of the presumed base on which the liturgy as “summit and source” is founded.

It seems to me that a true, pastoral spirituality revolves around liturgy and ecclesiology. These are intrinsically connected. Liturgy as the Church’s prayer is truly expressed in its fullness when it is celebrated by the whole church at liturgical prayer. In this connection, ecclesiology is the theological category for our pastoral thesis, that liturgy articulates and deepens sets of relationships: to God, to the bishop, to the ordained, to those who

collaborate in ministry, to one’s parishioners, and to the whole church throughout the world. Given this way of appreciating the role of liturgy in the spiritual life, the emphasis that some recently ordained place on specific role definition need not mean exalted status and apart-ness. In fact, if understood in the traditional way described here, it may well be a true key to the identity of the parish priest/pastor in that presiding and preaching always involve pastoral relationships. If relationships and relatedness to others are at the heart of the priestly life, then presiding and preaching deserve to be among the highest sources of “satisfaction” for the priest, simply because they derive from and support the life of the Church for whose service the priest is ordained.