

# **Our Living Memory: Reflections on the Mass**

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Synthesis paper for Theology of Worship

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## Our Living Memory: Reflections on the Mass

### Introduction

These days I often hear young adults say they don't get a lot out of coming to Mass. The music doesn't excite them, the homilies don't stir them and participating in the Eucharist doesn't seem to have the "magic" it once held in their lives. They come dutifully, but without enthusiasm. They want a religious life for their children and for themselves, but the language of signs and symbols used in the Church seems distant, a language they often cannot interpret.

In *The Sacraments: An Interdisciplinary and Interactive Study* Joseph Martos quotes Monika Hellwig saying "the root meaning of anamnesis (the ancient Greek word for what happens in liturgy) is not *remembering* but *not forgetting*." He goes on to say, "We all need to be regularly reminded of who we are and what we are called to be, lest we forget. And if we are growing in our understanding and appreciation of the Christian life, we need to receive direction for that growth from our religious community. Although they cannot do it all, the rituals of the liturgy and the sacraments can provide at least some of that direction."<sup>1</sup> The liturgy of the Church ought to be a religious experience for those who believe; but in order to for the ritual to communicate its sacred meaning those who participate need to be aware of approaching what Martos calls a "door to the sacred". This awareness requires that on some level, we understand what the symbols and rituals are intended to convey.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Martos. *The Sacraments: An Interdisciplinary and Interactive Study* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 49.

With this in mind I have prepared the following articles for our monthly newsletter, “*Parent-Catechist Connections*.” The newsletter is so named because we believe there is a vital connection between what we do in faith formation in the parish and what happens in the family. As the primary catechists for their children parents are responsible for supporting their children in participating in the life of the parish. Also, whether they know it or not, they offer the most powerful model for what being a part of the Body of Christ means in our lives and how worship is part of the meaning.

The articles offer brief historical information and some descriptions of what we say and do in the Mass. I have also attempted to connect the articles to themes we focus on with the children in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, particularly:

- Eucharist as Memorial: “Every Eucharist, inasmuch as it is a memorial, presents itself as an event of history by actualizing the past events and by extending them toward fulfillment and in some way anticipating it.”<sup>2</sup>
- Eucharist as the sacrament of covenant: “That relationship, which the Bible calls covenant, is a relationship that is composed of every moment in the believer’s life. But it is ‘condensed’ so to speak, in a particular way in the liturgy and, most of all, in the celebration of the eucharist.”<sup>3</sup> Our use of the covenant theme focuses on God’s invitation to life and the human response, especially as co-workers with God in history.

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<sup>2</sup>Sofia Cavalletti. *Living Liturgy: Elementary Reflections* (Chicago,IL: Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Publications, 1998), 84.

<sup>3</sup>ibid.,93.

- Eucharist as the sacrament of Unity: “Indeed, this is the fundamental reality of the eucharist: to be the efficacious sign of that unity which is meant to be accomplished on earth as a likeness and reflection of the unity of God so “that they all may be one. As you Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us.’ (John 17:21).”<sup>4</sup>

Lifting up these themes, which are quite consistent with all of the sources used for research, will hopefully encourage parents to reflect on the liturgical celebration in a way consistent with what their children see and experience in the Atrium.

I have intentionally chosen prayers and gestures that might not ordinarily be a focus, with the aim of sparking new interest in the liturgy as a whole. The primary aim is to encourage parents to be more aware of what it means to be part of the worshipping community and to perhaps find in the liturgy a new path for growing in their relationship with God.

### **Article 1: Remembering who we are**

When we gather for the Mass we bring with us all of our experiences of life: joy and sorrow, frustration and satisfaction, success and failure, worry and hope. These spiritual realities make us who we are as individuals, but when we come to the Mass we come to remember and to celebrate who we are as members of the Body of Christ: living signs of His presence in the world.

As the Mass begins the priest invites us to recall those ways in which we may have

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 96.

forgotten to acknowledge this truth in our daily lives. The **Kyrie** (“Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy”) is an ancient prayer pointing us to Christ as our mediator. While we speak of it as a “penitential rite”, in *Liturgy Made Simple* Mark Searle reminds us what we are really doing is not so much asking forgiveness for our personal sins, but remembering who we are called to be: people who proclaim the mercy of God thru Christ; the One who overcomes all of the ways in which we “miss the mark” in our relationship with God and with one another. <sup>5</sup>

We follow this by joyfully continuing the “song of the angels”. The earliest mention of the **Gloria** is around 380 in the *Apostolic Constitutions*. It begins with the song of the angels at the birth of Jesus: “Glory to God in the highest”. It continues, however, not with scripture but with words of the Church, indicating our activity in response to the Gift (“we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory”) and of our desire to celebrate His presences among us (“have mercy on us, receive our prayer”). Some commentaries indicate that since the Gloria is a “confession” of the greatness of God thru Christ and of the mercy made available, we really do not need to do both the Kyrie and the Gloria, In practice, however, we offer both the solemn moment of turning our attention to the source of our life and a joyous celebration of that event from the past made present in our celebration now. <sup>6</sup>

The Introductory Rite concludes with the **Opening Prayer**. The priest “gathers” our individual prayers and offers them as one: the prayer of a people joined together in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The prayer announces the “theme” of our celebration on this

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<sup>5</sup> Mark Searle. *Liturgy Made Simple* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1981), 36.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 36-37

day and helps us to be ready to listen to the Word of God.

## **Article 2: Remembering who we are becoming**

The first Sunday of Advent marks the beginning of a new liturgical cycle. The cycle, with “its fasts and feasts, its holy days and seasons”, sets a rhythm for life. Mark Searle puts it this way: “The calendar creates the rhythm, the rhythm creates the dance, the dance creates communion – with the community of faith, with the cosmos, with God.”<sup>7</sup>

Though we cannot say time has a beginning or an end in the Church - since all time belongs to Christ and we belong to Him - our habit of ordering time according to central events in the life of Christ has been part of Christian worship since the beginning. Proclaiming the Word of God in the assembly was part of Jewish worship. The covenant relationship Israel experienced with God was real for them in the events of history. When they recalled and celebrated these events God was present again in a real way. Early Christians continued and adapted this way of worship and handed it down to us today.

The **Liturgy of the Word** is an invitation to enter the events in the life of Christ and through them to experience the timeless presence of God. We hear Jesus, the Word Incarnate, calling us to a memory of all that has been, is and will be. We need to pay particular attention to the hearing part. The Word is not a letter from a distant friend, but the very Voice of Christ speaking to us.<sup>8</sup> As with any conversation, our gestures as well as our words, show we are

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<sup>7</sup> See Mark Searle. *Called to Participate: Theological, Ritual and Social Perspectives*. Edited by Barbara Searle and Anne Y. Loester (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2006),63-65

<sup>8</sup> See Joseph Martos. *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic*

actively engaged. To this end we respond after each reading, and before and after the Gospel.

The work is not always easy. In our culture, where time is money and saving time a virtue, we find it hard to let go of all we have to do or want to do to enter fully into conversation with Christ. When we strive to listen attentively and approach the Word as Emmanuel (God with us) we find a fullness of time that nourishes us and brings us to the place where we can and do celebrate our communion with God and with one another.

### **Article 3: Remembering what we believe**

Through the scripture readings we hear the voice of Christ inviting us to be co-workers in building the kingdom of God. We show our desire to respond affirmatively by professing our faith in the **Creed**.

The Nicene Creed we proclaim each Sunday was composed by the Church Council of Nicea in 325 and further developed at the Council of Constantinople in 381. It was originally used as a profession of faith before baptism, and continues to be so today; but by the time of Charlemagne, around 800, we find that the Credo (Latin for “I believe”) was also being proclaimed by the community before the celebration of the Last Supper. It was not until the twelfth century that the Creed became universal, when it was introduced in the Mass in Rome.

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The Creed offers a summary of the core doctrines of our faith. Oscar Lukefahr describes

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*Church* (Tarrytown, NY: Triumph Books, 1991), 262.

<sup>9</sup>See Oscar Lukefahr, C. M. *We Worship: A Guide to the Catholic Mass* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2004), 64.

it this way: “The first part expresses our faith in God the Father, the Creator of all things. The Second honors the Son, Jesus Christ, who became human, died for our salvation, and rose to give us eternal life. The third turns our attention to the Holy Spirit, who speaks to us through the Scriptures and gives us life in the church and sacraments. The last words of the Creed are a jubilant affirmation of our trust that God’s goodness and grace will bring us to eternal life.”<sup>10</sup> When we proclaim the Creed we identify ourselves as Christian people committed to a particular way of life – a life that has at its center a relationship with God which we intend to maintain and extend throughout time.

The Prayers of the Faithful show our unity with Christ and our confidence in God’s love. Through them we act on the command in the gospel to care for the needs of the world. They include prayers for the universal Church, for the leaders of the world and for God’s help in fighting injustice in the world. Finally, we ask for the needs of our own community. In this way we embrace a vision beyond our present circumstances to the goal of Christianity: that all might enjoy fullness of life in the kingdom of God.

#### **Article 4: Remembering the source**

People from the congregation bring gifts to the altar in the **offertory procession**: bread, symbolizing our need for nourishment; wine, symbolizing fullness of life and celebration; and the offertory basket, representing our daily lives. In *This is Our Mass* Tom Coyle reminds us: “Too often, we could be accused of being ‘Sunday Christians’ with our faith in a little box that

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 64-65.

we open for an hour (or less) on a Sunday morning, only to close it and put it away for the rest of the week when we leave the church at the end of Mass. The offertory procession is a reminder that this is not so: that our faith is a part of us, like breathing or eating, and that what we do in church on a Sunday morning finds expression in what we do on the other six days of the week.”<sup>11</sup> The procession is a summation of our lives in cooperation with God.

Bringing gifts for the Eucharist has been part of Christian worship since the beginning. From their Jewish perspective, early Christians recognized all of creation as a gift from God. They called this *berakah*, the Hebrew word for blessing. The most appropriate response to God’s generosity was to offer the first-fruits of all their labor. <sup>12</sup> Further, they understood giving of goods for the needs of the community to be part of what Jesus meant when he said, “do this in memory of me”. Mark Searle says, “They could not celebrate the memory of Jesus’ gift of himself without themselves being generous with one another.” <sup>13</sup>

In the **preparation of the chalice** the priest adds a few drops of water to the wine. He quietly prays, “By the mingling of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.” This simple action signifies the mystery of Incarnation: that God, who created the universe, would become small in order to join our human experience. We can also see the self-giving sacrifice of Christ, whose gift of himself

<sup>11</sup> Tom Coyle. *This is Our Mass* Revised North American Version (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1989), 83.

<sup>12</sup> See Edward Foley. *From Age to Age: How Christians Have Celebrated the Eucharist* Revised and Expanded (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2008), 32 – 33.

<sup>13</sup> SEE SEARLE. *LITURGY MADE SIMPLE*, 59.

sanctifies the gift of our lives. The gesture expresses both our desire to be in unity with Christ and with one another and acknowledges the sacrifice of Christ as the source and summit of our lives.

### **Article 5: Remembering where we are**

When we celebrate Eucharist we are not re-enacting what Jesus did and said at the Last Supper, we are participating in the moment. The Eucharistic prayer begins with the **Preface** which announces our joy in celebrating a particular season or a particular feast. The priest asks us to “lift up our hearts to the Lord”, to leave the cares of daily life behind in order to join our hearts and our voices with those of the angels in heaven. <sup>14</sup> The elements of the prefaces find their roots in ancient prayers of the synagogue, but they call us to be aware of ourselves as experiencing God’s generosity today.<sup>15</sup>

The **Acclamation** (Holy, Holy or *Sanctus* in Latin) is made up of prayers from both the Old and the New Testaments. The first stanza from Isaiah 6:3 announces, “Heaven and earth are full of your glory”. The second part, found in Mark 11: 9-10 is a song of praise for Jesus as he entered Jerusalem before his death and resurrection. Jesus also refers to these words when speaking of his second coming (Matthew 23:39, Luke 13:35). When we sing “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” we are welcoming Jesus upon his Eucharistic entry and we are

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<sup>14</sup> See M. Basil Pennington. *The Eucharist Yesterday and Today* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Co.), 36-37.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Dubruel. *The How-To Book of the Mass* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.), 169.

anticipating his completion of the kingdom of God, when all heaven and earth are one.<sup>16</sup>

The entire Eucharistic Prayer is a way of remembering all God has done in the past, of experiencing those events in our lives now and of celebrating our hope for continuing this relationship in the future. This understanding of memorial was part of Jewish spirituality, continued and handed down to us through the centuries. The Eucharistic prayer calls us to be participants, not spectators. When we hear the words of consecration we believe Jesus is present in the bread and in the wine. For those who believe this meal is a living memory – both a summary of the self-giving action of Jesus' life and death and an invitation to take part in his sacrificial gift of himself for the salvation of the world. <sup>17</sup>

### **Article 6: Remembering who we serve**

The final moments of the Mass call us to live our lives in unity with Christ who came to serve.<sup>18</sup> The “fraction rite” or **the breaking of the bread** is a good example. It struck the early Christians as important that Jesus broke one loaf into enough pieces to feed all. When they shared the one loaf they were reminded of their unity in Christ. When they thought about what Jesus taught them concerning the needs of others they also saw in the broken bread a sign not to let divisions or differences keep them from acting

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<sup>16</sup> See Jimmy Akin. *The ABCs of Worship: Mass Appeal* (San Diego, CA: Catholic Answers, 2003), 69.

<sup>17</sup> See Foley. *From Age to Age*, 30 -31.

<sup>18</sup> See Pennington, *The Eucharist Yesterday and Today*, 104 -114.

with love.<sup>19</sup>

After breaking the bread the priest takes a small fragment of the host and places it in the chalice. This custom seems to have been practiced in Rome as early as the fifth century when the pope would send particles of the consecrated bread from his Mass to the various churches in Rome. The particles would be placed by the priest into the chalice as a sign of unity with the pope – in other words, with the whole church. Oscar Lukefahr says the practice was also understood as “a reminder that Christ’s Body and Blood, separated during his passion, were reunited at his Resurrection. Thus, the rite became a symbol of eternal life.”<sup>20</sup>

The priest holds up the consecrated bread, announcing “This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world...” We respond with “Lord I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed.” These words from scripture describe a Centurion’s sense of humility before the healing power of Jesus. After healing the man’s servant Jesus says of the Centurion, “I have not seen such faith in all of Israel.” (Matt. 8: 5-8) The words point to our sense of awe in the presence of Christ and to our faith. Once again we can see our cooperation with God’s invitation brings forgiveness and fullness life through Christ.

Receiving communion it is both an intensely personal encounter with Christ and public statement of who we are as Catholic Christians. Being aware of what we are *doing* when we celebrate the entire Mass helps us to find deeper meaning for our lives

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<sup>19</sup> See Searle, *Liturgy Made Simple*, 67-68.

<sup>20</sup> Lukefahr. *We Worship*, 71.

and inspiration for our work as Christians in the world.

### **Closing reflections:**

Recently my oldest daughter was telling me about her friend's new i-Phone. "We don't have to wonder about anything anymore" she declared, "We just ask the i-Phone." This statement, while partially in jest, caused me to think more objectively about the audience for these articles. The young adults whose children I serve are sophisticated in their ability to access information. They are also pragmatic – they just need the facts to be satisfied. What are the implications for the language of theology? How will our attempts to interpret religious practices and beliefs need to change?

The challenge is how to inspire reflection and contemplation. How can we speak of sacred space to people immersed in cyberspace? Or explore the importance of ritual with people who think of it as "old fashioned" and not necessary? How can we communicate the mystery of time to those who think of themselves as being instantly "connected"? And even more complicated, how can we inspire a sense of urgency for participation in the history of salvation in a culture where history hinges on national events, carried forward by the will of a people? If the Church is to play a central role in the lives of these young people with their new set of questions and if liturgy is to make faith-sense for them, the dynamics of life in the information age have to be addressed. New constructs are required.

In *Is Theology a Science*, theologian M. D. Chenu suggests: "The theologian is an adult Christian who, taking cognizance of what he (or she) possesses, reflects upon it, analyses the

complex content of the faith, builds it up, unifies it.”<sup>21</sup> In a way we are all theologians, but those of us who offer catechesis and those who prepare liturgy need to be conscious of inviting people to stop and consider how our liturgical actions signify spiritual realities in ways that make sense today.

I began this paper thinking I had to “teach” people what they needed to know and do from a particular perspective. After examining many works with a plethora of perspectives I am humbly convinced each person’s sacred experience has value and purpose. Bernard Cooke summarized it this way: “What happens in the Eucharist is that the meaning of people’s Christian lives interprets the gospel message that is proclaimed, and that gospel message, in turn, throws new light on the meaning of their lives. The gospel message proclaimed in the Eucharistic action is meant to transform people’s understanding of what it means to be human, so a given group’s daily experience of being human in the actual life situation will inevitably affect how they hear that word.”<sup>22</sup> I hope in some way these articles will help to illuminate liturgical action, making those who take time to read them more predisposed for an authentic experience of the sacred as they take part in the Mass.

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<sup>21</sup> M. D. Chenu. *Is Theology a Science?* (New York, NY: Harthorn, 1959), 18.

<sup>22</sup> Bernard Cooke. *The Future of Eucharist: How a new self-awareness among Catholics is changing the way they believe and worship.* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997), 42.

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