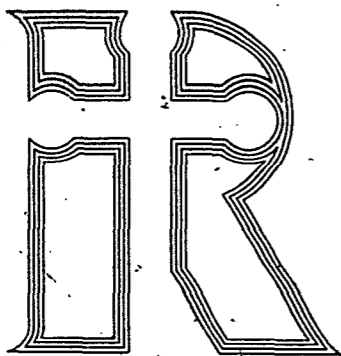


Lenten Worship Letter for Year of Renewal

One of the most important areas of renewal that we must give our attention to in a Year of Renewal is our worship of God. For Vatican II tells us that "the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fount from which all her powers flow" (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, art. 10).



The Church is teacher and servant, but above all else the Church is a worshipping community. For "we are Christians because through the Christian community we have met Jesus Christ, heard his word of invitation and responded to him in faith. We assemble together at Mass in order to speak our faith over again in community and, by speaking it, to renew and deepen it" (This, and all following quotations, U.S. Bishops, The Place of Music in Liturgical Celebrations, 1968).

When we gather for worship, therefore, we gather to do a very human thing — to celebrate. But we do not gather to celebrate something that is going to happen, as if the Mass is going to change our lives; rather we gather to celebrate something that has already happened, that we have been changed by God. We gather to bring ourselves to a deeper awareness of something that is already present among us, namely, our faith in Jesus Christ. We are a community of faith. Faith is a continuous reality in our lives. It may be shaky at times. It may ask many questions. But it is real: we share it with one another, and we want to celebrate this reality and by our very celebration intensify it. Thus at Mass we do not come together to meet Christ as if he were absent from the rest of our lives. "We come together to deepen our awareness of, and commitment to, the action of his Spirit in the whole of our lives at every moment."

Thus it may be said that we do not come to Mass primarily to improve ourselves or to get something. We come to revel in something we already have, our daily experience of Christ, our daily commitment to faith. The moment of liturgy that gathers us together in one moment in a series of religious moments in our lives. We experience God's love in the love of our friends. We experience God's presence in moments of reflection, moments of joy and sorrow, moments of concern for the needs of others. The moment of liturgy which brings us together capsulizes these many moments of religious experience going on in our lives and brings them to a new intensity.

We must not expect the liturgical moment to create a religious experience out of nothing. The liturgical moment will not help us to experience God, if we are not already attempting to experience him in the rest of our lives. The moment of liturgy, in other words, depends on all the moments of religious experience that have preceded it. Liturgy is a sign of our continuous experience of God and his presence. "People in love make signs of love and celebrate their love for the dual purpose of expressing and deepening that love. We too must express in signs our faith in Christ and each other, our love for Christ and for each other, or they will die." We must celebrate our faith and love in community.

The priest, therefore, who presides at the liturgy must be above all a leader in faith. With the help of his worship committee, he has to be in contact with the faith-experience of the community he serves. He has to know the dimensions of the faith of that community, its frailties and strengths, its problems and questions. He has to help a community realize its faith, express that faith and deepen it.

All who participate in the liturgy must see their worship, not simply as a Sunday task to be done, but as an effort to enter into the celebration of the faith-experience of the community to which they belong.

"We may not feel like celebrating on this or that Sunday, even though we are called by the Church's law to do so. Our faith does

not always permeate our feelings. But this is the function of signs in the Church: to give bodily expression to faith, to transform our fragile awareness of Christ's presence in the dark of our daily isolation into a joyful, integral experience of his liberating action in the solidarity of the celebrating community."

During Lent we urge our people to give



serious thought to the importance of the Liturgy in their lives. We urge priests as liturgical leaders and their parish worship committees to give serious thought and expend untiring efforts to create good liturgical celebrations in their parishes. For "good celebrations foster and nourish faith. Poor celebrations weaken and destroy faith."

'Waltzing Matilda' Closes 40th Eucharistic Congress

Melbourne (RNS) — The 40th International Eucharistic Congress came to a close in Melbourne's vast Cricket Ground on Feb. 25 as some 120,000 pilgrims sang the Australian folk ballad, Waltzing Matilda, in a special farewell tribute to Pope Paul's legate, Cardinal Lawrence Shehan of Baltimore.

The singing itself marked the end of the Congress' closing Mass, known as "Statio Orbis" (State of the World), a traditional service of re-dedication.

A major event of the Roman Catholic Church held every four years, the Congress brought together 17 cardinals, many bishops and archbishops from every continent, and thousands of priests and laity from various countries the world over for a week-long program of religious services and seminars.

One of the major highlights of the Melbourne Eucharistic Congress was the celebration of an aboriginal liturgy in the city's Sidney Meyer Music Bowl.

It was a form of the Roman Catholic Mass adapted to the spirit and forms of Australian aborigine culture and marked by foot-stamping, arm-waving, hand-clapping songs and dances.

Cardinal Shehan, the chief concelebrant of the Mass, wore vestments decorated by an aboriginal artist with a woodblock print of a tribal totem in the form of a giant bird.

The Mass, held before 30,000, was celebrated at an altar constructed of bark, adorned with

traditional aboriginal paintings of kangaroos, snakes, and the emu, an ostrich-like bird.

At key points in the liturgy, the space in front of the altar became a stage for stirring tribal dances and chants by about 120 aborigines in bright body paint. The men wore only breechcloths and the women short yellow skirts and tight brown blouses the color of their skins.

Earlier in the Congress, more than 100,000 Catholic school children jammed the Music Bowl

for a Mass called "Voices of Peace."

A Protestant Gospel singing group, the Proclaimers, led the singing during the service.

The Congress, which had received the full cooperation of Australia's major non-Roman Catholic Churches, had a strong ecumenical tone. Cardinal Jan Willebrands, president of the Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity, in a sermon at St. Paul's Anglican Cathedral in Melbourne, said that Christian Churches "must become united in order to give unanimous witness to Jesus Christ."

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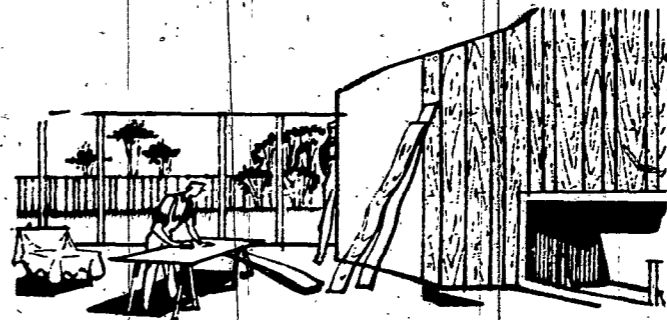
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