

# Is Our Liturgy too Busy?

PART ONE

By Msgr. William Shannon

A few weeks ago I had a discussion about liturgy with a couple I have known for many years. They are wonderful people. Well-educated and deeply committed Christians, they were involved in the Liturgical Movement long before Vatican II. And when Vatican II made the Liturgical Movement its own through its Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, they became eager and zealous members of the liturgy committee in their parish. They were growing tired of all the singing, the offertory processions — the whole element of total participation to which they were invited each Sunday. They said that they would like to have a more quiet Mass that would give them more time for reflection.

This conversation set me to thinking about the way we celebrate liturgy. It seemed to me that what they were saying is that our liturgy has become unduly preoccupied with busy-ness. In our excessive concern for participation, we have tried to keep people busy all the time, and the result is that we have worn them out. They are finding that they are not really praying at Mass — and they resent it.

## INSIGHTS On Pastoral Liturgy

Perhaps we have reached a point in our liturgical development when we have to listen to what people like this couple are saying. Certainly they are wrong if they want to return to a non-participatory Mass. But are they wrong in asking questions about the kind of participation we have called them to?

A couple of decades ago we used to speak of "praying at Mass" — which meant, at that time, following the prayers of the priest. In the last ten years, under the influence of Vatican II's reform, we have begun to speak of "celebrating" the Eucharist. This, of course, is all to the good; for the Eucharist is a celebration: a celebration of God's love expressed in Jesus, a celebration of our faith-response to Him.

But it seems to me that we have to ask the question whether in our emphasis on celebration — with all our efforts to keep people busy — we have pushed out of

their lives the important dimension of prayer. Prayer does not thrive on busy-ness. Have we in our anxiety for maximum participation almost forgotten that the Eucharist is prayer; and by prayer I do not mean simply saying prayers, but listening to God and responding to Him in faith? Do we have to ask ourselves if our liturgy has not become so over-verbalized, so busy, so noisy that there is no time left for really listening to God and responding to Him?

I am not in any way trying to suggest that prayer and celebration are incompatible. Celebration can certainly be prayer; but it is not necessarily so. We have to face honestly the question: is it possible to have a good celebration, in which every one is involved and yet in which they are so busy or so noisy that there is little real opportunity for an encounter with the All-Holy God?

Just think for a moment of what we do at Mass. We have a fairly long introductory rite. Then we move into an Old Testament reading, an Epistle and a Gospel and a homily. This is followed — rapid-fire — by the profession of faith and the general intercessions; and as the general intercessions are being made, the "offertory" procession is already forming. The procession proceeds to the altar. The people sing an "offertory" hymn or make responses to the priest's prayers. Then quickly — I almost said pantingly — they are thrust into the Eucharistic Prayer.

Just reflect for a moment on how busy all this really is. From the beginning right down through the Eucharistic Prayer, people hardly have a chance to catch their breath — let alone their thoughts. The Word of God has been proclaimed — in three separate proclamations. The homily has explained the Word proclaimed. But people have been given no decent amount of time to reflect on the Word, to recollect themselves, to see what this Word means for them in their lives. They have no time to prepare themselves for the Preface and the Eucharistic Prayer. They are rushed from Word to Sacrament. They are singing, making verbal responses — but scarcely given a moment really to think about what is said and what is happening so that they can make a personal response to God.

You will perhaps say that this is an exaggeration. But I wonder if this is not the way an increasing number of Catholics are seeing the Mass and being wearied by it?

[To be continued]

### King Ferry Council Meets

King Ferry — At Our Lady of the Lake the Parish Council met recently for an indoctrination session for new members. The council, active for the past four years, strives to build a Christian community within the council itself. Father Richard Stanton feels that by establishing a Christian community in the council they will better understand the need to build a Christian community within the entire parish.

Religious Education for the younger set will be under the guidance of Sister Elaine Theresa, pastoral assistant, who travels from the St. Joseph convent in Ithaca. It is expected that the classes will be starting early in October.

where he stood. But after he had left his father's presence, he thought things over. He realized how wrong he had been. He repented and ended up doing what his father wanted.

Originally this parable referred to God's people. All through their long history, Israel had professed to love God and follow His ways. Yet when God came to them in the person of Jesus, they rejected Him. They were like the elder son.

Those who received Him were the tax-collector, like Matthew and his friends; and prostitutes, like the woman who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears and dried them with her hair (for prostitutes wore no veils as respectable women, like Veronica, did). On the surface their lives looked like an outright refusal to have anything to do with God. Yet when Jesus came they listened to Him, followed Him, and did His will. These were like the second son.

However, there are deeper truths here. One is that taught by Ezechiel — namely, that even though a nation reject Jesus, individual citizens need not. In fact Christianity began with a remnant of Jews. **Salvation is personal!**

Secondly, deeds speak louder than words. Most of us, I'm sure, when we were kids, in moments of tenderness told our mothers how much we loved them. Equally sure, I'm certain, our mothers at one time or another, might have retorted, "I wish you'd show it a little more."

Love is more than words. If we really love God, then deeds, not words, must show it. Perhaps the greatest cause of atheism in the world today is Christians who profess the faith of Christ and are hellhounds in their daily lives. What they do speaks so loudly, nobody can hear what they say.

So often we begin our lives or even our day badly, like the second son in the parable. But having begun wrong is no reason to continue in the wrong. The second son repented. So can each of us.

And what is repentance? A twinge of sorrow, because one had been inconsiderate to a loving father? Or admitting one is wrong, like telling one's sins to a priest? Repentance means a change of mind, a turning in the opposite direction and ending up doing the Father's will. Confession is a good start.

### WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mt. 21:28-32. (R1) Ex. 18:25-28. (R2) Phil. 2:1-11.

The theme of Sunday's readings is personal responsibility.

Ezechiel in the first reading is addressing the Jewish captives in Babylon. Instead of blaming God for their plight, Ezechiel tells them they have only themselves to blame. **National apostasy caused the collapse of the nation.** Yet Ezechiel sought to lift up their drooping spirits by teaching them a truth quite novel at the time: namely, that of **personal responsibility.** The individual can rise above the nation. "Don't say," warned Ezechiel, "that the Lord's way is not fair. Your ways are unfair. You expect a just God to reward evil. This cannot be. Even a good man who turns to evil must suffer the consequences. Yet the reverse is also true — a wicked man turning from evil will surely live."

Ezechiel is speaking to us, too. We have sinned. Unless we realize this, we too might carp that God is unfair. The realistic liturgy, however, teaches us to plea for God's mercy and guidance. "Remember your mercies, O Lord, and teach me your paths" (Response).

Repentance is the path we all should follow, for we all are sinners. Again our Lord illustrated this truth by a simple parable. A father made a request of his two sons. The elder son agreed to do his father's wish. How polite he was: he even said, "Sir." His subsequent action, however, showed him to be a liar, a hypocrite. He talked a good game; but that was all it was — talk!

The second son, on the contrary, came right out with it and refused to do his father's will. He was cruelly blunt, even disrespectful. At least you knew

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