

Is Our Liturgy Too Busy?

[Part Two]
By MSGR. WILLIAM SHANNON

A few years ago, in the first fervor of the liturgical renewal, we used to chide people who said that, with all the participation demanded of them at Mass, they no longer had time to "say their prayers." I think we were right in criticizing such an attitude. Obviously we should not come to Mass to "say prayers" that are extraneous to the Mass. But I wonder if today we do not have to take seriously the objection of those who say that so much "participation" is demanded of them that they no longer have time really to pray.

Nor are we able to answer this objection simply by affirming that the whole Mass is a prayer.

WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mt. 21:33-43. (R1) Is. 5:1-7. (R2) Phil. 4:6-9.

Two Sundays ago the parable of The Laborers in the Vineyard pointed out that salvation is not something earned, but a gift of God freely given—a grace. This Sunday's parable of The Tenant Farmers, who worked the vineyard, is meant to counterbalance a do-nothing attitude that the parable of The Laborers in the Vineyard might possibly foster. Though salvation is a gift, still it is a gift that has to be accepted. Acceptance means responding to God's gift by producing the fruit of good works.

The artist who paints has a right to recompense for his painting. The dramatist who writes a play or the novelist a novel or any other writer—all have rights to royalties from the creations of their minds. Shall God alone, of all creators, have no right to royalties from the works of His hand? The word of God says otherwise. "He looked for the crop of grapes" (R1). "He dispatched his slaves to the tenants to obtain his share of grapes" (R3).

The parable of the Tenant Farmers reflects a true-to-life situation in Jesus' day. Landlordism was a problem then as now. Rich men bought up land, leased it, and while others worked it they went to some big city to live. Tenants on their part hated the landlord system, and not infrequently by an adroit mixture of legal dexterity and force they would contrive to wrest the land from the owner. Generally, the local authorities would be on the side of the tenants. After all, they worked the land and were part of the local community, whereas the landlords were rich and absent—often abroad, a thing hateful to the nationalistic Jew, and luxuriating on the sweat of the brows of others. So the cards were stacked against the landlords.

After the harvest, the landlord in the parable looked for a return on his investment. No doubt the tenants felt this first collection to be unjust; initial expenses would consume the first profits. So they beat up the collectors. The landlord wisely let it go.

When the next harvest came, he dispatched more slaves to collect the rent. The tenants had

INSIGHTS On Pastoral Liturgy

The Mass is an opportunity for prayer, but there will be no genuine prayer if there is no opportunity to reflect, to be recollected, to respond. This is a particularly acute problem for people for whom the Sunday Eucharist is practically the only time in their week when they give any significant amount of time to prayer. Are we robbing them of something important in their lives if our liturgy is so busy that it offers them no time for pondering and reflection? The question I am

probably decided that what had worked once would work again. So they repeated the first episode. The tenants were obviously working for a land grab. The landlord could not let this go on. Tenants who enjoyed the produce of three successive harvests could become owners by prescription. After this second incident, therefore, the owner had to take a drastic step or else lose his land.

When the third harvest came around, he sent his own son. The tenants perceived the implication. To allow the son to carry out his commission would jeopardize their increasingly strong legal claims. Faced with this eventuality, they killed the son. But this time, the tenants had miscalculated. The owner was not about to let his vineyard go. He intervened in person, ejected the tenants, and put others in their place. The tenants would now be ruined and might well have to face murder charges.

The point Jesus was trying to make in this parable was that killing Him would be no answer. (Remember Jesus told this parable on the eve of His Passion.) His concern was not so much for Himself as for His vineyard, Israel. Israel was on the road to doom.

One of the supreme tests of life is, "How do we use our privileges?" Oscar Wilde has a terrible kind of parable like this. Jesus was walking through the streets of a city. In an open courtyard, He saw a young man feasting gluttonously and growing drunk with wine. "Young man," said Jesus, "why do you live like that?"

"I was a leper," said the young man, "and you cleansed me. How else should I live?"

Jesus went on, and on the street He saw a young girl clad in tawdry finery, a girl of the streets, and after her there came a young man with eyes like a hunter. "Young man," said Jesus, "why do you look at that girl like that?"

"I was blind," said the young man, "and you opened my eyes. How else should I look?"

"Daughter," said Jesus to the girl, "why do you live like that?"

"I was a sinner," she said, "and you forgave me. How else should I live?"

Here were three people who had received priceless gifts from Jesus and who used them like that.

What nation has been so privileged as our nation? What religion as our religion? What people as we the People of God? Much has been given us. Much will be demanded of us. **Privilege bears with it responsibility**—that of producing the fruit of good works. A hand forever extended, as God's has been to us, and forever rejected will be withdrawn and extended to others. It happened to God's Chosen People. God forbid it should ever happen to anyone of us.

putting is this: do we — after 10 years of liturgical renewal — have to begin quite consciously to rediscover all over again the prayer dimension of liturgy and especially of the Mass? How can we make liturgy more reflective so that people can truly encounter the All-Holy God in their worship?

One of the answers to this question — an answer that is of prime importance — is that we must make more effective use of silence in our liturgy. To be silent at Mass is as important as to sing at Mass. We need to sing at the Sunday liturgy; but we have an equal need for silence. It is interesting that this need for silence has been set forth in the documents on the liturgical reform from the very beginning. Thus in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, issued in 1964, there is a discussion in article 30 of the various ways in which the people should take an active part in the liturgy. The article concludes with the words, "at the proper times all should observe a reverent silence."

The introduction to the new Roman Missal says: "Silence at designated times is also a part of the celebration. Its character will depend on the time it occurs in the particular celebration. At the penitential rite and again after the invitation to prayer, each one should become recollected; at the conclusion of a reading or homily, each one meditates briefly on what he has heard; after Communion he praises God in his heart and prays." (General Instruction #23).

The bishops of the United States in their foreword to the new Missal saw fit to comment on this statement in the General Instruction. They say: "In order to facilitate the use of silence rubrical directions for silent prayer have been indicated in this edition (of the Missal). These

CDA PLANS

Brockport — Catholic Daughters of America, Court Nativity of Our Lady, plan to have a reception of new members in October. A special Mass will be held for this occasion. A luncheon for the Elderberry Club will be hosted by the CDA in November.

silent periods for prayer should not be too brief or too lengthy. A more lengthy pause for reflection may take place at the penitential rite and after the readings and homily."

The Bishops offer the rationale for this silence: "The proper use of periods of silent prayer and reflection will help to render the celebration less mechanical and impersonal and lend a more prayerful spirit to the liturgical rite. Just as there should be no celebration without song, so too there should be no celebration without periods for silent prayer and reflection."

Silence then is one of the chief ingredients of a prayerful liturgy — silence seen as a positive way of participation, not just as a time of doing nothing. Our age is a noisy age that finds it difficult to use silence in a meaningful way. We have to teach people and learn ourselves to understand silence as the experience of a Presence. Silent prayer makes it possible for us to respond to God in the liturgy.

Scout Retreat At Seminary

The ninth annual Boy Scout Retreat was held at St. Bernard's Seminary Sept. 26-28. Nearly 350 scouts and their leaders, representing some 20 troops in the Rochester area, camped on the seminary grounds.

A project of the seminarians of St. Bernard's and Becket Hall the retreat had as its theme "Jesus is alive in '75." Leaders were Paul Grenon, a third-year student from the diocese of Providence, R.I., and Michael Ryan, a second-year student from this diocese.

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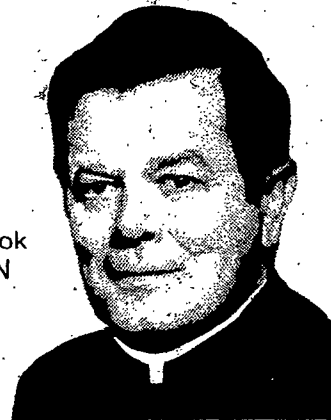
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