

What Is Pastoral Liturgy?

Part II
By MSGR. WILLIAM H. SHANNON

When we gather for the liturgy, 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 somehow the Mass is going to change us. Rather, we gather to celebrate something that has already happened. We gather to bring ourselves to a deeper awareness of a reality already present and going on in our lives. Faith is a 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. We are a community of faith. And we want to celebrate this reality, and by our very celebration, intensify this reality that is already present. So we do not come to Mass primarily to get something. We come to revel in something we already have.

The moment of liturgy that gathers us together on Sunday is 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 prayer and reflection in moments of joy, sometimes in moments of sorrow.

The liturgical moment 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 — in His Word, in the presence of Christ — if we

INSIGHTS On Pastoral Liturgy

are not attempting to experience Him in the rest of our lives. The liturgical moment, the event of liturgy, depends on all the moments of religious experience which have preceded it.

A simple illustration will bring out this point. A man kisses his wife. This kiss is at once an expression and an experience of their love and fidelity. But the kiss is only one moment in a whole series of their experiences of their relationship with one another. The kiss is a celebration of their love. But to be a real celebration of that love, it must be preceded by many other moments of loving actions toward one another.

This, then, is the first step toward a sound liturgical theology — to realize that liturgy is a celebration of a reality that is already present. This understanding of liturgy makes it very clear that liturgy can never be separated from life. It can never be separated from the faith experiences we have in our lives.

This understanding of liturgy can help us to understand not only the Mass liturgy, but the liturgy of the other sacraments. Take, for example, the sacrament of Penance. It celebrates realities that are present, namely, our repentance

and God's ever-present forgiveness. We do not come to the confessional laden with sins and then come out freed from those sins after the priest has said words of absolution over us. We do not come to the confessional wondering whether or not God will forgive us. We are already assured of His forgiveness. Rather, we come to the confessional repentant and experiencing in our lives the ever-present reality of God's forgiveness. What happens in the confessional is that we celebrate these present realities — our repentance and God's forgiveness — and in the very celebration of them we intensify their presence in our lives.

Or take the sacrament of Matrimony. A man and a woman are already committed to one another when they come before the altar of God. What the wedding is is a celebration of their commitment which intensifies and deepens that commitment. But if they are not already committed to one another when they come to the altar, there may be a wedding ceremony, but there is no true marriage. For if the commitment is lacking, there is no reality present to celebrate. The wedding ceremony in such a case has no real human or sacramental meaning.

NEXT WEEK: Making liturgy a reality

WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mk. 1: 14-20; (R1) Jon. 3: 1-5, 10; (R2) 1 Cor. 7: 29-31.

The Book of Jonah takes just two pages in the Bible. Why not read it this week? It really is a humorous story, full of satire and irony. Probably the only historical thing about it is the name of the prophet Jonah. But he is not the author of the book since Jonah was an 8th century prophet, whereas the story was written around 400 B.C.

The Jews had just come back from exile in Babylon. They found that pagans had settled in Palestine. In a short time the Jews started to intermarry with them, to the great detriment of their religion.

In the crisis God raised up Nehemiah, who went around breaking up the marriages. As a result of this cleansing movement, the Jews got the idea that God was their particular possession and that he had no interest in other people. Theologically, this is unsound. God is the God of all men, no matter what their nation may be. If they repent, he will be merciful. "God is good and upright, he shows sinners the way" (Resp. Ps.). That is what the author of Jonah wanted to teach.

To get this teaching across the author used a story, a delightful and fictitious one. God sends Jonah to Niniveh, the capital of cruel Assyria. Assyria had destroyed ten of the twelve tribes of Israel. Hence for the Jew, it personified evil and enmity with God. Yet Jonah was to preach penance to the despised Assyrians. He by no means relishes

the role. In fact, he takes off in the opposite direction to escape fulfilling it. He boards a ship.

God, of course, is not to be frustrated. There is miracle after miracle — a storm, a choice by lot, and a big fish. After a three-day retreat in the fish's belly, Jonah decides to go along with God.

Conveniently spewed up in the northern section of the Mediterranean, he goes to Niniveh and preaches. The worst possible thing happens. He is a success. The Ninivites listen and are converted — and saved. Horrors! So Jonah sulks. God's mercy saved Jonah from drowning. God's mercy forgave Jonah his disobedience. And yet, Jonah would deny this mercy to others. What a satire on the narrow-mindedness of those who all along have been the recipients of God's mercy, yet begrudge it to others.

St. Mark shows Christ preaching the same message as the author of Jonah. "The good news of God, which he proclaimed is the good news about God, namely, that God is the God of all men — a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, rich in clemency, loath to punish" (Jon. 4:2).

Only one condition is set to receive God's favors. It is the same condition set for the Ninivites — "Reform your lives." This means more than "keep the Ten Commandments." In the mouth of Jesus it meant "believe in the Gospel." To "believe in the Gospel" obviously meant doing what the four apostles called by Jesus did: to follow him unconditionally and share his task of bringing the good news about God's love for men to other men.

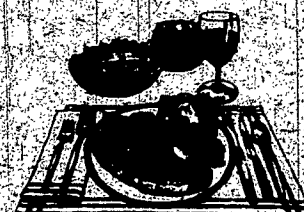
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Deaths

Fr. John White, Former City Man

Father John J. White of Verona, Mo., who began his studies for the priesthood here, died unexpectedly Jan. 8, 1976. He had been pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Verona.

Father White attended St. Andrew's Seminary with men who were ordained to the priesthood in 1941. He continued his education at Niagara University and was ordained for the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau in Missouri.

A friend and St. Andrew's classmate, Edward M. Weigel of El Rancho Drive, said that Father White was born here, lived in Elmerston Road, was graduated from St. Boniface School in 1929 and joined St. Anne's parish when it was established in 1931. The priest's father was the late John White, onetime superintendent of the Rochester State Hospital. His mother, Genevieve, worked there as a nurse.

The mother survives, and soon will be living, Weigel reported, at Mercy Villa, 1825 South Rogers Springfield, Mo. 65807.

THE OPEN WINDOW



Fr. Louis Hohman

Dear Father Hohman:

Recently a friend and I had a discussion regarding a young couple married in the Catholic Church who prior to their marriage had decided that they would have no children during their married life and would use effective contraceptives to this end. My friend thinks that this is a commendable position in view of world overpopulation and hunger.

Would you explain the Catholic position in this matter supporting your opinions with scripture?

Yours in Christ,
I.M.

Dear J.M.:

According to the teaching of the Catholic Church when a couple get married they have the right to

children if they are capable of having children. To deny this right to either one, either permanently or even temporarily, would be to invalidate the marriage. In other words, in a case of the exclusion of the right to have children there would be no marriage at all.

Now when you ask if it is commendable to not have children in view of world overpopulation and hunger, I would ask in return, "Do you think that not having children in this country has anything to do with the problem of hunger or over-population in, say, India?" Personally I can see a real connection between the reasonableness of having children and these particular matters when there is a direct connection. But I would think that the motives of a person who would exclude children from marriage in this country for those particular reasons would be at least suspect. It is very possible that in the future the United States of America, the richest country in the world, might become quite underpopulated, while the countries of Asia would become overrun, which would only accentuate the problem rather than alleviate it. Our problem with hunger is getting our superabundance of food to the other countries or helping them to produce enough food on their own. To make it merely a problem of overpopulation is to oversimplify the whole thing.

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