

Liturgy in America

By FATHER ROBERT J. KENNEDY

"Pastoral Liturgy in America" was the theme of the fifth annual conference of the Murphy Center for Liturgical Research held last month at the University of Notre Dame.

The concern of the main speakers and workshop sessions was not a matter of deciding what further changes would make our liturgy "American." Rather, since we are Americans celebrating the universal mysteries of our faith, it centered on how contemporary American experience can make our liturgy, in all its forms, a living liturgy.

An assessment of the nature of our experience was implicit in all these sessions. I would like to raise here briefly three of the main themes that were present in this assessment.

Archbishop John Quinn of Oklahoma City stated at the opening session that "liturgy is nothing if it is not prayer." Throughout the rest of the conference speakers and participants alike struggled with the meaning of this. Yes, among American Catholics there is a deep desire to pray. But how? How can we ar-

ticulate what God is saying to us and doing for us in this land of ours? And once we know, how can we adequately respond?

The American people today, in Father Vincent Dwyer's view, ache for a spiritual life and meaning, while, at the same time, contributing to the breakdown of trust that could enable the discovery of this meaning. We Americans desperately seek community, friendship and support, yet find it so excruciating to share and reveal ourselves. We cannot accept our own sin, and so fail to forgive and heal our brothers and sisters.

For all our progress in technology, all our freedom and rugged individualism, one more discovery must be made, one more frontier crossed. Tired of prepackaged life and the waste of our own progress, we have set out in search of the meaning of it all. God has been good, we know, to his

American people, and there is hope in the search. Our vision is slowly clearing to take a long, loving look at the real, at the living God.

But the hope present in this search for meaning is accompanied yet by a call to conversion. We must take ownership of the Spirit present in our own lives (a very difficult thing to do), uprooting our brokenness and planting ourselves in the life of the Lord. Like the Prodigal Son, we must come to ourselves, cultivating the heart that realm of healing that will enable us to arise and go to the Father — together.

And this is the third critical element: how does a community so varied as the American community pray together? Is the very pluralism that America is so proud of too great an obstacle to a living liturgy? The only answer was really a suggested means to an answer and a good principle for pastoral care: listen and care for the pain in people's hearts, work to quiet their inner rebellion, so that they can be reconciled with God and each other enough to pray enough to discover the meaning of the mystery of God in their lives.

All this — the need for a deepened spirituality, the call to conversion, and the sensitivity to the pluralism in our American parishes — was assessed with some practical suggestions, some of which can only be listed here.

Personally, our Baptism calls us to struggle with change and with each other to know more fully and deeply the wonderful workings of God. At the level of parish community, preachers of the Gospel need to provide both a word of comfort and a word of challenge with which their hearers can identify. Parish staffs can make the many hours of meeting time with parish groups times of prayer in a variety of forms, and times of always reacquainting themselves with their people and their people's pain. Parish members must always offer their gifts to the whole community and not be deterred by rebuff or refusal.

In the end, living worship will be the product of the work that sets God's (American) people free to experience in humbleness and thanksgiving the depth and riches of his mystery for us and within us.

COLLECTOR'S ITEMS!

It may be Dog Days in the diocese but for little Lynn Rupp and her friends it turned out to be Toad Days last week. Lynn, a sixth-grader, called the Courier-Journal last week to announce that she and Jenny Ray, Mike Zappia, Geraldine and Char Rupp and Jeff Corwaiz found themselves 100-count 'em, 100 toads in the Rupp backyard. Lynn is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Roy Rupp of St. John the Evangelist Parish, Greece.

"The Lord said to me, Go, prophesy to my people Israel."

Israel turned a deaf ear to Amos. So, hardly had he shaken its dust from his feet than Israel succumbed to Assyria (721 B.C.). History refers to the Northern Kingdom as "the ten lost tribes."

The gospel story parallels the Amos incident and contrasts with it. Again it is God who calls, but this time not one, but 12 men. He sends them also to Israel, not alone, but two by two to support one another. He instructs them to take nothing, to travel light — for His work will brook no delay and its success depends on only one thing: faith! Like Amos, they go without protest. Despite their words and works, they too are rejected by some.

Down through the centuries, God calls others: a Francis of Assisi, a Dominic, an Ignatius, Elizabeth Ann Seton, Mother Cabrini. We all take pride and glory in the faith and witness of such as these. We long for such lights to appear in our own times. Yet we seldom dream we are called to be one of these. We were baptized to be "leaven" in the world — agents of change, working within, unseen, but powerful enough to change conditions and attitudes around us.

Apparent success or failure is not what matters. Amos failed. The Twelve knew rejection. But both succeeded, because they were what God meant them to be and they did what He had called them to do.

When Bernard Baruch celebrated his 94th birthday, reporters asked him who he thought was the greatest person of the century. Reporters strained forward to catch the name of someone eminent or mighty.

"The fellow," Baruch said, "that does his job everyday."

Success is not in the achievement, but in the being and doing what God means each to be and to do!

WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mk. 6:7-13. (R1) Am. 7:12-15. (R2) Eph. 1:3-14.

Sunday's liturgy reveals once again the power of the word of God. God speaks to Amos, and Amos ups and goes from his sycamores and sheep. God-made-Man summons the Twelve, and they abandon their nets and fish — just like that!

Amos was both a shepherd and a dresser of sycamores. The sycamore produced an insipid fruit related to the fig but smaller; it was the food of the poor. At a certain stage in its development, the dresser had to puncture the fruit so that it would grow large and become edible.

Amos was minding his own business, doing his work, when all of a sudden God called him. (God so often calls man while he is doing what he ought.) "Go, prophesy to my people Israel," God said. And Amos upped and went.

Amos lived in Judah. God called him to prophesy in Israel. Civil war, after the death of Solomon, had split the kingdom of David in two: Israel, the northern kingdom of 10 tribes, and Judah, the southern one of 2 tribes. To prevent their subjects from going to Jerusalem and thus weakening their political loyalty, the northern kings had built shrines at Bethel and Dan.

At these sanctuaries, brotherhoods of prophets began to flourish. Their job was to offer political and religious advice to the king. These "prophets" were in reality time-serving professionals, whose chief interest was their fees.

When Amos came to Bethel and denounced the crimes of the kingdom, he incurred the ire of the priest at Bethel, a sycophant named Amaziah. Judging Amos to be like himself, a prophet for gain, he told him in no uncertain terms to go poaching elsewhere. Amos fiercely retorted that he belonged to no brotherhood of prophets. "God called me," he thundered.

INSIGHTS On Pastoral Liturgy

GOLDEN WEDDING

Mr. and Mrs. James H. Sentner of Birchwood Drive observed their 50th wedding anniversary June 29. A Mass at St. Salome's Church was concelebrated by Msgr. Gerard

Kreig and Father Conrad Sundholm. Father Robert McNamara asked the blessing at the luncheon that followed in the Pt. Pleasant Fire Hall.

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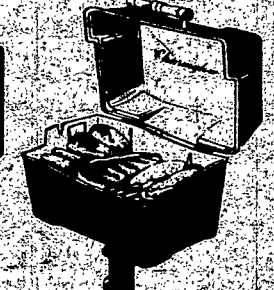
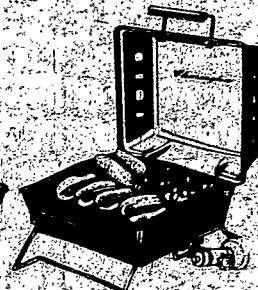
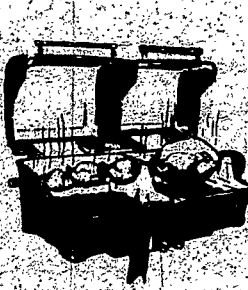
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