

Getting Going — Again

By Father Robert J. Kennedy

Without wanting to hasten summer's end, the time is arriving when liturgy committees will want to renew their efforts in assisting their parishes in living worship of the Father. Good planning and educational efforts will foster growth in prayer, allowing the liturgical rites to become more a part of the interior life of the parishioners.

There are at least three things that will help liturgy committees in their task:

(1) Decide on a Reasonable Amount of Work. One of the main reasons committees become frustrated is that they are trying to do too much at once. Review the calendar for the year and decide what seasonal and special celebrations will be tackled. But keep in mind that the planning of, let us say, six liturgical celebrations must be done in the context of maintain-

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ing ongoing areas of responsibility (scheduling and support of liturgical ministers, proving new music for congregational participation, providing educational information to the parish, etc.).

In addition, committees should beware of the desire to constantly seek out something new to do with the liturgy. Instead, it might be worthwhile to deepen the experience of a season, program or event already addressed by the planning work of the committee. For example, what do the prayers of the Thanksgiving Day Votive Mass really say, why is our parish having a communal celebration of the

Anointing of the Sick; what does Lent mean anymore?

Many pages could be written about the variety of goals a committee could undertake, and already these few words suggest a workload heavier than one could handle comfortably. So, when a committee sets about to develop its programs for the year, the tasks and responsibilities should be clearly outlined from the start.

(2) Be Creative in Planning. However, if a committee is faithful to its role as facilitator of the expression of the faith of the people, it cannot help but be creative! Now, by creativity I do not mean the addition of banners to the liturgy, having a folk group, or one of the parishioners' own flower arrangements, although these have their place. And creativity certainly does not include the whims or prejudices of committees or celebrants.

To be creative in planning, a committee must first of all attempt to tune into the experience of the whole people, the whole parish. Knowing the people of the parish — their faith struggles and peace — will suggest an incredible number of creative expressions of the whole people's worship. A committee must also take seriously the variety of options available in the liturgical rites themselves; choosing just the right words to express faith and prayer is most important. Then, when one has a feeling for the whole people and for good words for prayer, additional and appropriate elements of movement, symbol and decoration can be chosen.

(3) Study and Pray. A committee that doesn't spend a large amount of time in prayer and reflection deepening their own knowledge of the mysteries Christians celebrate, just isn't a liturgy committee. Frustration is also probably high. A committee could easily begin with the two books most central to all liturgical celebration: the Lectionary and the Sacramentary. Material enough for a year is to be found in the study of the introductory material in each of these books. Then, use the readings to nourish prayer, and the prayers to express praise and need.

When I think about committees taking these three points to heart, it sets me off dreaming with starry eyes about how great our committees and parishes

abortion for convenience' sake, even though God said, "Thou shalt not kill."

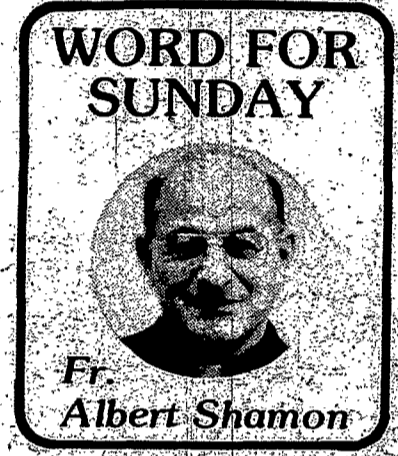
This tendency to serve God my way and not His way is as old as the human race.

The first reading is from the book of Deuteronomy, one of the most often quoted Old Testament books in the New Testament. Deuteronomy is a law book, expanded by homiletic and poetic material. It expresses the religion of Israel in all its purity. It is a vibrant appeal to be faithful to the true God, who is a loving Father and whose commandments are the gift of His paternal love for the education of His children and for leading them to happiness. Deuteronomy insists on interior religion. It proclaims the primacy of the Spirit over Law. It speaks to the heart. It is the most Christian book of the Old Testament.

Moses warned Israel not to add or subtract to God's commandments. Of course, time and living give deeper insight to God's Law. This is Tradition. What Moses decried, however, was not such Tradition, but man-made traditions.

Mark gives an example of this in the gospel — the ritual washings before a meal. Such man-made regulations touched only external behavior, but not the heart. They left motives and intentions untouched. When such man-made regulations became sanctity symbols and pre-empted God's commandments, they led man away from God and from true religion. Thus the Scribes and Pharisees, who insisted on the cleaning of cups and dishes, actually rejected the meal — the Bread of Life. Had they had their hearts in the commandments of God, they would have been open to the Word of God.

Today's readings, therefore, warn all of us against self-deception. All of us are disconcertingly ready to justify and rationalize whatever we do. From time to time, it behooves us to evaluate our service of God honestly. To help us, there is the sacrament of penance. Undoubtedly, the neglect of this sacrament accounts for the situation ethics that seems to have become the norm of morality for more and more people. "For who is judged by himself," said St. Bernard, "is judged by a fool."



WORD FOR SUNDAY
Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mk. 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23. (R1) Dt. 4: 1-2, 6-8. (R2) Jas. 1: 17-18, 21-22, 27.

A man walked down a street. As he passed a house, a woman screamed, "Get out of here. I don't need your help when you do it that way."

Somebody answered back, "But I'm doing everything you told me to do."

The woman retorted, "I know you are, but your heart's not in it."

With that a door slammed and a young man came out muttering to himself, "I give up! Nobody can satisfy her. She wants everything her own way."

The theme of Sunday's liturgy is, "Put your heart in it." Quoting Isaiah, our Lord complained, "This people pays me lip service, but their heart is far from me."

What did our Lord mean? He meant we sometimes put aside His will for our own. We rationalize. We follow our preferences to His commands. Once two friends met. One was a Buddhist, the other a Catholic. After much talk, the subject drifted to religion.

The Buddhist said, "Well, we are both serving God."

"Yes," answered the Catholic, "you're serving God your way, and I am serving Him His way."

That's the question: Do we serve God His way or our way? How many, for instance, follow their own preferences to God's commands. How many opt for artificial contraception, even though it is explicitly condemned in *Humanae Vitae*. How many savor divorce even though Christ said, "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." How many submit to

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