

# The Ministry of The Liturgy Committee

Over the past couple of weeks, we have written in this column of what a parish liturgy committee should be doing (in three "easy" steps) and what resources it should have at its service. Now let us look briefly at what a liturgy committee should be.

Most importantly, a committee should be a sign of what it wants the whole parish to be in Christ. By taking the time for prayer recommended previously in this column the committee allows the Spirit of Christ to create out of it a community — a people for whom unity matters more than pet projects, cooperation is more

important than competition, and honest searching together to find just the right expression of praise and thanks is more fruitful than planning many celebrations superficially. In such prayerful committees, disagreements are not divisions that undermine faith and the value of personal opinion, rather they are the creative tension that makes a liturgy meaningful for the parish, expressive of its worship of the Father.

For these reasons, a parish committee should also be representative. Unity does not mean that all think alike and hold the same opinions; rather it means

that all are working toward the same goals in Christ. In fact, it is absolutely necessary that all the various styles of devotion and piety be at least heard by a committee. The committee can easily find its work very good and well-responded to, yet be unaware of a large segment of people who are feeling more and more alienated. A committee's responsibility is to the whole parish, not just to those who like the "choir Mass" or "folk Mass." To do this, a committee may even invite a representative group of parishioners to a couple of meetings each year to voice their concerns.

of hope to those unemployed, those who have just lost a son or daughter, mother or father in death, those who will count themselves lucky to put a decent meal on the table? How will a liturgy committee plan Advent worship of God when these people are joined in one Church with those who have the luxury of celebrating the season more elaborately and more easily?

Obviously, the overall work of the parish liturgy committee is a ministry, a work done in the name of Christ on behalf of or for the benefit of others. In this case, it is for the expression of the parish's faith in worship of the Father through Christ. Each committee member is, therefore, most important and the committee together is a sign of hope for all.

## WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mk. 9:30-37, (R1) Wis. 2:12, 17-20, (R2) Jas. 3:16-4:3

The first reading in Sunday's liturgy refers to what happened to the Jews in Alexandria in the century before Christ. What was happening to them prefigured what would happen to the Jew par excellence — to Jesus Himself in Jerusalem. What was prefigured about Jesus was also foretold long before by the prophets. The words "to be delivered" (R3) were taken from Second Isaiah. The phrase "into the hands of men" was from Jeremiah, the prophet who more than any other represented the suffering Messiah.

This prediction of Jesus is the second time in Mark's gospel that He tells His disciples of His imminent passion. Jesus just couldn't seem to get through to them that the Messiah must suffer, that was why He kept alluding to the prophets and the Scriptures. And yet what great achievement has there ever been that did not cost blood and sweat and toil and tears.

Jesus came to found a kingdom — a kingdom whose magnitude would dwarf all other earthly creations. It was to be no Babel towering sky-high, no city seated on a mountaintop. He called it His Church and built it on a rock, Peter. As He slept in death, it issued from His bleeding side, like the first woman, the mother of all mankind.

Down through the centuries some distorted notions have cropped up about this Church. Of course the Church is necessary for salvation, and we become members of it through baptism — but baptism as such is no guarantee of salvation. Then too there is the ancient axiom, "Outside the Church there is no salvation," but this does not indicate a definitive reprobation of those who remain outside the visible Church.

Many Christians readily believe that the practice of the sacraments offers some assurance regarding the hereafter, provided they live lives in conformity with the moral law. Of course this does! And yet is this the real role of the Church in God's plan?

Do we become members of the Church in order to gain our own salvation, or principally to cooperate with Christ in the salvation of all mankind?

When God first gathered to Himself a people, it was in the desert of Sinai. The Promised Land was forty years away. His summons was no absolute surety of salvation: the harsh realities of the desert were there to face. Often those He had called yearned for the security

of Egypt. What God had demanded was faith — a permanent, day-by-day trust in Himself. His chosen ones didn't do so well in their response (cp. Ps. 95). Even when some had reached the Promised Land, they thought this was it! The prophets tried again and again to tell them it was not. God wanted their hearts.

Finally, Jesus came. He alone answered the Father's summons perfectly. His answer cost Him His life. With Him, however, the true nature of salvation was revealed — it was for all men, not for one people only. For it was love — Jesus' love for all — that prompted His "Yes" to His Father's summons. Thus He became the center of the true assembly, the people of God, the Church!

This Church is His mystic body. Freely, He chose her. To her alone He promised fidelity all days. Her mission is to all nations. Yet just belonging to her affords no absolute security — the disconcerting desert experience is still ours. Day by day, we must depend on God's good will: **live by faith and live the Faith.** Our love — like Jesus' — most encompass all and everyone.

Conversion of others must purify, deepen our own awareness of salvation. Our listening to others, walking with them, hearing them, searching out answers with them will bear witness to the transcendence of the religion of love and give to our love a truly "catholic" dimension.

The Eucharist summons to universal salvation. Its principal emphasis is catholicity. It is a cameo of what should be cosmic — a call to all to become brothers in Christ to worship the same Father.

Another way for a liturgy committee to be representative is to have among its members liaisons from the various groups of liturgical ministers (musicians, lectors, ushers, eucharistic ministers, sacristans). Active, constant communication with these ministers is most essential for good liturgical celebrations.

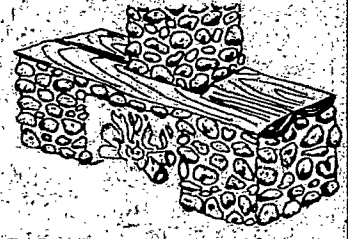
Crucial also is the constant participation of at least one of the clergy staff of the parish, not as controller of what will be allowed, but as the principal celebrant of the parish community who must be in tune both with the concerns of his people and with the whys and wherefores of the steps in planning.

A third thing a parish liturgy committee should be is sensitive to the needs of the whole people of the parish. This has been in the background of what has been said so far, but it deserves specific mention. In any given week, parishioners have multiple experiences of faith, love, hope, mission, or the lack thereof, all of which will affect their worship. Let us use Advent as an example, since it will soon come under consideration of the liturgy committee. It is a season of hopeful expectation and great joy because of the coming of Christ, not so much as the Babe of Bethlehem, but as the glorious Saviour of the People. It is also linked with a secular season of gift-giving, family and prosperity. A committee should ask itself what will be the experience of Advent-Christmas for those who have found a loving, supportive community and those who are normally isolated and lonely. What will be the experience of the season

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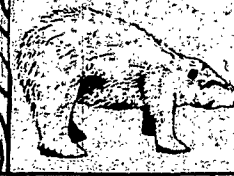
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