

# Liturgy and Contemplation

## 2 Priests Swap Pastoral Posts

**By Msgr. William H. Shannon**  
Liturgy is a celebration of our faith, that is to say, it celebrates the experience of God going on in our lives. This means that if we are not experiencing God in our daily lives, we shall have little to celebrate when we gather for liturgy. Liturgy cannot create a faith experience out of nothing, it can only celebrate and deepen what is already happening to us in our lives.

Liturgy, in other words, is the focus of a prayerful contact with God that should be a constant reality in our lives. Good liturgies happen, not simply because there is good planning, good music, good style of celebration, but especially because those who celebrate are men and women of prayer. Without deep personal prayer, liturgy will inevitably be a shallow and superficial experience.

The fathers of the Second Vatican Council were well aware of the importance of personal prayer as the source and ground of the fruitfulness of liturgical prayer. In the **Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy** they wrote:

"The spiritual life is not

# INSIGHTS On Pastoral Liturgy

limited solely to participation in the liturgy. The Christian is indeed called to pray with his brethren, but he must also enter into his chamber to pray to the Father in secret, yet more, according to the teaching of the Apostle, he should pray without ceasing." (Art. 12)

It is not enough to pray in community, we also must pray alone. Every Christian must enter into the desert of solitude to find God in the depths of his own being. The early Fathers of the Church went physically into the desert, for them the desert was paradise for it was the place where they could search for God and find Him who dwelt in their hearts. We, too, need the "desert experience," a time and place in our day when we can get beneath the surface realities of our lives and find "our heart," our center. To find our center is to find our real selves.

Finding our real selves is no easy task. For each of us is two selves. There is the **manifest Self**, the Self that everyone sees, the Self that appears on the surface. But there is also the **hidden Self**, the Self we really are in our depths. This hidden Self we hardly know, because our lives are brimful of activities that tend to hide it from our view. This is the Self we catch glimpses of at times — in moments of reflection, perhaps in moments of sorrow. This hidden Self is scarcely ever revealed to others, though sometimes we offer fleeting views of it to those we love.

It is this hidden Self that is at the center of our being. For it is at the center, in our depths, that we are our true Selves. It is at the center, and not just on the surface, that God knows us. More than that, it is at the center of our lives (in our "hearts") that God dwells. That is why we can experience God truly and deeply in our lives only if we find our center. Finding the center, finding our real Selves, is what prayer and contemplation are all about.

The word "contemplation" includes the word "temple." The center of our being is truly a temple where God dwells. Did not Jesus say:

"If any one loves me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make our home with him." (John 14:23)

Contemplation means finding the temple in the depths of our being, where the Father, His Son and the Spirit dwell. Contemplation is not just thinking about the "All-Holy God," it is experiencing the reality of His presence.

A disciple once came to a teacher to study and learn about God. "Teach me about God," he said to the teacher. The teacher was silent. Again he said: "Please teach me about God." Once more the teacher was silent. Finally, he asked a third time. This time the teacher answered: "Can you not see, I have been teaching you about God. God is silence."

We all need room in our lives for the "desert experience" — the experience of silence and solitude. There we can find our real Selves, our center. There God speaks to our heart. There we can hear Him and learn to respond. Meeting God in the desert experience of quiet contemplation prepares us to meet Him in the liturgical celebration.

## Nutrition Center Opened at St. Michael's

A new nutrition center for senior citizens has been opened at St. Michael's Church, 869 N. Clinton Ave. under the auspices of the Catholic Family Center, in cooperation with the parish.

Hopefully some 60 older persons will be fed at the lunchtime meal. According to James Maloney, director of the Catholic Family Center, those participating will be asked to contribute whatever they can and proceeds will be used toward events for senior citizens, such as trips.

The Association for the Blind prepares the food for the nutrition center.

temple worship, the paschal supper survived.

In the reform of institutions, the Spirit led the way. When the Spirit drew the Gentiles to the faith, the Church began to discover her true nature and began to be called "christian."


In 1959 ecclesial institutions seemed paralyzed, unable to enter into dialogue with modern man. Then a prophet arose through whom the Spirit spoke: John XXIII. He convened Vatican Council II that forced the Church to read "the signs of the times" and usher in a new Pentecost.

In the early Church, it was Jewish exclusivism that needed to be sloughed off. In the 20th century, it was a Westernized Christianity and the need to adapt ecclesial institutions to diverse cultures. Young Asian and African churches needed local liturgy, local law, local theology, local spirituality. In this way all peoples would begin to feel at home in the Church. Catholicity demands diversity in her institutions.

All institutional reform begins with liturgical reform. The first document of Vatican II was the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. Its two basic reforms sprang from two early 20th century movements: greater lay participation in the liturgy and a keen awareness of missionary responsibility, which effected greater emphasis on the Liturgy of the Word and a better organization of the liturgical assembly itself.

The success of this liturgical renaissance has caused new problems to surface. Priests and laity feel something is still lacking. Maertens and Frisque think this lack is **modernity**. Our liturgical heritage has been purified, restored to its essentials, stripped of excrescences. But it does not seem to provide sufficient openings for modern man to feel at ease there, to feel a direct link with his secular occupations. Domestic liturgies are searching out their own new ways. The Spirit, who was at work among Eldad and Medad and in a man not of the company of Jesus, is still at work in the periphery of the Church, speaking no doubt to the whole through its parts.

**WORD FOR SUNDAY**



Fr. **Albert Shamon**

**Sunday's Readings:** (R3) Mk. 9:38-43, 45, 47-48. (R1) Num. 11:25-29. (R2) Jas. 5:1-6.

In the readings of next Sunday's liturgy, we see the Spirit of God operative "outside" the establishment. When Moses imparted the Spirit of God on the elders who surrounded him, God's Spirit also came upon two of the elders, Eldad and Medad, who had not been present at the ceremony of investiture. Likewise in the gospel a man, not of the company of Jesus, expelled demons in the name of Jesus.

The Spirit of God is not bound. He often acts independently of established institutions.

Men have always attached great importance to their institutions. Institutions are vehicle ideas and offer the tangibility sensate man hankers for. But the danger of institutions is, they can become absolutized — golden calves or sacred cows.

With the beginnings of faith, however, institutions began to topple. Israel met God in historical events. He was free absolutely. He could have a Temple, but dispense with it if He did not receive proper worship there. When kings were not faithful, He let the Davidic dynasty fall. Not even was the Sinai Covenant eternal. The whole story of Israel is one of criticism of its institutions. One thing did stand up: the Jewish conviction that they were irrevocably the Chosen People.

When Jesus came, His attitude to the institutions of His people was characteristic. He observed the Law faithfully, but He was no slave to it. He realized the whole Law is summed up in the love of God and neighbor — but a love without limits. He saw the Sabbath as for man, not man for the Sabbath. He restored man's liberty: institutions were for man, not man for institutions. If they interfered with his spiritual growth, they were to be remodeled or abolished. Thus Jesus phased out many religious institutions of His day: circumcision, the Sabbath,

Fathers James C. Burke and Thomas Nellis, both associate pastors, are trading places, the Pastoral Office announced last week. Father Burke moves from St. Alphonsus, Auburn, to Holy Ghost Coldwater. Father Nellis, from Holy Ghost to the Auburn parish.

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