

Insights in Liturgy

The Usher and Parish Liturgy

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At the heart of the Church's liturgical teaching is the Second Vatican Council's call to "full, conscious, and active participation" of the faithful. The participation of the assembly is "the aim to be considered before all else." (CSL 14)

Reliable commentators on church architecture point out that the model for worship space is no longer the ancient temple, the medieval cathedral, or the contemporary public hall, but the home. The home is the model environment for stimulating personal dialogue, interaction, and confrontation, where there is no place for an audience.

The need for creating a home-like atmosphere is the essential ministry of the usher. The usher, acting on behalf of the assembly, is decisive in creating a climate of hospitality and friendliness among the people gathering to celebrate the liturgy. The role of the usher does not run alongside or counter to the liturgy, but is part of the liturgical action itself. The usher exercises a fundamental liturgical ministry by facilitating an atmosphere of the faithful.

Greeting and welcoming people at the door, providing a place for their coats, introducing strangers to a few regular members of the congregation, and

seating people close together to avoid pockets of emptiness between families is the best preparation for good liturgy. "Breaking the ice" with conversation has as important a place immediately preceding the liturgy as reflective silence has between the readings or after receiving communion. Withdrawal, aloofness or inhibition are not attitudes appropriate to the real presence of Christ's sacrament of unity and love.

Ushers are not door marshalls. Nor are they needed simply to take up the collection as an embarrassing necessity quickly gotten out of the way as the Mass continues. They are hosts and hostesses meant to engage the congregation as the primary symbol of Christ.

Ushers are liturgical ministers with a responsibility to respect and appreciate ritual communication. They need to understand the integral importance of the collection and the presentation of the gifts and the symbolic power of well-

ordered processions. In many simple but vital ways, ushers serve the liturgical community they represent by caring for the distribution and collection of participation aids, seeing that no one is neglected at the peace greeting, and estimating the number of communicants at a particular Mass so that sufficient hosts may be presented and consecrated without resorting to those reserved.

Finally, as all liturgical roles, the ministry of usher is not exhausted by its liturgical duties. Drawn close to people and their needs at the Sunday celebration, ushers will naturally meet members of the community looking for work or suffering the tragedy of accidents, alcoholism or loneliness. In many cases, ushers can bring these needs to the attention of the parish staff or other appropriate persons or agencies long before someone might otherwise seek help.

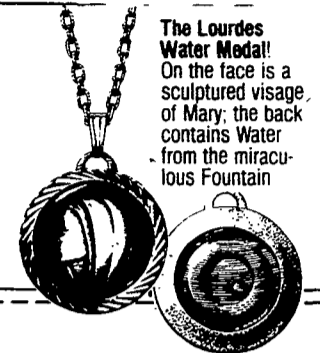
But whether by alerting

others, offering consolation, or even taking the opportunity to visit the sick themselves, ushers are in an excellent position to provide a feeling of contact and closeness to the faith

community. Above all, this is the sense of warmth and responsibility which enables the usher to become an effective minister attending to the needs of the local church.

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WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Lk. 23:35-43. (R1) 2 Sm. 5:1-3. (R2) Col. 1:12-20.

The new Liturgical Calendar puts the Feast of Christ the King at the end of the Church Year, as a fitting climax to the life of Christ unfolded on other Sundays.

The first reading narrates how David became king over all of Israel. This happened in two stages. First, David became king over only two tribes in the South: Juda and Benjamin. After seven years the northern king, Ishbaal, Saul's sole surviving son, was murdered. Then it was that the remaining ten tribes came to David and asked him to rule over them too. They gave three reasons.

First, "we are your bone and your flesh"; that is, you are one of us.

Secondly, "it was you who led the Israelites out and brought them back"; that is, you've earned the right to rule by your military prowess when Saul was king.

Lastly, the Lord Himself called you "to shepherd my people Israel." Kingship is your vocation.

David was Israel's greatest king. So multifaceted was his personality, so incredible his feats in war and in peace that the Jews expected the Messiah to be like him. Jesus was.

He became one of us, flesh and bone — "the Word was made flesh."

He came in response to the Father's call. The Father sent Him. Lastly, he rescued us from our enemies, the power of darkness.

It might seem strange that the gospel chosen for the Feast of Christ the King is the crucifixion story. We perhaps would have opted for the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday when He was acclaimed king.

The crucifixion story is rightly chosen, for Jesus was never more king than on the cross. There He fought our battles. There He made the royal gesture of giving His life for others. There He saved us.

Luke dramatized what He was really doing on the cross by the story of the Good Thief. What a story!

Why is the thief called

"good"? Because he had a sense of justice, of concern for another. He said, in effect, "We are guilty. We are getting what we deserve. But this man is innocent. Desist from upbraiding Him."

He had faith in the kingship of Jesus. Calling Jesus by name (which he had gotten from the inscription on the cross), he prayed for a remembrance.

He got a royal answer. "This day you shall be with me in paradise." Not years from then, but now, "this day." Not just a remembrance, but an honored place, "with me."

Today not a few reject Christ as King. O yes, they may call him "Superstar" or stage Him as a merry-making fool. But still only a man for all that. St. Paul called him "Head" — top Man. Why? Because he is God, Creator; and because he is Savior, Redeemer (R2).

As our God, He keeps everything in existence. Without His continued help we all would fall back into the utter nothingness from which we were made, as the light goes out when the electric current is cut. How absolutely dependent we are! Between us and nothingness, there stands only the Son of God. Truly He is King!

As our Redeemer, He is the firstborn of the dead; guaranteeing a second, like the Good Thief, and a third, and a fourth, and so on and on — a resurrection for all who believe in Him. What a powerful King!

As His followers, it behooves us to renew our allegiance each Sunday.

Each Sunday to say, "Here we are, your bone and your flesh" Our Creator!

"Here we are, to give thanks to the Father through you for having rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us into a kingdom of light and love." Our Redeemer!

"Here we are, to commune each Sunday with you that the Bread of Life will strengthen us to be loyal to your way of life." Our King!

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