



Jubilee

Mrs. Hilda Gouse, left, was one of the participants in the celebration at St. Mary's, Dansville, marking the silver jubilee of her daughter, Sister Patricia Gouse, SSJ, principal of St. Mary's School. At the parish reception, Sister Patricia was presented with a silver cross by St. Mary's pupils.

Insights in Liturgy

By THOMAS and MICHELE DRISCOLL

Sacramentals

Sacramentals can be defined as those symbols and symbolic actions which help Christians to prepare for and to deepen their experience of the Lord's sanctifying presence in the liturgy. Three categories of sacramentals can be enumerated.

First, some sacramentals consecrate persons. This would include the blessing of abbots and the consecration of virgins. A second category is the blessing of objects such as ashes, palms and oils. The third category includes the ceremonies which are added to a sacramental celebration to enhance the ritual. For example, the catechumenate of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults calls for exorcisms, signs of the cross, anointings, impositions of hands, and the bestowal of the white garment and candle.

Sacramentals are distinguished from sacraments in that they are not efficacious "ex opere operato" but only "ex opere operantis Ecclesiae"; that is, not of themselves, but only as part of the communal prayer of the Church. While they exist primarily for the enhancement of liturgical action, sacramentals do share in the sanctification of Christians because they are symbols of the Paschal mystery.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council specified two functions of sacramentals. The first function is that of disposing people to more fully participate in their celebration of the Lord's presence. All sacramentals point to the Eucharistic liturgy as expressive of the whole mystery of redemption (cf. CSL, 47). The second function is the deification of various occasions in life. For the Christian, brought into a new

creation by Baptism into Christ's death and resurrection, everything is a proper subject for inclusion into this way of life. Circumstances of human activity are consecrated through the communal prayer of the Church. For example, entrance into the religious life, burial rites, blessing of expectant mothers, all could be considered sacramentals.

Article 79 of CSL points to a renewal on our exercise of sacramentals: "The sacramentals are to undergo a revision which takes into account the primary principle of enabling the faithful to participate intelligently, actively, and easily; the circumstances of our own days must also be considered. When rituals are revised, as laid down in Art. 63, new sacramentals may also be added as the need for these becomes apparent." The Roman Catholic Church is presently engaged in the task of rediscovering, revising and creating anew the sacramentals in order to carry out the expectations of this document.

Two considerations emerge from this reflection on sacramentals. For the vast majority of believers, sacramentals have frequently been limited to the category of medals, scapulars, statues and other articles. The faithful need to be led to a broadened understanding of sacramentals which appreciates ritualized actions.

When sacramental articles and movements are employed, there is a need to be sensitive to their artistic harmony, quality, and appropriateness (see Environment and Art in Catholic Worship from the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, Art. 19-26).

"Because the assembly gathers in the presence of God to celebrate his saving deeds, liturgy's climate is one of awe, mystery, wonder, reverence, thanksgiving and praise. So it cannot be satisfied with anything less than the beautiful in its artifacts, movements and appeals to the senses." (Environment and Art, 34)

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