

Insights in Liturgy

Sacramentary: Prayerbook, Knowledge

By Father James Saeers

In this age of Mass media it is not unusual to find liturgy committee members furthering their education through the use of video-tape recorders, movies, film strips, in addition to the vast number of printed resources. These individuals may be surprised to find that the Sacramentary (Roman Missal) which is used at all celebrations of the Eucharist is one of the most valuable sources of prayer and education to be found in the Church today.

What is it? "A sacramentary is a collection of presidential prayers for the celebration of the eucharist. Such books have been in use from about the fifth century," states the foreword of the book.

Although it has been in use for approximately 15 centuries, the sacramentary is a book that has undergone many changes. In our own day it has become primarily a volume of presidential prayers a stark contrast with the pre-Vatican II missal of St. Pius V, which contained parts of the Mass that had previously been shared by other ministers — deacons, lectors, song leaders, choir. In narrowing the scope of the Sacramentary, the Fathers of Vatican Council II broadened and restored the vision of Church — a people who share in the ministry and celebration of our common faith in Jesus Christ.

To think of the Sacramentary as merely a "book of prayers for the priest" would be foolish. The text has a profound preface which consists of "approximately 83 pages of information of equal importance to both presider and planner. On those pages may be found notes of explanation about the Sacramentary itself (a brief history and reasons for change); guidelines for the celebration of the eucharist (this General Instruction section is 35 pages long; a Directory for Masses with Children, and the norms for the liturgical year and the new General Roman Calendar.

In addition to this are appendices to the text which include the Rite of Blessing and Sprinkling Holy Water, sample formulas for General Intercessions, various

prayers of preparation and thanksgiving, the Rite of Blessing of Oils and Consecrating the Chrism, musical settings for the Mass, and the approved text for the celebration of Mass in Latin.

This information, and the instructions found in the actual texts of prayers throughout the book, is not meant to be a list of rubrics to be followed for the sake of liturgical law, but rather a vision of the mind and heart of the Church in regard to our eucharistic celebrations. They are truly important to the worshipping community. As serious liturgists we should not approach this book merely to find out "how to do it," but rather to deepen our experience of liturgy — to discover why we are celebrating as a Eucharistic Assembly!

Although we may feel a bit overwhelmed when we first glance at all that the Sacramentary contains, it is important to remember that by itself the text is incomplete. It is necessary to

study this book in relationship to other documents which have been published by the Church since the Sacramentary was published in 1969. Of paramount importance are the following: "Music in Catholic Worship," 1972; "The Rites of the Catholic Church as Revised by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, and Published by the Authority of Pope Paul VI," 1976; "Environment and Art in Catholic Worship," 1978. In addition to these texts all Diocesan Guidelines should be consulted.

The Sacramentary is meant to grow and change in union with the Church. We would be fools to "canonize" it as some of our brothers and sisters have done with the Tridentine Mass and the Sacramentary of St. Pius V. Studies are presently underway to refine the language of the text and increase the number of eucharistic prayers. As members of liturgy committees we would be wise to study the Sacramentary as well as other liturgical documents of the Church.

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