

Insights in Liturgy

By Pam Schaeffer

General Intercessions

The General Intercessions, which conclude the Liturgy of the Word, were reintroduced into the liturgy by the post-Vatican II reformers of the Mass. The Council explicitly wished this to happen (Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy, C.L., 53) because this prayer had "suffered loss through the ancients of history" (C.L., 50; Flannery, P. 17). As a matter of fact, the intercessions are one of the oldest parts of the Mass.

These prayers of intention were given a loose format by the Conciliar Fathers (outlined below), and were originally known during the first years of the reformed liturgy as The Prayer of the

Faithful. This terminology proved to be confusing. Prayer of the Faithful was interpreted by the people to mean "prayer of the laity," and they tended to set them apart from all other prayers. They were easily misconstrued as a time for sharing the "personal" prayers of the assembled people. The "universal" or "communal" nature of these petitions, as they are meant to be, was obscured by the misinterpretation of the word "faithful" to identify the laity, in exclusion of clergy. Clergy, religious, and laity alike, are, first of all, members of the "faithful" by right of baptism! In an effort to clarify these misconceptions, the basic outline of the Prayer of the Faithful was repeated in the 1969 "Ordo Missae," except the name was changed to

General Intercessions (General Instruction, G.I., 45-47).

This is not a prayer of the laity. It is, rather, the liturgy's petition — prayer par excellence. St. Cyprian called this the prayer of the "holy people assembled under the direction of the bishops." That is why "the priest directs the celebration from his chair or from the lectern (G.I., 99), and the reading of the intentions in this prayer belong to the deacon, as the one who serves the assembly" (G.I., 132), or to "the cantor, or other person. The congregation has a role by acclaiming the prayer in a common response after each intention or by silent prayer." (G.I., 47)

The General Intercessions should lead the congregation to acknowledge its concern for the needs of the larger Church and the world. Through these prayers the community is able to express its need for the continued guidance and strength that comes from God. Therefore, it is important that the prayers of petition be reflective of a prayer that is worldwide in scope, and not confined to the interests of the congregation that is present.

The customary format called for in the General Instruction (46) is: a) the needs of the Church; b) those burdened with any trouble; c) civil authorities

and the welfare of the whole world; and d) the local community. This is given as a guide, no official wording or order of intentions is obligatory. There are many resources available to help planners create these prayers for use in their community's liturgical celebrations. The word create is emphasized here to encourage the development of the gifts of the planners, and to discourage the concept of "canned" prayer that proves to be meaningless when applied to the wide variety of unique communities that subscribe to these aids.

It is of interest to note that the fourth section, that addressing the local community, does not mean just the people who are participating in the assembly. It includes the needs of those who are absent as well as those present (i.e. a death or the sick in the neighborhood, local or parish council elections, an ordination, a wedding, events or activities that will affect the parish, etc.). This is the way provided to reach a balance between the universal and the local. However, on special occasions such as a confirmation, a marriage, or a burial, the series can be adapted to the event. At other times, when the liturgy is not specifically designed

around a special occasion, some communities find it most helpful to conclude their general prayers with a call to those present to "reflect silently on their personal intentions," so that others can express their fellowship by praying with them.

The General should not merely echo the readings and the homily that have just preceded (as in fact often happened in an over-hasty development before the Council). Neither should it become an occasion for the free improvisation of the participants' reactions, as might be the temptation, say, at a Mass celebrated in a small group or in a home setting. These intercessions should remain general, as their name implies. It is also true that the intercessions are not meant to be a kind of moralizing appendage to the homily, or a repetition of the exhortation that is fittingly contained in the homily. No, the intercessions are prayers, not proclamations or even a simple instruction on Christian living.

The special nature of the intentions makes them a part of the liturgy that belongs to the people, and not a presidential prayer such as most of the prayers that end a liturgical action, or part of one (the prayer over the gifts at the end of the preparation of these, the concluding prayer after the sacrificial meal). However, there is no contradiction here saying the priest is the official leader of the General Intercessions (G.I., 47). He too, remember, is a member of God's people; moreover, the shared character of the intercessions for the intentions of the Church and the world brings out in a very impressive way, more so than any other part of the service, the priesthood of the entire community, a priesthood that includes both the ordained and the priesthood of all the People of God.

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Speaker

Dr. William L. Smith, former United States Commissioner of Education, will deliver the main address at this year's Alice L. Foley Lecture Series at Nazareth College Thursday, July 17, at 10 a.m. Dr. Smith is well known for his role in the development of the national Teacher Corps Program and is currently serving as Administrator of Education for Overseas Dependents within the newly created Department of Education in Washington, D.C. He is the sixth speaker in the lecture series initiated in 1975 by Nazareth College to honor Dr. Foley who retired as president of the college in June 1976. The lecture will be in the main auditorium of the Nazareth Arts Center and is open to the public without charge.

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PUZZLE ANSWERS FOR SUNDAY, JULY 20, 1980

I. 1. Martha. 2. Mary. 3. Lord. 4. anxiety. 5. youth. 6. bout. 7. sing. 8. neon. 9. queen. 10. raisin. 11. rash. 12. IOU
Key Passages: I. "Martha, you are anxious about many things, one thing only is required."
II. "Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "There in the tent," he replied. One of them said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah will then have a son."
III: Even now I find my joy in the suffering I endure for you. In my own flesh I fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his body, the Church. I became a minister of this church through the commission God gave me to preach among you.

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