

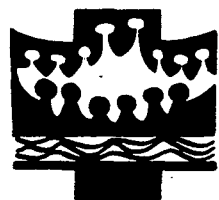


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Auxiliary Bishop Dennis W. Hickey congratulates John Nolan, grand knight of Knights of Columbus Council 178, on the occasion of the council's receiving of The Star Council Award, the K of C's highest recognition.

**Insights
In Liturgy**

By Thomas J. Discoll



**Celebrating
Who We Are**

When we gather for liturgy we do many important things. We celebrate the presence of the Lord in the assembly, in the proclaimed Word, and in the bread and wine. We receive the Body and Blood of Christ. We join our hearts and minds in the praise of God. We bless and call forth the Lord's blessings. One often overlooked dimension of liturgy is the sociological. For believers it is secondary to the theological dimension. Yet we dare not overlook it.

Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman, speaking to the 1981 National Meeting of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions in Milwaukee, addressed this topic. He said that sociologically at liturgy we share self-definition with each other. We tell each other in creed, prayer, hymn, blessing and gesture who we are. We define ourselves as part of the chosen people. In doing so, we rule others out who do not share our belief. This is only natural and has been part of our history since the beginning. The inclusion of the Creed of Nicea in the liturgy in the fifth century censored in those who believed the doctrines of this Council and censored out those who did not, the Arians.

This process of self-definition of a group offers the individual the opportunity to adapt a fulfilling self-identity. In other words, if week after week we are told that we are the People of God and the Body of Christ, we may come to believe these doctrines. We may come to

deeper levels of faith. At issue, then, in liturgy is the self-definition, self-consciousness of the group assembled.

Prior to the close of the 19th century, Americans knew who they were and felt affinity to those who were part of their "natural" community. They often worshiped with, lived near, and worked with the same people. But the loss of ethnic neighborhoods, and the rise of suburbanization, especially in the 1950s, meant that these "natural" communities were lost. The result is that due to the accident of geography we often worship with strangers. Hence, the community very often only comes into being at the liturgy. It is a "limited liability" community in which the members have only a few expectations and limited concern for each other.

We each belong to several "limited liability" assemblies (e.g., those gathered to watch a Buffalo Bills game, PTA groups). One task for those planning liturgies and organizing church communities is to realize that the Church competes with these other assemblies. We need to present the Church as an ultimate caring community, concerned about ALL aspects of life. In doing this, hopefully, we will begin to transform our communities with limited expectations into primary groups who will share a common vision of God present in the midst of the assembly.

There are many parishes in our diocese which are successfully doing this now. May the Lord bless their efforts.

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