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Columnists

Changes in post-Vatican II liturgy

By Father Richard C. McBrien
 Every post-Vatican II survey has disclosed that U.S. Catholics have been generally pleased with the state of worship at the parish level. They like the changes. Those who don't constitute a small minority.

These findings run counter to a suggestion, included in a recent report in *The New York Times*, that liturgy in America is in the doldrums, that we are somehow falling farther and farther short of the ideals set forth in the council's teachings, and especially in its landmark "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy."

The state of Catholic worship across the United States undoubtedly varies dramatically from diocese to diocese and from parish to parish. In some places, the liturgy is celebrated in accordance with the highest of standards, including those of good taste. In other places, it is a celebration in name only. The experience is at once appalling and depressing.

In most instances, however, the results probably fall somewhere between excellence and wretchedness, with an unmistakable tilt toward the former. Far from being in the doldrums, Catholic liturgy in America is doing very well indeed, at least by comparison with the truly bleak days before the conciliar reforms took effect.

Imagine a Catholic Rip Van Winkle being suddenly aroused from a protracted sleep. What would be the quickest and most effective means to introduce him to the changes in the Catholic Church since Vatican II?

You'd take him to the Eucharist, explaining on the way why we are more likely these days to call it "Eucharist" rather than "Mass."

Once in church, our Rip Van Winkle would notice immediately the changes that had taken place since the 1950's.

1. The altar is facing the congregation, and the Communion rail is gone. The priest celebrates the liturgy facing the community. The separation between priest and people is gone.

2. The liturgy is celebrated in the vernacular. The congregation doesn't have to follow the Mass with a missal, like people at an opera.

3. They can actually hear all of the priest's prayers, including and especially the Eucharistic Prayer. We'd inform our Rip Van Winkle it used to be called the Canon of the Mass, and that the priest has at least four choices.

4. The responses are given by the whole congregation, and not just by two altar boys. The whole community participates in the celebration, in word and often in song as well.

Essays in Theology

5. The Scripture readings are proclaimed by lay lectors, women as well as men. The presiding priest sits and listens, just like everyone else in the congregation. Our Rip Van Winkle would also eventually discover how varied these readings have become, thereby introducing Catholics to a much broader and richer sampling of the Word of God over the course of a three-year cycle.

6. The homily is more likely to be drawn from the three Scripture readings rather than from some topic or theme totally unrelated to the day's liturgy.

7. There are prayers of intercession, led usually by one of the lectors, which link the day's Eucharist with specific needs and problems that have arisen during the previous week or are about to occur.

8. There is a presentation of the gifts on the part of selected members of the congregation.

9. The whole congregation joins in the Grand Amen at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, recites or sings the Lord's Prayer together, and exchanges a handshake or greeting of peace.

10. Lay persons, including women, assist in the distribution of Holy Communion.

11. Most of the congregation, even at the last Mass of the day, come forward to receive Communion. In some instances, they receive under both species.

12. Perhaps our Rip Van Winkle would find more empty seats in church than would have been the case before the council, but he would soon discover that just about everyone in attendance is there voluntarily. Indeed, he would probably look in vain for someone concerned primarily about the "obligation under pain of mortal sin."

Are there still problems? Of course there are. And my Notre Dame colleague, Mark Searle, identifies a number of them in his insightful essay, "Renewing the Liturgy — Again," in the November 18 issue of *Commonwealth*.

On balance, however, we are far ahead of where we were 25 years ago. That shouldn't make us complacent, but it ought to make us grateful.

Cana's call to change for the better

By Father Albert Shamon
 Sunday's readings: (R3) John 2:1-12; (R1) Isaiah 62:1-5; (R2) 1 Corinthians 12:4-11.

To a Hebrew, "glory" meant the presence of God. God was present in Jesus. Just looking at Jesus, one saw only Mary's son — no different in appearance from any other person. So the Son of Mary wrought His deeds to reveal the Son of God within Himself. What the other evangelists call "miracles," John terms "signs" — things seen that tell about the unseen in Jesus, His Godhead. In the first half of his Gospel, John presents seven signs. The miracle at Cana in Galilee is the first.

In Cana, there was a wedding feast and the mother of Jesus was there. She must have been very close to the family, for it seems she had something to do with the wedding arrangements. Perhaps that was why she was so concerned about the wine shortage. Her authority was such that the servants obeyed her without question. Joseph is not mentioned because he was probably dead by that time.

The Cana incident reveals the depth of Mary's faith. She turns to Jesus when she has a problem. And she trusts Him totally even though she may not have understood His answer: "Woman, how does this concern of yours involve me? My hour has not yet come."

The term "woman" was not a word of disrespect. It is the same word Jesus used of Mary from the cross. It intimated that Mary had a greater role to play in salvation history than that of intercessor. She is the woman of Genesis whose seed would crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15) when his hour came; and she is the woman of Revelation with the crown of 12 stars (Revelation 12:1) as she appears at Medjugorje to bring peace to the world.

Thus the puzzling reply of Jesus to Mary's request was meant by John to point to the hidden meaning of the miracle at Cana. John wrote: "On the third day (after the call of Nathaniel) there was a wedding at Cana" — an unmistakable pointer to the resurrection of Jesus. Wine symbolized blood among the Jews. His hour would come on the cross.

Jesus would transform the water of the Old

A Word for Sunday

Testament into the wine of the New. "I have come, not to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17). As His wine from water was better than the old wine, so is the New Testament better than the Old. Jesus brings fulfillment, perfection.

What Jesus did once, He does over and over again. Whatever Jesus touched, He transformed for the better. He touched the Samaritan woman; He touched Magdalene; He touched the thief on the cross; He touched the centurion, Longinus — and he changed them all from sinners into saints. What He has done, He still does. Jesus can take us as we are — guilt-ridden, sinful, fearful, in error, dead (as in water) — and transform us into persons filled with hope, purity, peace, light and life (as in wine).

Transformation is precisely the point of the miracle at Cana. Change is a sign of life. But change can go either way. It can transform for the better, can change an Aldonza into a Dulcinea. Or it can deform, can change an apostle into Judas. Franz Kafka's chilling story "The Metamorphosis" portrays the transformation of a man into a giant cockroach. In their vision of hell, the seers of Medjugorje saw the damned transformed into hideous animals.

Jesus came to transform potential animals into angels and potential beasts into "beauties" or saints.

How easy it is for religion to become what it is not supposed to be. Instead of serving as an agent of transformation, religion can instead merely reassure us that we do not have to change at all.

That was why the last recorded words of Mary are: "Do whatever he tells you." Not just listen to whatever He tells you; but act on His teachings — change for the better!

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