

'Sands of time' sift out quiet thoughts

Just before we started the 5 p.m. Mass at Resurrection Parish on Saturday, Father Lou Vasile, pastor, called my attention to an hour-glass timer located on a small table just to the right of the presider's chair.

He told me it took the sand three minutes to pass from top to bottom after the timer was turned over. Then he asked if I would mind activating the timer when I returned to the chair after the Communion rite of the liturgy.

Lou explained that the community had been reflecting on the important place of silent reflection in our Sunday worship. That reflection had led to the timer, which seemed a light-hearted way to honor, and to be in communion with, the Lord and with one another.

I was happy to honor Lou's request and, I confess, curious about how those in attendance were responding to it. I must say I was impressed by the experience. The silence seemed peaceful, positive and quite prayerful.

I had no sense at all that people were uncomfortable with it or that they could not wait until the quiet moment ended so that they could get on with the business of the day.

Such a positive response to quiet times in our liturgical celebrations is something I do not take for granted. Indeed, I have noticed often over the

along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

years how quickly some folks grow restless at such moments. They begin to fidget and look around to see if others share their impatience at what they seem to regard as a waste of time.

I have the strong impression that some think when we experience silences within our celebrations that these periods occur because the presider is distracted and has simply forgotten to move things along in expeditious fashion.

In any case, the timer at Resurrection on Saturday set me to musing on the importance of silence as a component of our personal and corporate prayer.

And it got me thinking about the opportunities offered in the present structure of our liturgy to enjoy that value. I mention such examples as:

1. The invitation to take a moment to reflect on our need for forgiveness during the penitential rite;
2. The pause invited by the invitation,

"Let us pray," before the opening and closing prayers of the liturgy; and

3. A moment of quiet after each reading during which we begin to draw God's word into our hearts and to respond to it.

It is quite common in my experience that the presider, deacon, organist, cantor or lector tends immediately to fill those moments with words or music.

My concern is that when such is the pattern, we lose a dimension of quiet reflection that is quite important.

I think you understand quite well that my intention here is not to criticize anyone. Nor is it to promote three-minute timers as permanent fixtures in any of our sanctuaries.

Rather, it is to encourage all to reflect continually on our liturgical celebrations so that we can understand in continually deeper ways the treasure they are for our lives.

When we come to that kind of understanding I think we all do a pretty good job of expressing it appropriately in our worship.

Thanks to all of you who have participated in our reflection, prayer and discussion on the centrality of the Sunday Eucharistic liturgy in Catholic life. You make a great contribution to the life of the Church for today and tomorrow.

Peace to all.

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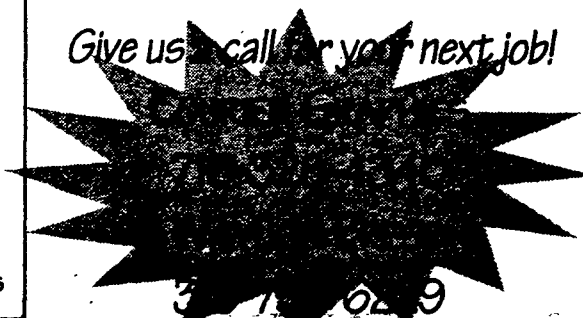
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