

The whole community celebrates Mass

Cardinal Roger Mahony's pastoral letter, "Gather Faithfully Together: A Guide for Sunday Mass," is based on a threefold conviction: that the Second Vatican Council is one of the "finest graces" of this century, that its renewal of the liturgy was central to its vision of the church, and that the Sunday liturgy in every parish "remains the very center of the Church's life."

It acknowledges, however, that there are some views that are opposed to the continuation of the liturgical renewal.

The first dismisses it as a failure, "an embarrassing mistake of Vatican II." The second believes that the church has already come "as far as was intended," so that we should "hear no more of liturgical renewal." The third characterizes it as "meaningless in light of the great need for the Church to throw itself into causes of justice and peace."

Cardinal Mahony believes that we are at a crucial point in the church's liturgical renewal. Rather than abandon the renewal or regard it as essentially completed, we must learn from both the mistakes and the successes of the past, and go forward — together.

His fundamental insight is that the ongoing renewal of the liturgy cannot happen in isolation from the renewal of catechesis, the social mission of the church, and the task of building Christian community.



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

"Let catechists, teachers and directors of religious education, teachers in our Catholic schools, see how a strong parish liturgical life forms Christians. And let those who work in liturgy know that the stronger the assembly's participation in the liturgy, the greater the need for all forms of instruction and catechesis." There can be no compartmentalized approach to parish ministry.

Throughout the pastoral letter the cardinal pursues the Catholic path of both/and rather than either/or.

Thus, it is not solemnity or festivity, but solemnity and festivity. Not reverence or community, but reverence and community. Not the vertical or the horizontal dimensions of liturgy, but the vertical and the horizontal. All must be held together.

If there is a single theological point that runs through the entire document, it is that the liturgy is the work of the

whole assembly. It cannot be a matter of the priest and the other liturgical ministers on the one side, and the "audience" on the other.

Thus, the opening procession involves more than the presider and ministers; it includes all of the people — of every age and race and social condition — coming from their neighborhoods and homes to assemble in the house of the church.

And when all have assembled, their participation in the liturgy, in accordance with the council's teaching, must be full, conscious and active.

"The songs are for singing, the Scriptures for listening, the silence for reflecting, the intercessions for pleading, the Eucharistic Prayer for immense thanksgiving, the communion for every kind of hunger and thirst satisfied in partaking together of the body and blood of Christ, and the dismissal for going out to love the world the way God does."

The most difficult part of the whole renewal, Cardinal Mahony insists, is the ongoing effort to cultivate in the whole community "a deep awareness that it is not so many individuals who are standing here singing, but the Church. It is not individuals who are coming forward to the table, but the Church."

And it is not even individuals going forth to live by the word they have listened to and the body and blood of Christ they have consumed. "It is the

Church going forth as leaven in the midst of the world God loves."

Cardinal Mahony acknowledges that he, like many older priests trained for ministry before Vatican II, has experienced some measure of personal difficulty in adjusting to the renewal mandated by the council. "Many of us," he writes, "did not readily grasp what the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy asked of us."

"Please know," he continues, "that I am myself committed to this work. Together we will approach the jubilee year doing what will have the greatest impact on the Church of the next millennium in our archdiocese."

"I will do all I can to support your efforts to implement this letter over the next years. But as always, the good to be done comes from all those working at the parish level."

There are countless pastors, religious, and lay ministers all across North America who would warmly welcome a similar approach from their own bishops.

Indeed, what is so remarkable about Cardinal Mahony's letter is not only what it says explicitly about the nature of liturgy but what it says implicitly about the nature of episcopal leadership as well.

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Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Christ set example of creative living

Many people don't think of themselves as creative people. But all of us can imitate the creativity of Christ and improve our lives in the process. I think that in doing so, many will discover that they are more creative than they suspected.

When I was studying psychology, our professor would draw a circle on the board, point to it and say that most people tend to conduct their lives within a predictable circle, never moving beyond its circumference.

Then he would erase part of the circle, draw jagged lines extending out beyond its circumference and comment that this is the way creative people act: They more often than not do the unpredictable by venturing out beyond the confines of their familiar, "enclosed" world.

Christ's life was anything but predictable. In his early public ministry we would have expected him to first go to the holy city of Jerusalem. Where better to be-



the human side

By FATHER EUGENE HEMRICK

gin to preach the kingdom of God? But he didn't. Rather, St. Matthew portrays him going to the land of Zebulun and Naphtali and the Decapolis. In writing this, Matthew teaches us that Christ is not ordinary. He goes in the opposite direction from Jerusalem and to people who are not of his culture.

This lesson is repeated frequently. Instead of working with religious leaders, Christ works with sinners. He talks with

women from Samaria in public, which is contrary to Jewish custom, and he dies like a slave, which is contrary to his divinity.

In doing the unpredictable, Christ offers us a beautiful model of creativity that contains suggestions for changing our lives.

To start with, do we ever take stock of the circles in which we live? Is our circle usually the same predictable group of friends? Although they may be fine people and supportive, have we ever thought of moving beyond this circle and trying to touch someone who might need our support — someone, perhaps, who gravitates to the corner of a room and sits alone?

Have we ever tried to improve our ability to listen seriously to others — including others who may not be part of our circle?

Next December, will our Christmas card list be the same as it was in 1997, or will it include new names — people we've

gone out of our way to meet?

Today neighbors tend more and more often not to know each other. This, in part, is because both spouses in a family work and neither one is able to find time to get to know neighbors. Perhaps a spark of creative energy will lead us this year to look upon our home as something more than an isolated, impersonal residence in a particular part of town.

To whet your appetite for creativity during the year ahead, I leave you with a thought from Edith Shaeffer:

"A Christian, above all people, should live artistically, aesthetically and creatively. If we have been created in the image of an Artist, then we should look for expressions of artistry and be sensitive to beauty, responsive to what has been created for our appreciation."

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