

COLUMNISTS

Liturgy reveals very nature of church

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy was the first major document approved by the Second Vatican Council and promulgated by Pope Paul VI in December 1963. Because the liturgy is the "summit" and the "source" of the entire Christian life (n. 10), it was appropriate that the council should have begun there.

There is an ancient theological principle that worship is the primary expression and measure of Christian belief (the Latin axiom is *Lex orandi, lex credendi*, "The law of praying is the law of believing"). For this reason, the quality of the church's liturgy is the best pastoral indicator of the state of the church's faith.

Where you have a badly celebrated, badly structured, badly understood liturgy, you have a Christian community, at best, simply going through the motions. At worst, its faith is at risk.

For good or for ill, there is no greater teacher in the church and about the church than the liturgy itself. A liturgy performed exclusively by the priest teaches that the church is an essentially clerical entity to which the laity simply belong in order to receive, in an entirely passive way, various spiritual benefits.

Before Vatican II it was common to speak of "hearing" or "attending" Mass.



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

The Mass was perceived as something that the priest alone "said" (a revealing pre-conciliar expression), by the "power" given him in ordination. The role or obligation of the laity was to be physically present, at least for the so-called "principal parts" of the Mass: the offertory, consecration and Communion.

If you arrived before the priest removed the veil covering the chalice (following the Gospel or creed) and if you did not leave the church before the distribution of holy Communion, you were spiritually safe. At worst, you committed "only" a venial sin if you missed any of the minor parts, such as the prayers at the foot of the altar and the Epistle, or the final blessing and "Last Gospel."

Given the state of liturgical life before the council, Vatican II had to do far more

than merely tinker with the rite. By translating the liturgy into the vernacular and by restoring to the laity their rightful roles in the service (vocal responses, singing, readings, bringing forth of the gifts and even assistance with the distribution of holy Communion), the council also changed — for the better — the thinking of many Catholics about the very nature of the church.

The church is not just something to which we belong; we are the church, the very people of God.

To take some other examples: The removal of the altar rail was meant to eliminate an artificial barrier between the altar and, on the one side, the sanctuary, on the other, the worshipping assembly.

Because the reception of Holy Communion is an act, not of adoration, but of coming forward to receive something to eat and drink, namely, the Body and Blood of Christ, the liturgical posture is one of standing, not kneeling.

So, too, with the turning around of the altar. The priest is not simply pleading to God on behalf of the people, who kneel quietly behind him, hoping that God will hear his prayer.

The priest faces the congregation because he presides over it and is an integral part of it himself. It is the whole as-

sembly that worships, not just the priest.

A final example: In his *Marialis cultus* (1974) Pope Paul VI explicitly discouraged the recitation of the rosary during the celebration of Mass. Obviously, his intent was not anti-devotional. It was to underscore the communal nature of the Mass, which is the whole church's participation in Christ's worship of the Father. Unlike the rosary, the Mass is not a private devotion, and should not be simply a backdrop for private devotions.

Those who have been least happy with the liturgical renewal promoted by Vatican II have never fully accepted the council's thinking that has undergirded that renewal. The council taught that the church is the whole People of God, not just the hierarchy, and that it is as much a this-worldly reality as it is a heavenly communion.

Although some recent calls from restorationist quarters for "a deepening of liturgical spirituality" express a commitment to Vatican II, the mentality behind the words points in a different direction.

It is a mentality at odds with the council's understanding of the church.

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

Sunday for prayer and rest, not shopping

16th Sunday of the Year (July 23): (R3) Mark 6:30-34; (R1) Jeremiah 23:1-6; (R2) Ephesians 2:13-18.

Different people have different attitudes toward work. However, whatever the attitude, we all need to take time off from work. The bow that is always strung soon loses its snap. God knew that so he commanded that one day a week be taken off for a day of rest and worship.

The Sabbath rest is based on the creation story. God worked six days and rested on the seventh. Most Christians celebrate Sunday, because on Sunday God the Father completed the creation of the world; on Sunday, God the Son redeemed the world; and on Sunday, God the Holy Spirit came down upon the Apostles.

It is sad to see more and more businesses encroaching on the Sunday rest. This is sad, I say, because working on Sunday takes many people not only away from Sunday Mass, but also away from their families. It deprives people of the best opportunity in the week to rest, build up relationships and pray.

You and I need one day a week in which we worship God and do only the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. God meant us to have one day a week on



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

which we can worship and visit friends and relatives, the sick and shut-ins, and take a nap or go bicycling with our family and do whatever it is that helps to refresh and rekindle our minds, our bodies and our spirits as well as those of others.

Believe it or not, people who succeed are not those who forever keep their nose to the grindstone. Hard work, dedication, sacrifice are important attributes in life; but some of the most effective people who ever lived, like Ben Franklin, spent considerable time "goofing off."

Jesus recognized the need for people to loosen the strings on the bow from time to time. He said to his Apostles after their first missionary trek, "Come to an out-of-the-way place and rest a little." Often when Jesus took his disciples off

by themselves, it was for prayer. Jesus knew that we not only need to refresh our bodies and minds, we need to refresh our souls as well.

Two willow trees grew a short distance from a stream in New Mexico. One of them was sturdy and rich with leaves, the other smaller and less attractive.

Over the years the owner of the property wondered why the difference. Then one week while digging near the trees his shovel struck something hard. While uncovering it he solved the mystery of the trees. Years earlier someone had buried large slabs of stone wall in the spot. The underground wall prevented the roots of the frail tree from reaching the water in the stream. But there was no wall between the flourishing tree and the water. Likewise, when we do not give ourselves time to worship God, then we are like the tree that was shut off from the life-giving flow of the stream.

Take time to laugh, it is the music of the soul.

Take time to think, it is the source of power.

Take time to play, it is what keeps you young.

Take time to read, it is the seat of wisdom.

Take time to pray, it is the greatest power on earth.

Take time to love and be loved, it is a God-given privilege.

Take time to be friendly, it is the road to happiness.

Take time to work, it is the price of success.

Take time for God, it is the way of life.

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, July 24

Micah 6:1-4, 6-8; Matthew 12:38-42

Tuesday, July 25

2 Corinthians 4:7-15;

Matthew 20:20-28

Wednesday, July 26

Jeremiah 1:1, 4-10; Matthew 13:1-9

Thursday, July 27

Jeremiah 2:1-3, 7-8, 12-13;

Matthew 13:10-17

Friday, July 28

Jeremiah 3:14-17; Matthew 13:18-23

Saturday, July 29

Jeremiah 7:1-11; Luke 10:38-42

or John 11:19-27

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