

COLUMNISTS

Mass is the launching pad to Christ-like service

In this final segment of a series of articles using parts of the Mass as a basis for reflecting on our moral lives, I've chosen the closing invocation: "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord."

Common sense tells us that those words simply conclude the ritual and tell us to get going. But theological sense tells us that something far more significant is actually going on as those words are pronounced.

In context, when we hear those words we are just concluding our experience of communion in the Risen Lord. We are finishing our participation in the Lord's Supper, a pre-taste of the heavenly banquet, our commemoration of his death and rising. We have experienced union with one another in faith, we have experienced communion with God through that union and through the nourishment of his Body and Blood. We have eaten the Bread of Life and drunk from the cup of unending salvation. Whew!

Now we are told to "go." It really can sound somewhat anti-climactic.

Still, we don't come together in order to be kept at the table. We come together in Eucharist precisely for this very moment: to be sent back into the world, into our lives, nourished by our fellowship with one another and our union with God. Baptized Christians are called to take up the mission of Christ and to carry on his work in the world. The object of our faith is not to stay in church;



the
moral
life

BY PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

the object of our faith is to serve the dawning of the kingdom of God on earth.

The object of Eucharist is not simply to enjoy intimacy with God ourselves, or remain in the beauty of the church or in the joy of the liturgy. Our intimacy with God, experienced and renewed at the table of the Eucharist, grows and strengthens as we move from Sunday to Monday, as we seek to realize God's will in our work, in our family life, with our associates, in all our joys and sorrows. We read in Scripture that God came to save the world. Christ did not come to save the church; he came to save the world.

We are invited to join in that effort, and we are strengthened for the task through our sacramental celebrations.

Johann Metz, a German theologian, calls the church the "table and story-telling community." In his terms, we experience the church most profoundly at Eucharist as we gather around the table for the eucharistic meal. In his terms, listening to the

readings of the day is akin to the story telling that families always engage in when they gather for special events and meals. We hear again the stories (in this case the stories of Israel in the Old Testament and the stories of Jesus in the New Testament that are the very foundation of our faith and our identity as Christians) that form us as a people, as individuals called to discipleship, as the church of God sent forth on behalf of the kingdom.

For Metz, the gathering with one another at Eucharist, combined with hearing the stories that supply our basic vision of life and value, is significant in itself, but it also equips us with the inspiration and energy to take up our daily lives with a sense of mission and ministry. At liturgy we realize what it is to enjoy the nourishment of the Lord and the support of the community of faith. We realize, too, that as we offer our lives to God and as we consecrate the "stuff of those lives," symbolized by the bread and wine, we also take on the mission of Christ to be realized in our daily lives.

Like Jesus, we are called to heal what is hurt or broken, to relieve suffering, to forgive sinners, to rebuke injustice, to confront the haughty and the arrogant, to make room for the excluded, to serve the cause of righteousness. All this takes place in the very worldly, very secular lives that we live through the week. Like Jesus, we are called to take up a life of selflessness and service. Like him, we are called to confront our own demons, whether these take

the form of a lust for power or things or dysfunctional relationships. Like him, we are to search for God in the encounters of our life that take place all through the week, outside and beyond the walls of the church.

Sometimes as Catholics we are tempted to turn baptism into a "cosmic insurance policy" that keeps us safe from some unpleasant fate that may befall us beyond the grave. Sometimes we associate ministry with what happens closest to the altar. We tend to assume that church ministers are those who have been ordained or who work for the church. The words spoken at the end of every liturgy assure us of something else.

They tell us that baptism is a call to take up the mission of Christ. It is a call to mission, not some kind of passive assurance that we can escape an unfortunate spiritual ending. Those words at the conclusion of Mass tell us that ministry is not just what happens in the sanctuary of our churches. Real ministry happens in our jobs, our friendships, our participation in politics, the personal work we do to overcome our own sins and flaws. Church ministers are not only those who take their paychecks from the parish. Church ministers include all of us who, as the table and story telling community, go forth from that gathering into the world "to love and serve the Lord."

Sister Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's Institute.

Could you identify someone who may be a victim of domestic violence? —

— Would you know how to respond?

In recognition of October being Domestic Violence Awareness Month, the Women's Commission of the Diocese of Rochester is co-sponsoring the first diocesan formal training sessions for pastoral staff members on domestic violence and three prayer and healing services.

Service of Prayer and Healing Sunday, October 1

- 3 p.m. (bilingual) Sacred Heart Cathedral, 296 Flower City Park
7 p.m. St. Mary Our Mother Church, 816 W. Broad St., Horseheads
7 p.m. (bilingual) St. Stephen Church, 48 Pulteney St., Geneva

Training Workshop on Domestic Violence

led by Rev. Stephen Dohner, Ph.D., director of the Department of Marriage and Family Ministry in the Cleveland Diocese and founding member of the Domestic Violence Task Force in Cleveland.

October 24

9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

St. Francis DeSales

130 Exchange St., Geneva

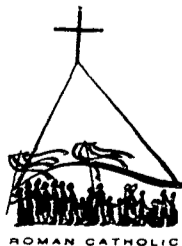
October 25

9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

St. Bernard's Institute,

1100 S. Goodman St., Rochester

Training at both locations is free. Registration is due October 10 to Suzanne Schnittman, Diocese of Rochester, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, NY 14624 or by email to schnittman@dor.org.



For more information about the prayer services or training workshop, contact Suzanne Schnittman at (716) 328-3210, ext. 354 or email schnittman@dor.org.

COURIER CLASSIFIEDS

GENERAL

Announcements

ADOPTIONS The Catholic Courier does not publish adoption advertising. To obtain a list of agencies that serve birth mothers and adoptive parents, call 716-328-4340. Agencies wishing to be included on this list may send information to the Catholic Courier.

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Kids' answers from page 11: name, kingdom, earth, bread, forgive, against, temptation, evil