Taking Lent Seriously
The wonders wrought by God among the people of the Old Testament were but a prelude to the work of Christ in redeeming mankind and giving perfect glory to God. He achieved his task principally by the paschal mystery of his blessed passion, resurrection from the dead, and glorious ascension, whereby dying, he destroyed our death and, rising, he restored our life.

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EDITORIAL

LED BY THE SPIRIT

When a person first ventures into the desert, what strikes him most forcefully is *intensity*. The day’s heat, the cold of night, the sunlight, the brilliant stars, the loneliness, the distance, the emptiness: *intense* is one word that describes them all.

During Lent, the community of God’s people is being led into an intense spiritual experience. The Holy Spirit brings the Christian Church into the desert, as he once led Christ; he is leading us out to take part in prayer and penance, conversion and renewal. Christ calls us to become more Spirit-filled, to lay aside the worthless things we are always seeking. He invites us to believe and repent.

Once again, the Church is calling us to follow Christ into the desert, to die with him to sin and self, and to live for God. Like the people of Israel, God will give us living water and the bread of life. But first, these necessities of life in the Spirit are to be the subject of intense soul-searching and renewal.

In the desert, the people of God are given the covenant with its commandments and promise of life. God is faithful, and continues to be with his people: he is God-who-is-with-us!

This trek is not an aimless wandering, but a purifying march toward a specific goal. During this pilgrimage, the Church is called to put aside unnecessary baggage and to travel light.

Our goal is a deeper sharing in the Easter mystery, in the death-resurrection of Jesus. By dying, he has destroyed our death. By rising, he has given us unending life. He wants to bring us into his salvation ever more fully, to purify his travel-stained people, to refresh us at the wells of salvation.

The Spirit of Jesus wants to lead your particular community of believers into Lent, to purify you and nourish your faith, to deepen your prayer life; to help you, in a word, to die to sin and to live for God.

This issue of the Bulletin will help you to celebrate Lent seriously this year, and to begin preparing early to celebrate it even better in the year to come.

This Lent is the acceptable time, the day of salvation for your community of faith.

Listen to the voice of the Lord when he is calling!
INTRODUCTORY NOTES

STILL VALID

Lent has meaning for the Christian Church in the jet age. The period of Lent is still valid.

In this lenten issue of the Bulletin, we present some thoughts about the meaning of Lent for today’s people, and we offer some help for parishes and other communities of believers:

— to prepare for lenten renewal
— to celebrate this holy season well
— to carry its impact into the Easter season.

Not the end, but the beginning: This issue does not present a ready-made lenten program; rather, it suggests ideas for you to select and develop in your community, according to your needs and lights.

It is intended for everyone who is interested in becoming a better Christian; it is for individuals as well as for communities.

In a special way, it has been prepared for priests, members of parish councils and liturgy committees, for religious, teachers, choirs and musicians. It is for every person who is involved in planning and celebrating the community’s liturgy.

To be used with profit: The best approach is positive: how can we adapt these ideas to make this our best Lent ever? What can we do to improve our past lenten celebrations and programs?

It is better to work as a team, planning the community’s lenten approach. A few ideas, discussed and adapted and carried out, will be more valuable than many half-baked or untried thoughts.

Evaluate: After Lent is over, your committee should weigh what was planned and achieved, and make preliminary plans to do even better next year.

NO COMPETITION

The contents of this bulletin are not intended to be in competition with any diocesan lenten programs. Where your diocese has planned a program for the season, you should follow it. Ideas from this Bulletin may enrich your community’s practices, but in no way should they supplant or override local planning.

This bulletin is intended particularly for communities where no diocesan plans have been prepared; it offers raw material for a parish or community program during the liturgically rich lenten season.
OUR LENTEN TASK

DOUBLE-BARRELLED SEASON

The Vatican Council (CSL, nos. 109-110) presents Lent as having a two-fold character:

1. **Baptism theme:** During Lent, the Christian people of each community recall their baptism, or prepare for it, as in the catechumenate.

   For most people, then, Lent will be a time to:
   
   • remember what wonderful things God does for them in baptism, and praise him for these graces;
   
   • renew their personal commitment to Christ: to die to sin and to live for God.

   This should be done both by individuals as well as by communities (families, parishes, organizations, schools and classes, convents, choirs, other groupings of the faithful).

   *For too many Christians, the baptismal aspects of Lent are unfamiliar or ignored.*

   *What about your community this Lent?*

2. **Penance theme:** Lent is a time when God’s people are called to repent and change our hearts and our lives. Penitential practices are encouraged to reinforce the response to the call to conversion, and to strengthen the witness value of our penance.

   * * *

   For a balanced Lent, both these aspects must be present in individual and community observances.

PREPARING FOR EASTER

By these two themes of baptism and penance, the faithful are prepared to celebrate the death and rising of the Lord Jesus (the paschal mystery), and their own share in this mystery. This mystery should influence and explain the whole of our lenten effort.

The Church recommends that we prepare for Easter by growing in our awareness of what Christ’s death and rising mean in our lives.

To bring this about, the Vatican Council states that Lent is a period of

• closer attention to God’s word
• more ardent prayer.

*How is your community planning for a warmer love of scripture? What are your ways of promoting more fervent prayer this Lent?*
**BAPTISMAL FEATURES OF LENT**

*Everyone thinks of the penitential side of this season, and tends to forget its baptismal aspects. For this reason, the Vatican Council reminds us of the intimate relationship between Lent and the sacrament of baptism.*

This year, your spiritual community should explore some of the baptismal elements in your lenten renewal.

In baptism the individual person becomes a child of the Father, a brother or sister of Jesus Christ and of all the children of God, a temple of the Spirit. He is taken into the family of God, the Church, and shares the spiritual heritage of Christ.

By baptism, the Lord Jesus makes us:

- **Priestly people:** We are set aside and dedicated to sing the praise of the Father. Through Christ, in the Spirit, our praise and thanks rise in the name of creation. We become God’s priestly people in baptism, the living temple bringing greater glory to him.

- **During Lent, we should renew our community worship and praise and thanksgiving.**

- **People of prayer:** Filled with the Spirit, we are called to pray always, with faith, with confidence. When we do not know how to pray, the Spirit is with us to teach us, to help us express our deepest thoughts to God (Rom. 8). Through baptism, we are made people of prayer.

- **During Lent, more ardent prayer should mark our daily lives, both as individuals and as a community.**

- **Holy people:** Before time began, the Father chose us to be holy and without fault (Eph. 1). We are the people whom Christ has washed in his blood, the people he has rescued from darkness and brought into his kingdom of light. He invites us to die with him to sin, to live with him for God.

- **Lent is a time for the baptized community to become serious about putting on Christ.**

- **Preparing for baptism:** Lent is also the period during which catechumens make their final preparations for baptism at the Easter vigil, after some years of prayer, renewal and instruction.

  - How serious is the Church in North America about establishing a reformed catechumenate?

  - **Lent is a time for Christians to do some serious thinking — even along ecumenical lines — about preparation for adult baptism.**

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**BANNERS AND POSTERS**

In making preparations to celebrate the season of Lent and Easter, the liturgy committee should remember how banners and posters may be used to heighten the atmosphere and emphasize the main points of a liturgical season.
Servants of God: The term servant is often used in scripture to describe our relationship with the Father. Even his Son became a servant for our sake. The great men and women of the Bible are servants: Abraham, our father in faith; David, our teacher in prayer; Jesus, our Lord and savior; Mary, our model of faith and obedience.

Jesus tells us that his food and drink — the source of his life and strength, as it were — are to do God's will (Jn. 4). Here I am, I have come to do your will! The words of Ps. 40(39) are applied to Christ. By obedience to the Father, he saved us, and God raised him up, and in him, he gave us eternal life.

Lent is a time for the servants of God to improve their attitudes toward God's commandments, to let God teach them through his law, to praise him for giving them light for their paths. Lent is a school of obedience for the followers of Christ.

Easter mystery: During Lent, the Christian community is called to renew its Christian spirit, to cast aside any obstacles to the freedom of God's children, to scrape off all our spiritual barnacles. We are invited to pray and carry our cross with Jesus in order that we may be more fully united in his dying and rising.

Lent leads us up to and into the Easter vigil, with its purifying word and sacraments, its renewal of the Christian spirit.

* * * *

Lent can mean all these things to each community of worshippers, but it demands serious preparation and realistic celebration.

PENITENTIAL FEATURES OF LENT

Lent is a time of penance.

— penance should be internal and individual
— it must also be external and social
— penitential practices are to be encouraged by the Church according to:

modern day possibilities
local possibilities
individual circumstances

— instruction: it is important to impress on our minds and hearts:

• the social consequences of sin (and therefore the external and social aspects of penance).

• the heart of the virtue of penance is hatred of sin as an offence against God.

• the role of the Church in encouraging us in lenten practices (this means our parish, our spiritual community in concrete terms).

• the need to pray for sinners.

• the importance of the paschal fast.
Individual Penance

a) Duty: Penance is the duty of every individual follower of Christ. (Each of the points below also applies to Christian communities.)

b) Hatred of Sin: The real heart of the virtue of penance is hatred of sin as an offence against God. Therefore the first penance each of us should undertake is to give up sin.

Guidance and help come to us from God through his word, Mass, sacraments, and in prayer.

c) Serious Self-Examination: Let's find out what sinfulness God wants us to work on this Lent, and make sure we are tackling the real problems.

d) Positive and Negative: Lenten penance is not just a matter of giving up nice things or avoiding sin. It means doing, working with Christ and his people, the Church, to die to sin (negative side of Lent) and to live for God (positive side).

GOD'S WISHES

The Lord of heaven and earth has some suggestions about the kind of penance his people should do. These are expressed in Is. 58.

Reading them in several versions helps to clarify God's message.

These ideas make an excellent meditation for each believer and for believing communities, especially with regard to the lenten season.

In the light of this message, what changes are you going to make in your life during Lent?

TIME OF CONVERSION AND RENEWAL

Led by the Spirit, the people of God are invited to turn their hearts away from evil and back to God: to die to sin, to live for God. This conversion and renewal should take place in the lives of individual Christians, as well as in their communities: the family, the parish, the diocese, and the civic community.

Personal conversion: Each follower of Jesus is invited to come closer to the Lord in his thinking (having the mind of Christ in us) and in his action. Everything he does is to be rooted in and based on the love of Christ. He is called to give better witness of a living faith. During Lent, he is asked to be more attuned to God's word and Spirit by prayerful reading, especially of the scriptures. The spirit of the sermon on the mount should be the goal of each individual in seeking renewal.

Community conversion: While individual improvement is required for community renewal, there are many ways in which Christians can become a positive social influence for Christ in their various groupings:

- Family: Perhaps three areas might be the subject for serious discussion and lenten action by families who wish to mature in Christ: family prayer, bible reading, concern for others.
• Parish: This community, gathered around this altar, is called by God to give special witness during Lent. The seriousness of the parish response to God's call needs to be examined.

The parish family is called to grow in holiness. Lent is a time to take stock, to see how well the parish is serving the Lord and his people; if it should find that it has become self-seeking instead, then this is the time of salvation which God is offering. Are there important aspects of parish life being neglected? In what ways is Christ calling this community of worshippers to respond to his graces?

Parish councils might use this time for a serious study of their parish and its activities in the service of the Lord and his people. (See Bulletin no. 35, pp. 195-196, 200, 214.)

• Diocese: The lenten period affords time for the people of God in this area to appreciate God's providence in guiding them through their spiritual leader. It is a time for all involved in local activity to realize the needs of the diocese and universal Church (missions, vocations, work for peace, development).

Lent is also a time for all involved in the diocese to re-examine priorities, to make sure that the Lord's work is truly advancing. Lent is an opportunity for leading a diocesan effort in prayer and conversion.

• Civic community: The Church of God is called to pray for the civic community, for God wants all to be saved. Christians have a responsibility to be the light of the world, to let their light shine before men so that they will praise the Father.

This Lent would be a good time for the parish to look on its community responsibilities by giving serious, prayerful study to the Council document on the Church in the modern world.

* * *

Lent is a time to ask the Spirit to lead us into full Christian maturity, to beg him to warm our frigid hearts, to straighten our warped ways, to lighten our darkness and to deepen our faith, our hope and our love.

SUNDAY: A DAY OF MEDITATION

A person who is looking for a little extra act of praise on the Lord's day may wish to spend a few moments of meditation on Ps. 119(118). By taking one or two sections of eight verses, he may pray and reflect on God's law, especially as it affects his life as a believer.

By law we can understand the commandment of love (Jn. 13:34-35), or the two great commandments (Mt. 22:34-40 and parallels) or the ideals of Jesus as outlined in the sermon on the mount (Mt. 5, 6, 7).

Any of these may also serve as a source of meditation.

The more fully we are attuned to the will of God, the more pleasing will our prayer and worship become.
CLOSER ATTENTION TO GOD'S WORD

A warm and living love for the word of God (CSL, no. 24) cannot be developed among Catholic Christians by liturgical services alone. New lectionaries, well-trained readers, bible study groups, scripture services are all good, but they will be fruitless until individuals and families read and pray the bible.

**Individuals** should consider whether their lives are being guided by the Spirit who speaks through God's words. What place does the gospel text have in their Christian living?

Daily reading of the gospel, frequent praying of the psalms should be the ideal which the parish or community encourages for its members.

Lent is the best time to begin.

**Families:** Does the family ever gather at home in the Lord's name to hear his word and to respond to it in prayer?

A brief gospel passage may be read each day at table, followed by a moment of silent prayer. During the meal, perhaps, some comments or reflections on the text may be shared.

Would it ask too much of a parish to prepare a suggested list of readings, and publish it each week in the bulletin?

Perhaps the ferial gospel could be the reading chosen.

Bible stories may be told to the children (see *Tell Me A Story*, in this issue).

**Parish:** What place does the bible have in the spiritual life of the parish? How widespread is the reading of the gospels or use of the psalms?

A few evenings — or afternoons for mothers — may be set aside during Lent for a brief introduction to prayerful reading of the scriptures. A pamphlet or small New Testament may be used, and Saint Mark is a good gospel to begin with.

The starters presented in the 1973 Liturgical Calendar may be useful in leading people to a deeper appreciation of the daily scripture texts.

Bible services should be encouraged during Lent. (CSL, no. 35:4.) One example of a penance celebration is included in this issue.

Further training (techniques) and formation (understanding of the word of God and their role in proclaiming it) may be given to the readers during Lent.

The prayer of the faithful (general intercessions) could be prepared more carefully so that they reflect parish concerns and needs drawn from the scripture readings of the day.

Man does not live by bread alone, but by the word spoken by God. The same is true of the parish community.

Lent is a good time to help the members of your spiritual community to come to know Christ more in the scriptures and in the breaking of bread.
MORE ARDENT PRAYER

Lent is a time for more ardent prayer. Some ways in which each parish and community may prepare to grow in prayer this Lent are outlined below.

Priests are invited to reread the article on the priest as a teacher of prayer. (See Bulletin no. 33, pages 65-66.) Lent is a particularly appropriate time for each priest to exercise his leadership in prayer. He has the responsibility of leading each member of the worshipping community to a deeper sense of prayer, and of helping the whole parish — especially in the liturgy — to grow in its prayer life.

Parish councils: Both the parish council and its liturgy committee need to join with their priest in being concerned about the prayer life of the parish. (See Bulletin no. 35, pages 194-196.) A positive program of helping individuals in prayer is needed. Each parish should plan for such help at sometime in the year: during Lent, perhaps in the fall months as activities resume, or after Easter.

Sometime before Lent, the liturgy committee might do a serious review of the devotional life of the parish and of the opportunities offered for growth in prayer.

Flowing from Scripture

Since Lent is a period when the Church is called to give closer attention to God's word, it is also fitting that prayer should be based on scripture. During Lent, believers should learn to pray more ardently with the bible.

Prayer may flow, for example, from the day's gospel reading, or from another gospel event. Priests should encourage and guide their people in learning to base their praying on God's word. The daily starters given in this year's Liturgical Calendar, Guidelines for Pastoral Liturgy, will be helpful in this way.

A commendable parish project would be one of helping people to learn to pray with scripture. Another would be to lead people to pray the psalms with greater understanding. A simple version of the psalter, an easy introduction to some of the imagery, and then plunge in by using them. Gradually, as they grow familiar with some of the psalms, people will find they can use the Spirit's words as their own prayer.

For those who are ready, a simple introduction to the liturgy of the hours might be a worthwhile Lenten project.

When Lent is over, members of the parish who have begun to use the psalms in prayer should be encouraged to continue: praying one or more psalms a day will lead serious persons to continuing growth in prayer.

Prayer for Others

Set aside: Christians are set aside, dedicated by God to be his people of prayer. We are called to pray in the name of all creation; in a special way we should be ready to pray for the needs of all.
Concern for the world: The needs of humanity must be the concern of each believing Christian. Peace, justice, better living conditions — the social aspects of the gospel message — these have to be part of the prayer of every individual and community that claims to follow Jesus. Sunday's general intercessions should also express the concern of the parish for these needs.

To be truly Christian, the community has to go further: it must back up by action during the week what it states in Sunday's prayer.

Prayer for sinners: How often does the parish community really pray for sinners? (True, we tend to shy away from that word nowadays, but surely everyone in this world is not doing his utmost to fulfill God's word!)

What about praying for people who have difficulty in believing? Or for those who are striving to raise their families amid many difficulties? How many pray for their priests and bishops, for teachers and parents, for civil leaders?

Time to Start

Lent is the time when God is calling his people to more ardent prayer. How is your community going to answer his invitation this year?

GRACE

There was a time when it was fairly common to see people saying grace in public eating places. Catholics would make the sign of the cross, others would bow in silent prayer. Today, it seems, this practice is rare.

Could it be that this reticence comes from a feeling that the old formulas are empty, that such prayer is a sham? What ever became of Mt. 5: 16?

Perhaps we need to realize once more our need to pause several times during the day for conscious, deliberate prayer. Meal time is a good time to praise the Lord, to thank him for his gifts for us, to ask his guidance and light.

Grace means thanks, praise.

Paul tells us that we should give glory to God in everything we do, including eating and drinking.

Is it not time for each of us to re-examine his attitudes on meal prayers?
PASTORAL LETTER

DESSERT SPIRITUALITY

In a Canadian diocese a few years ago, some priests adapted their bishop’s lenten pastoral letter as a basis for the parish program for Lent. In the parish bulletin on the Sunday before Lent, an invitation was extended to all families and religious communities to join the bishop and clergy in a search for conversion.

This letter is a family meditation. Its local adaptation would serve as a good beginning for many of us as Lent ’73 opens.

The holy season of Lent begins very shortly. On this coming Tuesday night at midnight, the whole Church begins her solemn penitential march toward Easter night and the resurrection. Long ago, the vast throng of the people of Israel fought the desert wilderness to gain the Promised Land; so, on Ash Wednesday, the Church sets out on her pilgrimage of love to find new life in the risen Christ.

The announcement of Lent’s beginning sets off different echoes in the soul of each person. For some, the opening of Lent sends out echoes of gloom and sadness; for others, it is the signal to open the battle against spiritual fatigue and laziness; for still others, the opening of Lent brings forth a sigh of thanks: “Thank God, Lent is here! Now we can get down to the serious work of following Christ!” For all of us, “Behold, now is the acceptable time!” says Saint Paul in his letter to the Church dwelling at Corinth.

Let us take a brief look at Lent, and see where it may lead us this year.

Lent, and the People of Israel

The chosen people of Israel, led by Moses, passed through the waters of the Red Sea, and began a long, difficult type of Lent. Slowly they moved across the lonely desert toward their homeland. They learned that there was no God except the God who led them: there was no rest except in his wonderful mercy. Often they rebelled against the heat of the sand, and the constant monotony of the food; but gradually they learned to worship together, to sacrifice together, and to rejoice together, under the hand of God. Their Lent was a long, bitter struggle for survival. Finally, after a forty year Lent, they marched into the Promised Land. They were a people cleansed of individualism; they were fully aware of their common membership in the royal family of God.

Today, we, the Christian people, are not led into the desert in the same way. But we must become aware of the same basic pattern: salvation comes to us in the desert. Let us examine this idea — that we must return to the desert.
Christ Goes Back into the Desert

Led forth by the Holy Spirit, Christ Jesus went out to the wilds of the desert. Indeed, as the gospel for the first Sunday in Lent reminds us, Christ went back into the desert for forty days and nights. For six long and lonely weeks, our savior fasted and prayed: a hymn of glory and a prayer for mercy came from the suffering body of Christ in the wilderness. In the remote solitude of the desert, the Son of Man prayed for all the sons of men.

Each year, as Lent begins, Christ goes back into the desert. He goes in us, and we go in him. Once again, Israel moves out to do battle in the wilderness. Once more the cry of Moses is heard, “Spare your people, Lord, for they are truly sorry!” This time, the cry comes from the new Moses, the new Abraham, the new David, Christ the Lord!

We, the people of ________________, go out into the desert, in Christ, to seek the living God. We will cry out the battle hymn of Lent:

“Spare your people, O Lord, spare your people!
For we stand as sinners before you.”

Lent and Easter

At the end of Lent, we will find Easter. As we suffer with Christ in the desert, so we shall enter with him into the Promised Land. As we die with Christ, so shall we rise with him. His death destroys all death, and his rising is the promise of our own rising at the Last Day. Behold, we are buried with him in the tomb, and we shall rise with him in glory. We are buried with him beneath the waters of baptism: we arise in triumph from those waters, to seek our new life and new freedom. Easter is the celebration of death and victory. Easter is the time for baptism, because baptism is the sign of death and resurrection, of darkness crushed by blinding light.

Lent, Easter, and the Community

I call upon all of you to join me in this very vital march into the desert. If our Easter victory is to be a real triumph, several things must be present in our lives during Lent.

SILENCE: First, let us try to shut out much of the noise which drowns out the gentle invitation of Christ to follow him into the desert. Everlasting television viewing, noisy radios, entertainments beyond count — those things afford no help to the Christian in the desert of Lent. The sign of the desert is SILENCE.

PRAYER AND SCRIPTURE: Secondly, let prayer arise from our hearts and lips, through Christ, to the Father. Lent is lived primarily in the home: let the holy bible be read in the evening; fuller knowledge of the history of salvation is of great encouragement to all of us, both priests and people.
EUCHARIST: The daily Masses and Sunday Masses of Lent, accompanied by a homily, are treasures of praise and sources of strength without equal. The whole liturgy of Lent, from Ash Wednesday to the Easter Vigil, is a magnificent heritage. It is the urgent desire of the pope and the bishops that the treasure-box of the lenten liturgy be opened by all priests for the enrichment of the lives of their people. It will bring warm consolation to the priest as well.

THE CROSS: During Lent our penance should not be only internal and individual, but also external and social. Its practice should be fostered in ways that are possible in our own times and according to our circumstances. Its essence is self-denial, accepting our daily cross and following Christ. We must share our lives with the community, our goods with the poor.

HOLY WEEK: Finally, let us look ahead to Holy Week and Easter: As Lent leads us, week by week, to the Alleluias of the Easter victory, so each family should prepare for that victory. Each home should make a worthy preparation for the Easter Vigil, and for Holy Week which goes before the Vigil. Easter is the most important day in Christian history. The Vigil should become the most beautiful and significant celebration in a parish. I wish to encourage and promote your efforts to make the Easter Vigil a clear and joyful sign of our victory in Christ.

Let us go forth together, into the desert; we are marked with the ashes of our sorrow. We go together, bishop, priests and people, to seek the living God. We go out to do battle against all things which take us away from our heavenly Father. With our hands stretched up towards God our Father, we, the new Israel, echo the humble prayer of Israel of old:

"Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us!
Do not cast off what you have created,
For you are the Lord, our God."

Devotedly yours in Christ,

USEFUL FOR YEARS

The ideas and suggestions contained in this issue of the National Bulletin cannot be exhausted or even explored fully in one year. They are useful for years to come.

If a community begins working on them this Lent, and continues next year and the years after that, it will be making a serious start at the work the Lord intends for us all during Lent.

May we suggest you order extra copies now, and use them both this year and next in your lenten task of renewal.
Every Christian community needs to reflect on its sacramental life sometime during the year. Lent and Easter are seasons when the meaning of the sacraments in the spiritual life of God's people should become even more clear for all.

What does the sacrament of penance mean to the individual members of your parish? What does it mean for your community as a whole?

For many, the first thought that comes to mind is forgiveness of sins. Others look further, and realize this sacrament is the first step toward a renewed, re-invigorated Christian life. Some see the sacrament only as a cleansing, while many realize it is also a means to the Easter peace Jesus promised.

The role of the Spirit in the sacrament, in the steps leading a person to repentance, and in the serious efforts to live a new life in Christ needs prayer and study of scripture if we are to understand this role and tell others about it.

The Spirit-inspired joy that should fill the community when a sinner returns (Lk. 15:7) should be real. Where is it in your community?

We need to pray about the parables of forgiveness (Lk. 15:4-32), the purpose of the Son of Man (Mt. 20:28), the responsibility of individuals to forgive one another (Mt. 18: 21-35). What efforts do we make to study these and to practise them as individuals and as a community?

Celebration

The way the sacrament of penance is celebrated reflects the faith of the community, both of its priest and of the individual penitent. At the same time, it affects and forms — or stunts — the faith of all concerned.

The parish or community liturgy committee should take a serious look at the way the sacrament is presently celebrated here:

- **Time**: When are confessions heard? Is the time suitable for the community? Are time and place announced in the bulletin as a sacramental rite? What about the problem (in some parishes) of confessions before and even during Sunday Masses? What can be done to avoid, as a general rule, hearing them during Mass?

  Adequate time should be given so that each penitent is free to discuss his spiritual needs and the celebrant has time to give sound spiritual advice and direction. Spiritual medication rather than bandaids, and preventative medicine rather than tourniquets should be the goal of each community. And this means sufficient time is needed.
• **Place:** Most of us grew up with confessionals designed with the comfort and spiritual reassurance of an outdoor telephone booth in a snowdrift. In the past few years, we have been hearing about celebrating the sacrament in a room, where the penitent has the choice of a kneeler or the more personal face-to-face encounter. It would be good for each liturgy committee to discuss such a way — at least on occasions — for the sacramental celebration in their community.

• **“Celebration”?** Do we *celebrate* the sacrament or just go to confession and get absolution? What sort of words do we use in announcements, signs and bulletin boards? What phrases do we use when speaking of the sacrament? A change of attitude will often be aided by a change of vocabulary.

Do priest, penitents and community look on each confession as an act of public worship, as an occasion of praise to God? What can be done in your community to deepen this awareness?

• **Vestments:** The old ritual encouraged the priest to vest in surplice and violet stole. Most newly ordained priests abandoned the surplice after one or two unsuccessful attempts to wear it with dignity in the box. Even today, too often the stole is a grimy once-violet ribbon.

  **Should the stole be white, to reflect the paschal significance of the sacrament being celebrated?**

• **Atmosphere:** Adequate light, some reasonable comfort, banners or posters reflecting the gospel ideas of repentance, forgiveness and renewal: these could bring a new atmosphere to the area in which the sacrament is celebrated. Dignity is required in our worship, and needs to be considered in this sacrament too.

**Related to Eucharist**

It is interesting to notice how the Church moves from one side to the other until it finds the balanced position in its theology and practice. We have just come out of a period when penance and eucharist were so closely linked in the popular mind that many considered confession a necessity before communion. Then as communion became more frequent, the sacrament of penance *seemed* to be unnecessary, and we have been having the current phenomenon of infrequent confession and frequent communion. Gradually, we should be seeking to move to a more balanced understanding and use of the sacrament of penance, especially in relation to the eucharist.

Jesus gave us sacraments in order to nourish our spiritual life. (CSL, no. 59). As the center, the apex, the heartbeat of Christian life, the eucharist stands at the core of the sacramental system. Each sacrament is better understood when seen in light of its relationship to the eucharist.

Sin harms and weakens the unity of the community of believers. The sacrament of reconciliation restores the bond between the individual and the Church. This restoration of unity in the Spirit is celebrated and deepened in the eucharist.

Have we made serious efforts to study the penitential rite? to understand the references to sin in the eucharistic prayers and their prefaces, in the Lord’s prayer and its concluding prayer? in the greeting of peace and its intimate relationship to the eucharist (remember Mt. 5:23-24)?
Do we yet grasp the meaning of eucharist as thanksgiving? Have we come to see that we are thanking God our Father because he has freed us from sin? Do we realize the meaning the death and rising of Christ in which we are plunged by baptism, and which we make present again in this eucharist? We are praising and thanking our heavenly Father who has rescued us from sin, snatched us from the power of darkness, and brought us into his kingdom of light.

**Easter Peace**

In the twentieth chapter, John’s gospel shows the risen Christ on Easter Sunday evening. After giving the assembled apostles his peace, he gives them the power of forgiveness.

Christ’s Easter peace involves much more than relief from remorse and guilty consciences, and more than an individual’s forgiveness.

This peace in which we are invited to share is the peace of Christ: we are once more one with Christ; in him we are one with God and one with one another. Once more we are swept up into God’s plan; once again we are united with God’s will. The restoration of all things in Christ is a little closer now, since Christ has restored us to our place in the Father’s great design.

Through his minister of reconciliation, the Lord Jesus forgives the repentant sinner, and brings him once more into a full relationship with his people. Once more, the sinner is reconciled to the community and able to break the bread of life with his brothers and sisters. A forgiven sinner re-enters the company of forgiven sinners.

Together with them, he praises God in Christ for his mercy. If we listen to the words of the eucharistic prayers and their prefaces, we frequently hear this theme of praise and thanks for our reconciliation and forgiveness.

Because another member has been restored to the community, all rejoice (Lk. 15:7), and give greater praise in the eucharist, which a greater, holier community is now celebrating.

**Down-to-Earth Practices**

If we keep such ideas in theory only, and fail to bring them down to earth, they will be of little use in our parishes and communities. We have to take a serious look at the way we should celebrate these truths, and do something positive. Changes need to be studied and discussed and prayed about. Priests and people have to understand them before they take place, and have to be helped sometimes to see that they are gaining and not losing by these improvements.

Look back over the past year to see what has been done to help members of your parish or community to grow in their theology and liturgical understanding of the sacrament of penance. Look ahead, and ask your parish council members what they are planning in this regard for the coming year.
PENANCE CELEBRATION — LENT 1973

Introductory Notes

a) Bible services are encouraged in a special way during Advent and Lent as one way of promoting a warm and living love for scripture among God’s people (CSL, nos. 35:4, 24).

Many members of a spiritual community may benefit from a bible service celebrating God’s gift of forgiveness. This service may be used at any time during Lent, but it is recommended for the final two weeks of the season. Preparations should begin well in advance of the date chosen.

During the final days of Lent, the Christian community is preparing the celebration of the Easter vigil. This service should be of assistance to them in making the choice of dying to sin and living for God.

Care must be taken to avoid any ceremony of darkness and light, or use of the Easter candle, so that nothing will be taken away from the Easter vigil, the greatest night of the Church’s year.

b) The celebration of a penance service does not always involve sacramental confession. Some may have been to confession fairly recently; others may prefer another confessor, or may not be ready to go to confession at this service. The goal of this celebration is conversion. To focus everyone’s attention on confession rather than conversion is to measure a Christian’s change of heart too narrowly.

At the same time, one must not mislead people into thinking that a communal penance celebration is the equivalent of sacramental absolution.

c) Personal attention: When the sacrament of penance is celebrated, the priest should help it become a personal meeting of the penitent with Christ. Individual attention in the form of instruction, advice, encouragement, should be given to each penitent by the priest. If the sacrament is celebrated after the bible service, as suggested in this outline, more time will be available for giving each person the individual attention he or she needs and desires.

d) The following outline is a guide, with suggested texts. While these may be used as they stand, it is often better to adapt them to the needs of the local congregation. Other suitable hymns, psalms and readings may be found in the Masses and office of the season, as well as in Catholic Book of Worship. (See liturgical index, complete edition.) The liturgy committee of the parish council should be encouraged to develop this service as required to meet the needs of the community.

e) All scripture references are to the Jerusalem Bible. In the case of the psalms, the second number refers to the Vulgate.

f) The degree of participation will depend on the level of the liturgical development of the community. Priests and their liturgy committees may wish to use this bible service to lead their people into further participation in the community Mass.
g) For a full celebration, there should be a celebrant, a number of confessors, one or more readers, servers, choir, (thurifer, if incense is used). The celebrant presides from the chair, leads the prayers and preaches the message of conversion. His work will stand out more clearly when he encourages others to assume their proper roles.

h) A number of smaller or scattered parishes may wish to pool their efforts in celebrating penitential services in each place. A team of priests going from parish to parish on several different days will bring the benefits of this celebration to more people.

i) People's leaflet? Some parishes may wish to prepare leaflets to help their people take a full part in the psalms and responses.

Others may prefer to encourage the people to use the Canadian hymnal. In this outline, appropriate references are made to the hymnal for all parts sung by the congregation.

“Every believer in this world of ours must be a spark of light.”

(Pope John)

This quotation could be used as a versicle and response at some point during the celebration, or included in the people's folder as a good summary of the positive action the Lord Jesus wants us to take.

j) Other ways in which a liturgy committee might wish to develop the theme of this celebration:

—We are in the darkness of sin;
  Christ is the light of the world.

or

—Sin is darkness;
  Christ is light;
  Christ brings us victory over sin.

k) Further ideas may be found in:

—Penance, Catholic Information Center, 3225 - 13th Avenue, Regina, Sask.


—Repent and Believe, Liturgical Commission, 320 Cathedral Street, Baltimore, Md. 21201, U.S.A.

Many books of bible services are available, and most have services for Lent or for the sacrament of penance.

The services contained in the Bulletin last year also provide further references and suggestions.
PENANCE CELEBRATION OUTLINE

Theme

Christ is the light of the world

The theme may be explained in a few sentences before the service begins, after the bible is enthroned, or in any leaflet handed out to the congregation.

Entrance Rite

1. Entrance song

Ps. 27(26)

or seasonal hymn

or hymn based on theme

2. Enthroning the Word of God

The book of God's word (bible or lectionary) is carried in procession by the reader, accompanied by servers with lighted candles, and the others mentioned in (g) above. He places the book in a place of honor (reading stand or lectern; on the altar, if necessary), and the candles are placed nearby. If desired, the celebrant may incense the book.

The readings are proclaimed from the book in this place of honor. The book used for the service should have a special binding to show and reinforce our reverence for God's word. When it appears, Canada's new lectionary will be particularly suitable for this purpose.

3. Celebrant's Greeting

Sign of cross, and one of:

2 Tim. 1:2
Tit. 1:4
1 Pet. 5:14

4. Opening prayer

The celebrant may choose a suitable prayer from the lenten Masses or offices; he is encouraged to compose his own, based on the theme as developed in the readings chosen for this celebration. One example of such a prayer:

Let us pray to our Father in heaven, who sent his Son to be the light of the world:

pause for silent prayer
Loving Father,
we praise you for having chosen us
to be your holy people,
your instruments for saving the world.
Grant that we may once more cast sin out of our lives
so that we may truly be the children of light.
Father, we ask this grace through Christ our Lord.

Christ is the Light of the World

5. Reading from the word of God

   An OT or NT reading may be chosen, or a mosaic of texts may be read
   without titles in this manner:

   Celebrant    Man lives in the darkness of sin:
   Reader (1)   selected verses from Is. 59:9-14
   Celebrant    God sends his light to us:
   Reader (2)   selected verses from Is. 9:1-2, 5-6
   Reader (1)   Lk. 1:78-79
   Celebrant    This light is Christ:
   Reader (1)   Jn. 1:1, 4-7, 9
   Celebrant    Jn. 8:12

6. Meditative silence

   God’s people reflect silently and pray in response to the word they have heard
   in faith.

7. Our response to God’s word

   Reader (1)   I am the light of the world, says Jesus.          Jn. 8:12
   (R.)          Send us your light and your truth.              Ps. 43(42):3
   Reader (2)   Those who follow Jesus
                do not walk in the darkness of sin. (R.)          Jn. 8:12
   Reader (1)   Though we walk in a dark valley,
                he is with us to lead us on. (R.)              Ps. 23(22):4

8. Prayer

   The celebrant may develop a prayer in collect form, based on the reading,
or he may prefer to use the opening prayer from the 13th or 26th Sunday of the
year.

Jesus Brings Us into the Kingdom of Light

9. Reading from the word of God

   A reading may be chosen from               Mic. 7:7-9
   Col. 1:11-20                               1 Jn. 1:5-10
   1 Jn. 2:7-11, 15-17                        1 Jn. 3:1-10
10. **Our Response to God's teaching**

_Celebrant_ Let us pause for a moment of prayer to thank God for making us his people through the waters of baptism. Though we have not always been faithful, we should promise him once more (today) that we will love him more deeply, and show this love in our daily lives.

*A lenten hymn may be sung.*

**Jesus Sends Us to Share His Light**

11. **Gospel reading**  
*Mt. 5:13-16, 48*

12. **Homily**

_The brief homily, based on the sacred readings, should lead the congregation into the examination of conscience._

13. **Examination of our Christian lives**

_The emphasis here should be on the moral teaching of Jesus and his apostles, as well as on the fact that our sin impedes the way and work of the Lord in the world. A manner of living by which we prepare the way of the Lord should be encouraged among the people of God._

_A pause should be made for reflection after each consideration. Some may wish to add a community response each time, using a suitable psalm verse or a prayer such as “Lord, have mercy on your people.”_

_One way of presenting the examination of conscience is given at the end of this outline._

14. **Silent prayer**

_For about five minutes, all remain in silence. Sitting or kneeling as they wish, they discuss their way of life with the Lord._

_For those who wish it, the sacrament of penance will be available after the bible service._

15. **Community act of sorrow**

_Lord, you have called us to be children of light. Forgive us for choosing darkness and sin._

_Lord, have mercy._

_R. Lord, have mercy._

_You have promised us your help in times of need. Forgive us for neglecting your strength in our weakness._

_Christ, have mercy._

_R. Christ, have mercy._

23
You have come to give us eternal life.
Forgive us for refusing your gifts to us.
R. Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

or selected verses of Ps. 51(50) may be sung. CBW no. 235.

16. Acclamation

A song of joy or thanksgiving may be sung by all, or by the choir. One of the seasonal psalms may be sung, or organ music played to bring an atmosphere of the joy and eagerness of God's people to spread the light of the Lord.

Or a brief prayer of the faithful, based on the theme, may be developed, ending with the Lord's prayer, no. 17.

Conclusion of the Rite

17. Lord's prayer

This prayer should be sung by all, as at Mass. CBW 221-223.

The celebrant may desire to prepare an introduction based on the theme, using these or similar ideas:

Let us pray to the Father of light
as Christ our Lord has taught us:

18. Invitation

The celebrant invites all to receive the benefits of the sacrament of penance, if they so wish. Priests will be available after the closing hymn.

19. Blessing
given together by all the priests

May almighty God bless you,
the Father and the Son
and the Holy Spirit.

20. Recessional hymn seasonal, thanksgiving or praise

Sacrament of Penance

Those who wish to receive individual guidance and sacramental absolution are encouraged to take the opportunity provided by the presence of a number of confessors. The choir might sing meditative or seasonal hymns or suitable psalms in a quiet manner for the first five or ten minutes after the service.
EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

This is a sample of one approach to the examination of conscience for adults in the spirit of the Vatican Council.

The emphasis is on the positive commands of Jesus, on living his gospel in our daily lives, on the social dimensions of a good life as well as of sin.

Pauses should be made for meditation and examination between the questions asked by the celebrant. Two readers may be used for greater effect.

A number of areas of Christian living should be explored during the service. The parish or community liturgy committee could also work with the celebrant to develop other areas, along similar lines.

Introduction

Celebrant

God our Father has sent Jesus to save us, to bring us from the kingdom of darkness into his own kingdom of light. Though we have been called to be the children of light, we have often chosen darkness and sin. Guided by the Holy Spirit, let us open our hearts to God's word, admitting where we fail to follow Christ and seeing how we need to improve. Let us ask his help to be converted, that we may once more live as the children of light, as God wants his beloved people to live.

Light of the World

Reader (1) Jesus is the light of the world, but in his wisdom, he sends us forth to be the light of the world today.

(2) We are called to do our good deeds before men so that they will see the good we do and give praise to the Father.

Celebrant What sort of example of Christian living do I give to my family? Do I really stand up for my faith by my daily words and actions at work, at school, at play?

See

Jn. 8:12

Mt. 5:14

Mt. 5:16
Does my whole manner of life —
my possessions, my recreation,
my language, my honesty —
lead people to Christ, or away from him?

Do I help my city (town, township) become better
by personal involvement in its affairs?
How much cooperation and leadership have I given
in the life and work of our parish community?

Listening to the Lord

**Reader (1)**
Man does not live on bread alone,
but on every word spoken by God.
His words are a lamp to guide us,
a light for our path.

**Celebrant**
Lord Jesus,
you have the words of eternal life!
Open our eyes so that we may see
the wonderful truths in your law.

*See*  
*Mt. 4:4*  
*Ps. 119(118):105*  
*Jn. 6:68*  
*Ps. 119(118):18*

Do I read the word of God each day?
Is the bible the basis of my prayer?
Is God's word ever read aloud in our home?

Do we listen with faith to the readings at Mass?
During the week,
do we try to recall the Sunday gospel message?
Are we opening our heart to the Spirit
so that he may guide us in our daily living?

What sort of Christian reading matter is in our home?
Do we read religious books and papers
that will help us grow in our faith?
Are we trying to share our enthusiasm for Christ?

Living As People of Light

**Reader (1)**
Do not live according to the behavior of the
world around you,
but let God change you inwardly
by a completely new way of thinking.

**Reader (2)**
Sell your belongings
and give the money to the poor.
Store up your riches in heaven,
for your heart will always be
where your treasure is.
Reader (1) Everyone will hate you because of me. If the world hates you, you must remember it has hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. But I have chosen you from this world, and you do not belong to it. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too. 

Mk. 13:13

(2) Do not let evil defeat you; instead, conquer evil with good. I will not leave you alone; I will come back to you. I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper, the Spirit of truth, to stay with you for ever. 

Rom. 12:21

Jn. 15:18-20

Jn. 14:18

Jn. 14:16

Celebrant As an individual, do I tend to follow the world's standards instead of standing up for Christ's truth? Is my personal treasure in heaven, or is my heart kept at a distance from Jesus by too much involvement in things?

pause

As a parish community, do we use our money and energy for Jesus and his poor, or for our own small goals? What do we do for the helpless at home and abroad? How seriously do we support the missions?

pause

Do we let the world lead us, or are we giving Christian witness to others? What did we do for Christ in the past year?

pause

Are we ready to stand up for Christ at any cost? Do we avoid persecution by being timid? Do we talk and pray in order to avoid action for justice in the light of the gospel?

pause

Are we discouraged by evil? Do we turn daily to the Spirit for light and guidance to bring Christ's truth, joy and peace into the lives and affairs of the world?
Prayer and Worship

Reader (1)  Jesus teaches us to pray in public as well as in private, for ourselves as well as for others.
           (2)  We are to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him.
           (1)  Jesus invites us to be perfect, as perfect as our heavenly Father is.

Celebrant  Do I seek God's light and strength at the beginning of each day?
           Do I end each day with praise and thanks, with sorrow and good resolution, with a prayer for help to do better tomorrow?
           When I neglect to pray, do I realize that I am failing to give glory to God?
           Do I encourage prayer at home among the members of our family?
           Am I dedicated to serving Jesus Christ?
           Am I trying to please him?
           Do I seek to be perfect, to make my life a living sacrifice of praise?
           Am I doing every action for God's honor and glory?

Living Our Faith

Reader (1)  Jesus promised the world that it would recognize his followers by their love for one another.
           (2)  He sent us to show this love to others so that we might lead them to the Father.

Celebrant  Do we live our daily lives by Christ's standards or by the world's?
           Do we do good actions in order to show off, so that others will think we are holy?
           Do we try to show love and kindness to others by our daily actions?
           How do we treat our relatives and neighbors?
           How do we act toward strangers?
           When people see our daily life, are they led away from Christ, or inspired to follow him more closely?
Conclusion

*Reader (1)*

Jesus says to each of us:

without me, you can do nothing.

*Reader (2)*

But in him, we can do all things.

*Celebrant (1)*

He calls us to bear much fruit, eternal fruit.

*Celebrant (2)*

He calls us to follow him, obedient to the Father, loving and serving his brothers and sisters.

*Celebrant*

The right time has come, and God’s kingdom is near, Turn away from your sins, believe the good news of our salvation.  

*Mk. 1:15*

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

They once were in common use until about ten years ago.

They were a familiar part of clerical and religious life.

St. Augustine died with them on his lips.

The seven “penitential psalms” have been forgotten by many in the last few years. Do they have a place in today’s Church and its prayer life? Should we bring them back?

* * *

Under one antiphon, the seven psalms were “recited” by individuals and communities at penitential seasons, especially during Lent.

The refrain (what a nice, positive approach!):

Do not remember our sins, O Lord, or those of our ancestors. Do not take revenge on our sins.

The psalms in traditional use:

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Read over these psalms prayerfully, and consider whether and how they should be “rehabilitated” and brought back into the prayer life of the community. The requirements of CSL, no. 13, should be observed, of course.

Please share your ideas and suggestions with us.
ASHES FOR EVERYONE?

A great fuss is made by many people to “get” the ashes at the beginning of Lent. Either on Ash Wednesday or on the following Sunday, long lines form to receive the ashes. Everyone — adults, children, infants — is marked with the sign of repentance.

But when they read the texts of the liturgy of the word in which the ashes are blessed, some are beginning to ask themselves: should ashes be given and received indiscriminately?

Two Opinions

Yes: This is a sacramental. Everyone who receives the ashes with good dispositions will benefit. It is good for others to see us wandering about the city with smudges on our foreheads, people marked as penitents. It is not right to separate sheep from goats, or to ask people to stand up and be counted.

No: We should encourage all to listen carefully to the texts, and invite those who are ready to take Lent seriously to come forward to receive the ashes as a sign of their intentions. People are already asked to make a similar declaration of faith when they choose to come for communion or remain in their seats.

Gradual Change?

It would not be wise or right for a priest to insist that only dedicated persons should receive the ashes. But it would do no harm at all if priests and liturgy committees were to have a thorough discussion about their parish approach to Lent. Is it fair to ask people to take Lent seriously when the parish doesn’t?

Over the next few years, priests and people should make an effort to understand Lent better, to do some serious preparation for this season, and to enter it with definite plans for renewal.

Should everyone receive the ashes? Before we can answer that question, we have to ask ourselves: How well do we realize what Lent means? How ready are we to enter this season with Christ and his Church?

DO WE NEED IT?

A pastoral document to serve as a study guide during the season of Lent? Pierre Berton shook up his church and made its pews uncomfortable by asking some penetrating questions. Do we need a simple leaflet, pastoral in tone, to be a source of insight for Canadians who want to make Lent a time of renewal? It need not be an official document, but one that parishes, communities and dioceses could use if they have not prepared a pastoral program of their own. Perhaps this might be done on an ecumenical basis, with local churches working together on a similar theme.

Such a program could become a yearly development, a movement of the people of God toward greater holiness.

What about Advent also?
COUNTDOWN FOR LENT

Before the three year cycle of readings began, we were helped to get ready for the season of Lent by the two and one-half weeks of preparation. Now that these are gone, placing the main emphasis on Lent itself, there is a tendency for this season to creep up on us; as a result, we find ourselves taking the first ten days just to get going.

One way of helping the people of your community to be ready for Lent is by a series of brief articles in the parish bulletin (or posters or banners in appropriate places) on the spiritual possibilities of the lenten season. It should be a positive approach, encouraging prayer, a change of heart, bible reading, almsgiving, suitable penances.

Some thoughts along these lines are included in the 1973 Liturgical Calendar, Guidelines for Pastoral Liturgy, for the three Sundays before Ash Wednesday.

THEMES OR PROGRAMS FOR LENT

Some dioceses and parishes take on a theme for the lenten celebration. It sounds like an easy solution: five or six weeks to cover some topic or area of life thoroughly.

In planning such times, serious thought should be given to this question: is this particular theme really the work of Lent?

When following such themes, one should be careful to keep perspective, and not lose sight of the whole lenten task by too much emphasis on one of its parts.

The theme may be involved in the Sunday celebrations provided that it does not smother or ignore the carefully chosen themes, prayers and readings of those Sundays.

A local theme may be of value, but it can never replace or overshadow the themes of the universal Church in its celebration of Lent.

GOING, GOING . . .

Less than a month after it appeared, every copy of Bulletin no. 35, Parish Liturgy Committees, was sold.

We have arranged for a reprinting of another thousand copies.

Be sure to get enough for your committee members. Order No. 35 today, at $1.25 a copy, from the address on the inside front cover.
HOLY WEEK

WEEK OF FAITH

Throughout the entire liturgical year, the Church celebrates the saving work of the Lord Jesus. Each Sunday is a remembrance of the death, rising and glory of our savior. (CSL, nos. 102, 106)

As a period of listening to God's word and of praying, Lent prepares the Christian community throughout the world to celebrate the Easter mystery. The baptismal and penitential features of the lenten season lead the faithful to Easter. (CSL, no. 109)

Holy Week is the setting in which the Church has placed its greatest feast, the annual Easter celebration.

Word and Prayer

This week is a week of listening to God's word and of responding to his love in prayer. It is a sad commentary on our understanding of scripture to see the greatest night of the year “improved” by skimping on the beautiful series of readings from God's word.

Holy Week is not to be centered around ceremonies. They are to aid us in our celebration, not to be the main effort. It is good to remember the Council teaching: “Ceremonies however beautiful . . . will be of little value if they are not directed toward educating men in the attainment of Christian maturity.” (Min­istry and Life of Priests, no. 6)

This week is a week of celebrating our faith in our crucified and risen savior. It is a week of listening to the greatest signs of God's love for us proclaimed in scripture, and a week of celebrating with Christ, of praising the Father who has sent us so great a savior.

The Church invites us to join with all Christians, and with Christ our Lord in a spirit of obedience to God's will and of sacrifice. Read Heb. 12:2-3

Preparation

The whole lenten period is a time of preparation for Holy Week and Easter. Read CSL, no. 109 once again in this light.
By adequate instruction, by prayer and scripture, by liturgical celebration, by personal and social penance, the members of a community can prepare for Easter.

Parish bulletins can also be an effective way of helping people to deepen their realization of their lenten task and its relationship to Holy Week and Easter.

Since every Sunday is a little Easter, the great truth of the paschal mystery can be kept before the minds and hearts of all.

Sunday and weekday homilies, bible services (CSL, no. 35:4), provide opportunities for instruction and spiritual guidance.

Servers, musicians, choir members and readers have special roles to play in preparing for the parish celebration of Holy Week.

Reconciliation

Holy Week is a time of special grace, when many are moved to seek reconciliation with the Christian community.

While opportunities should be provided for all members of the community to take part in the sacrament of penance this week, we should not forget Pope John’s wise advice: it is even better to encourage people to celebrate the sacrament of forgiveness before Palm Sunday, so that they will be able to take a full part in the entire week. It usually takes about two years to persuade the people of a parish to advance their Easter confession by a week, but it can be done. Provision still has to be made for this sacrament during Holy Week, but starting the trend toward the previous week will promote a fuller and more fervent celebration of Holy Week.

An outline of a penance celebration is provided in this issue of the Bulletin.

With serious preparation and joyful celebration by all, Holy Week can provide a great spiritual advance for the members of your community of faith.

Music for Holy Week

Three questions have always plagued organists and choirs when preparing for Holy Week:

• What do we sing?
• When do we sing it?
• Where do we find the music?

Planning Holy Week Music

Planning the music for Holy Week is going to be easier this year, and smaller parishes will be able to increase the extent of their singing at each of the major ceremonies. By using Catholic Book of Worship and the C.C.C. Holy Week record, everyone will be able to improve the musical aspects of this week of faith.

Holy Week planning is simplified when musicians take full advantage of two tools provided in the complete (choir) edition of Catholic Book of Worship:
• **Outline of the liturgical celebration**, including the music to be sung, or indicating the **type of music** that is fitting. (A simplified form of this outline is contained in the pew edition.)

• **Liturgical index**: This is a simple key to the hidden treasures of the hymnal.

Examples of how these are used are included below in the articles on each of the major days in Holy Week.

**Record Brings Additional Help**

To help choirs — especially in smaller parishes and communities — to choose and learn music for Holy Week, the National Liturgical Office has developed an LP containing many examples of psalms and hymns for the main celebrations. All the music is taken from *Catholic Book of Worship*, and the jacket locates each selection by page or number in the hymnal.

Details of the record are being mailed to all parishes.

Besides introducing choirs to examples of Holy Week music in the hymnal, the record may be used to help congregations become familiar with this music. One way of doing this, for example, could be to invite people to remain for a ten or fifteen minute practice after lenten evening Masses. The recorded hymns for one day, such as Palm Sunday, could be played once or twice, while the congregation followed in *Catholic Book of Worship*. (The choir, of course, should learn them ahead of time, where possible, using the same method if desired.)

Then the congregation could begin to sing along with the record; with a few repetitions, they will become familiar with the music and much better prepared to use it during Holy Week.

A similar procedure could be followed in parish schools and organizations which meet during Lent.

**Hope for the Future**

While it may take generations before Holy Week and Easter hymns become as familiar as Christmas carols, each believing community should start now to lay foundations for this Holy Week. Long range results will show in due time.

Let's begin now to make this year the best Holy Week we've ever sung in our community church!

And when Easter comes, let's keep on improving!
PASSION SUNDAY

On the Sunday before Easter, the Church calls us to celebrate the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem. Our king enters his city in order to achieve his paschal mystery: to save us by dying for us and rising, and by involving us in this saving mystery.

Two themes are evident in the celebration: the kingship of Christ and his suffering and death. At times they are in contrast, at times they come together in this day’s liturgy: “Hosanna to the son of David!” changes to “Crucify him!” Yet the messianic figure who is proclaimed king in Sunday’s procession is still proclaimed king while he hangs on Friday’s cross.

Messianic Entrance

Many parishes and communities need to improve the way of commemorating the Lord’s entry into Jerusalem. The missal provides three ways of celebrating this rite:

1. Procession to the church: Priest and people assemble at another place (another church or chapel, or a building distinct from the church: how about your parish hall or school?). The priest’s introduction, and the Mass collect which he says later, give a good summary of the meaning of Lent and Holy Week.

After the palms are blessed, the gospel of Christ’s entrance is proclaimed, and the community moves in procession to the church, singing praises to Christ the king.

Too often, this form of the rite has been dismissed too readily: too much bother or preparation, some feel; takes up too much time, say others; maybe your community has some new excuses? Now is the time for your liturgy committee to take a fresh look at your past practices and see how they can improve the quality of worship and celebration in your community this year.

2. Solemn entrance: Less solemn than the procession described above, this rite begins near the main entrance and proceeds to the sanctuary. It is definitely considered second best, and should not be chosen unless the outside procession is impossible.

3. Simple entrance: This boils down to the usual Sunday entrance rite, but Catholic Book of Worship adds a good suggestion for the entrance hymn. The missal notes too that a bible service on the Lord’s solemn entrance into Jerusalem and on his passion should be celebrated on Saturday evening or at a convenient time on Sunday. Should this be combined with a penance celebration if held on Passion Sunday?
Reading of the Passion

In the Mass, the triumphant notes of the messianic entrance are muted. The reading of the passion from one of the synoptic gospels is the focus of the liturgy of the word.

The stark reality of this proclamation is emphasized by the complete absence of candles, incense, greeting and sign of the cross. (A good reason for making sure that candles and possibly incense are used when the gospel is proclaimed at Sunday Masses during the year!)

Normally a deacon or priest other than the celebrant reads the passion. It may also be read by lay readers taking parts, but here the part of Christ is traditionally reserved for the celebrant.

The current rubrics make no mention of the moment of kneeling and silent prayer when the reader proclaims the death of Christ on the cross. To continue this would not be against the spirit of the liturgy, but perhaps it would be better to follow the general rule (Gl, no. 23) and invite all at the end of the reading to reflect on what they have heard proclaimed in God's word. Then the celebrant begins the homily.

Passion Sunday Music


Litururgical index: back of complete edition, CBW, page i; passiontide, page i; kingship, page iii.

Holy Week record: offers a number of hymns and psalms which are appropriate on this solemn day, the opening of Holy Week.

Other Preparations

Other ways of improving the Passion Sunday celebration include:

Servers: A procession with only two or three servers is skimpy. Perhaps Lent is a good time to encourage more boys to become servers. Parishes which have a policy of inviting all the servers to be vested in the sanctuary each time they are at Mass will be able to develop better processions.

Some training is always needed, however, for old and new servers. How to walk in procession may seem an elementary lesson, but it is good to repeat it occasionally. It is also good to encourage them to take part in the singing (do they have hymnals?) and to join with the congregation in making hearty responses. Sometimes it seems that boys have moved from making an appropriate length of noise in the Latin days to making little, if any, now.
Palm distribution: In modern economics, poor distribution methods often frustrate reforms to bring more benefits to more people. Sometimes the same problem can bedevil the Passion Sunday celebration.

Making a big deal over passing out the palms, with long lines coming up to altar, is passé. *The rite no longer makes provision for this.* It simply states that the people already have their palms, and the celebrant blesses them.

This means therefore that the people should receive them as they come into the church (or place) where the palms are to be blessed. This is easily done by having servers hand out the unblessed palms before the Mass.

More parishes are moving toward the practice of blessing the palms at each Mass on this Sunday.

Parish announcements: It is particularly important to proclaim the paschal fast: see the note in the 1973 Liturgical Calendar for Passion Sunday.

It would be a wonderful saving of words and decibels this year if each parish made only one announcement on Passion Sunday (at the proper time, please! before Mass or after the prayer after communion): “All the announcements and times for Holy Week services are in the bulletin.”

*Isn't it time we realized how foolish it is to print a bulletin and then make it unnecessary by announcing everything of importance contained in it?*

During the last few weeks before Easter, the bulletin can remind people of the meaning of the main days during Holy Week, and how we take part in them through the liturgy.

Roles and participation: Your liturgy committee should read over CSL, nos. 28-30, and ask some serious questions about parish worship (for every week, not just for Holy Week):

- **All and only** (no. 28): Does everyone do all that he should, and only what he should do in the celebration? Is the priest still doing the work of two or three others?

- **Liturgical ministries** (no. 29): Have our servers, readers, commentators, singers, and musicians been given any training and formation in the liturgy in this past year? A day of renewal for people serving in these ministries should be part of every community’s annual program, preferably in cooperation with other parishes and communities.

- **Ways of participating** (no. 30): Do you use all these in your Sunday celebration? as well and as fully as possible? What about the celebrant’s interventions? (See 1973 Liturgical Calendar, introductory note no. 4.)

A fruitful celebration of Passion Sunday will be the result of serious preparation by people, liturgy committee, servers, readers, musicians, choir members, clergy and all others involved in preparing for and celebrating this day.

A good opening for Holy Week will do much to set a high level of community celebration throughout the entire week, the holiest time of the liturgical year.
SACRED TRIDUUM

The Church has long centered its Holy Week celebrations on the days most involved in the paschal mystery. With Christ and all his Church, we celebrate his death and rising, and our involvement through baptism in his saving act.

Even on Good Friday, we recall Easter; on the day of the resurrection, the liturgy reminds us of the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus.

Holy Thursday evening, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, the Easter vigil, Easter Sunday: these are sacred days, and we are invited to celebrate them with faith.

MASS OF THE LORD’S SUPPER

As Christ gathered his disciples for the passover meal before his passion, so now he gathers the members of this parish community around the table of the word and eucharist. We have come in obedience to his command: “Do this in memory of me.”

The unity of the Christian community is vividly brought out by the one parish Mass, in which all the clergy take a full part. Only where pastoral reasons demand it (such as providing Mass for a large number of people who would not be able to attend the main celebration) should there be another Mass.

Washing of the Feet

Before a community’s liturgy committee or priest dismisses this rite as awkward or embarrassing or useless, serious consideration should be given to these questions: What do we do as a community to serve others as Christ served? How does he expect us to help the needy, the suffering, the neglected in our community? How does Jesus expect us to carry out the lesson of Mt. 25:31-46?

If it is decided to omit this ceremony, what real act of Christian service is going to take its place on this day, outside the liturgy?

What about the procession of people bearing gifts for the poor, as recommended in the sacramentary? Is this not the time to present the lenten alms for peace and development?

Communion

On this day, when Christ commanded his apostles to love one another as he loved us, so that our mutual love would proclaim our faith to the world (Jn. 13: 34-35), the greeting of peace should have special meaning. This could be brought out by the celebrant in his invitation.

Other interventions of this type can help the celebration develop well.

In communities where communion under both forms is customary, this is certainly the most proper day for its use. Consideration needs to be given, of course, to the larger numbers taking part in the Mass.
Parishes not yet communicating in this way might consider asking their bishop's permission to begin this practice during Lent, after due preparation of the parishioners.

Communion should be received from hosts consecrated in this Mass; this is not unusual, really, since the Vatican Council heartily endorsed this practice at every Mass. (CSL, no. 55)

This evening, therefore, the tabernacle is empty before Mass. But here again, one might question the makeshift ways that some parishes have of taking care of the eucharistic species during the sacred triduum.

**Eucharistic Procession**

The hosts consecrated for Friday's communion service are carried solemnly through the church in procession, while all sing the processional chant. The solemnity of this rite is enhanced by the silent community adoration for a few moments after the tabernacle is closed.

The stripping of the altar is carried out quietly and crosses are removed from the church or covered, in preparation for Good Friday's solemn unveiling of the cross.

Adoration for a period of time, but not later than midnight is to be encouraged. Liturgy committees should give thought to providing suitable material for personal prayer and meditation, especially scripture readings, psalms and possibly texts from Christian writers.

**Music**

**Outline of liturgy:** *Catholic Book of Worship* (complete edition, p. 35-37, pew, p. 50-52).

**Liturical index:** back of complete edition, *CBW*, p. i; community, p. ii; eucharist, p. iii, unity, p. iv.

**Holy Week record:** a variety of psalms and hymns is illustrated in the selections recorded. Many of these may be used in eucharistic devotions and at communion time during the year. The opening hymn brings out clearly the themes of this evening's celebration.

When the music is being chosen for this celebration, it might be helpful for all involved in the meeting to listen first to the reading of the appointed gospel, which conveys the Spirit of love, unity, concern, and the atmosphere of the Lord's supper.
GOOD FRIDAY

_Celebration! Red vestments! Communion! What has happened to Good Friday?

_The Church's deepening faith in the paschal mystery is revealed by these elements, and by the frequent references throughout the prayers to the resurrection. We serve not a dead master but a risen, living, glorious savior._

Yet Good Friday is celebrated on a somber note, for Christ’s obedience to the point of death on the cross was the price he paid to save us, to bring us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light.

Dramatic Liturgy

Many dramatic acts and gestures have been deliberately retained or introduced in the present Holy Week liturgy. This is particularly true of Good Friday and the Easter vigil. By balanced use of these dramatic moments, a community can build up its faith: “in the liturgy, the sanctification of man is manifested by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which is proper to each of these signs.” (CSL, no. 7)

Some of these actions and gestures:

- _Silence:_ during the entrance procession, and the time of prayer; after the reading of the passion account (see notes on _Passion Sunday_; after the invitation to pray during the solemn intercessions; after the cross is unveiled; after communion; during the recessional.

- _Prostration and kneeling:_ The prostrate celebrant, surrounded by his ministers, leads the kneeling congregation in a few moments of silent prayer to open this day's liturgy. All may kneel, if desired, after the passion is read; when the cross is unveiled, the congregation kneels in silent veneration.

- _Denuded altar:_ The starkness of the bare altar is deliberate: no cross, cloths or candles ornament it. All other crosses in the church have been removed or covered Thursday evening.

- _Time:_ Even the hour chosen for the service, the traditional hour of the Lord's death on the cross, has a dramatic impact.

In preparing for this celebration, liturgy committees and celebrants should remember the teaching value of these actions and gestures, and not be too quick to devise substitutions for them.

Music and Singing

_Outline of liturgy:_ The order of service is described in _Catholic Book of Worship_ (complete edition, pages 37-41, pew, p. 52-57).

_Liturgical index:_ found at the end of the complete edition of _CBW_, p. ii; see also passiontide, p. i; some hymns from Lent, p. i.
Holy Week record: The selections chosen include a few that many would not have picked at first glance. Some of these might also be used with benefit during Lent. Examples for singing the intercessions and the unveiling of the cross are also given.

Parishes should make a serious effort at singing the responsorial psalm, the gospel acclamation (same as the one for Passion Sunday), and the brief parts for cantor and congregation in the general intercessions (CBW, complete, page 39; pew, p. 54).

Paschal Fast

Is anybody listening to the Vatican Council? Ten years ago it said:

"Let the paschal fast be kept sacred. It should be observed everywhere on Good Friday and, where possible, prolonged throughout Holy Saturday, so that the joys of the Sunday of the resurrection may be visited on uplifted and responsive spirits."

(CSL, no. 110, italics ours)

Individuals, families and parishes should make it one of the special lenten events.

Good Friday and Holy Saturday should be solemn days of prayer, of penance, of reflection on the word of God. They are not days for shopping, travelling, TV and entertainment, partying. Are we going to follow the world, and forget this day's meaning by making it another holiday?

Making the Stations

For parishes and communities which have continued the stations of the cross on Good Friday evening, or during Lent, we might offer some ideas for consideration:

Many of the older forms are negative and excessively lugubrious. The Christian belief is incomplete and useless, according to Paul, if Christ has not risen: our faith would be in vain. Yet most of the older forms of this devotion leave Christ dead in the tomb. The paschal mystery needs to be brought out much more vividly.

Every popular devotion, including the stations, needs to be reviewed and renewed in the Light of CSL, no. 13. What can you say of the format you are using?

Purple stoles? The Church now uses red vestments on Good Friday, emphasizing the triumph of the risen Lord over sin and death.

A way of the cross involving scripture readings, full participation (see CSL, no. 30 for suggested means), positive hymns, a way which builds up faith and leads to a fuller Christian life could be beneficial.
Arrayed in Splendor

Easter finery shows up in all its array on Good Friday. Most of it was purchased during Lent.

This should lead us to examine the dichotomy in our lives between belief and practice. (Remember all that stuff last night about loving our brothers and sisters in Christ, about Christian concern for those in need?)

How do our lenten alms compare to our expenses for new duds? Would any of us dare share dollar for dollar with the poor what we spent to "celebrate" the resurrection of Jesus?

Perhaps some of our lenten efforts should be spent in praying about Jesus' words: Mt. 5:6, 6:20-21; especially Mt. 6:28-33. They come from the sermon on the mount, the presentation of Christ's ideals for his followers.

EASTER VIGIL

On Holy Saturday, the people of God remain in recollection at the tomb of the Lord, meditating on his sufferings and death, refraining from celebrating the eucharist until night. The altar remains stripped and undecorated.

Throughout the day, the faithful are invited to continue the solemn paschal fast which they began on Good Friday.

Darkness and Light

For the symbolism of the service of light to have its full effect, a number of preparations need to be made:

People should become sensitive to the light-darkness imagery of the bible. During Lent, for example, this could be discussed in bible study groups or in lenten instruction series; the parish bulletin might make a serious attempt at helping members of the parish to grow in their understanding of the scriptures. Reading some of the light-darkness passages during the season will also be helpful to their prayer life and as a preparation for the vigil service.

Darkness is essential! All lights — including vigil lights and outside lights — should be extinguished before the service of light. To anticipate the ceremonies before night has fallen is not only an abuse, but a destruction of the symbolic value of this ceremony.

Candles are needed for the entire congregation. The symbolism of the service of light loses much when the spreading of the light of Christ stops before it reaches the congregation.

The Easter proclamation may be sung by someone other than a priest or deacon if necessary. If the priest is an indifferent singer, choosing and preparing a good singer for this role is important. Part of the training for the role is guidance in understanding the symbolism in the chant: passover, Red Sea, Israel, paschal mystery. (Some of these ideas could be shared with the whole parish through instructions and in the bulletin, as noted above.)
Service of the Word

The reading of the scriptures is the basic element of the vigil service. Too often, however, we can be tempted to dispense ourselves and read three OT texts instead of the seven given.

Why are we tempted in this way? Could it be that we are embarrassed by God's word? Or have we failed to understand the message and the symbols in which it is clothed? Perhaps the lenten work of more faithful reading of God's word could be directed to some of these passages.

The purpose of the full set of readings is clearly brought out in the celebrant's introduction: to remember how God has saved his people through the Old Testament, and in Christ; today he continues his saving work in us.

Responsorial psalms should be sung to bring out the full response of faith. The Canadian hymnal provides a simple method of singing them. The alleluia refrain in the responsorial psalm should be sung solemnly, for it is the first alleluia of the Easter season.

Baptismal Liturgy

The season of Lent is intended to recall their baptism to those who are already members of the Church, and to give catechumens their final preparation for baptism. In the Easter vigil, the baptismal liturgy is the culmination of the community's lenten renewal.

Simple music for the litany is provided in the Canadian hymnal. With a little practice, it is easily learned. (Liturgy committees should also consider using the litany a number of times during the year, especially during processions, so that all might become more familiar with this traditional form of prayer.

It is desirable to confer baptism during the vigil celebration.

Renewing the promises: In a parish or community that has taken Lent seriously, the renewal of promises will be filled with meaning. For any individuals who have not followed the lenten observances seriously, the vigil can offer an opportunity to become more involved in the work of Christ throughout the Easter season.

When the priest sprinkles the people with holy water, it is better to go through the church, so that all may be in closer contact and feel more a part of the ceremony. (Parish worship committees should discuss the use of holy water as one of the ways of beginning the Sunday celebration: see the introductory notes of Guidelines for Pastoral Liturgy — 1973 Liturgical Calendar.)

Liturgy of the Eucharist

The Easter vigil Mass is the first Mass of the feast of the risen Lord. White vestments, flowers, music are signs of our joy. Now we celebrate, for Christ our Lord has been raised from the dead! He has triumphed over sin and death! His death is our life, and we rejoice with him.
Our Easter celebrations begin now, filled with a spirit of Christian joy, and last for fifty days, until Pentecost.

The Easter eucharist is the climax of Lent, our communion a pledge from God for a life of grace. (Communion under both species should become the normal form in this celebration.)

We have shared in the death and rising of the Lord Jesus through baptism. We have renewed our baptismal promises.

Now we are asked to be changed persons, Easter men and women, new people in Christ. We are to die to sin and to live for God.

Filled with the life of Christ, we must live our lives with him for the Father, and praise him with our alleluias.

Music

The vigil service on the greatest night of the year should be filled with song. It should outshine even Christmas in splendor of music, psalmody and hymns.

Order of service: Since the Easter vigil liturgy is unique, the outline of the celebration provided in Catholic Book of Worship (complete edition, p. 41-52, pew, p. 58-69) is particularly valuable. The music for all the responsorial psalms and refrains is built on the same general lines.

Liturgical index: complete edition, CBW, p. ii; see also Easter, p. ii, baptism, p. ii.

Holy Week record: Two examples are provided of the responsorial psalms, and the different sections of the litany of the saints are illustrated. The special Alleluia before the gospel and the dismissal are included, as well as a traditional Marian Easter song.

Good music for this celebration depends on wise preparation and adequate practice, along with an understanding of its meaning and importance in the Holy Week services.

A BEGINNING

This issue of the Bulletin has been devoted to taking Lent seriously. It is not the last word on the season, but rather a beginning. If we start this year to observe the season a little better than last year, and next year go on to do even better, we will be moving in the right direction.

There is still much room for diocesan liturgy commissions to work with parish and community worship committees, helping them to take Lent seriously.

We haven't given all the answers in this issue. We have asked a few questions, suggested a few directions, recalled a few traditions.

Next year, God willing, we will go further ahead so that we may all grow in our appreciation of the liturgy of Lent and Easter.
EASTER SEASON

After a Lent filled with determination and a Holy Week celebrated in faith, we are inclined to relax and take a liturgical holiday for a while. Is this what the Church intends?

The Easter season need not be a dead season, or one of total rest after a busy Lent. It ought to be a period of quiet celebration, of meditation on what God has done for us through the death and rising of his Son, our savior.

It is a time to appreciate the story of the Church’s beginnings, as recounted in the readings from the Acts of the Apostles. We can use it as a time for looking at today’s Church — its institutions, practices, worship, priorities, goals — in the light of scripture.

Easter week, the octave of the feast of the resurrection, centers around the appearances of Christ to his apostles. It is a week for deepening our faith in his resurrection and its meaning for us as Christians today.

Ascension and Pentecost

What does your community understand about the feast of the Ascension? Two or three members might be asked to look at it seriously, and suggest ways of giving the parish celebration more meaning.

Pentecost is the close of the Easter season, and then the season of the year, ordinary time, resumes.

One aspect of our Christian living that constantly needs concern is the connection between liturgy and life. How seriously do we practise what we proclaim and profess in the Sunday liturgy?

The bible is filled with warnings from God’s prophets: don’t let worship become merely something you do. It must come from the heart. Lip service is an insult to God.

During ordinary time, the second reading on Sundays is usually devoted to practical aspects of full Christian living. Concerned believers will want to look at these during the week, and parishes should seek to help them grow in their faith in this way.

Every Sunday

Every Sunday is supposed to be a little Easter. Each week on the Lord’s day, God assembles his people, proclaims his word to us, and invites us to praise him for saving us in Christ.

Some serious thought should be given by the parish worship community about how Sunday is being celebrated in the parish. What about summer and its effects on the Lord’s day celebration? Plans should be made for the fall months, so that Sunday will be a day of greater prayer and praise.
The prayers and ceremonies for use in the Mass of chrism are contained in the ICEL translation:

INTRODUCTION

1. The bishop is to be considered as the high priest of his flock. The life in Christ of his faithful is in some way derived and dependent upon the bishop. The chrism Mass is one of the principal expressions of the fullness of the bishop's priesthood and signifies the close unity of the priests with him. During the Mass, which he concelebrates with priests from various sections of the diocese, the bishop consecrates the chrism and blesses the other oils. The newly baptized are anointed and confirmed with the chrism consecrated by the bishop. Catechumens are prepared and disposed for baptism with the second oil. And the sick are anointed in their illness with the third oil.

2. The Christian liturgy has assimilated this Old Testament usage of anointing kings, priests, and prophets with consecratory oil because the name of Christ, whom they prefigured means "the anointed of the Lord."

Chrrism is a sign: by baptism Christians are plunged into the paschal mystery of Christ; they die with him, are buried with him, and rise with him; (2) they are sharers in his royal and prophetic priesthood. By confirmation Christians receive the spiritual anointing of the Spirit who is given to them.

By the oil of catechumens the effect of the baptismal exorcisms is extended. Before they go to the font of life to be reborn the candidates for baptism are strengthened to renounce sin and the devil.

By the use of the oil of the sick, to which Saint James is a witness, (3) the sick receive a remedy for the illness of mind and body, so that they may have strength to bear suffering and resist evil and obtain the forgiveness of sins.

I. The Oils

3. The matter proper for the sacraments is olive oil or, according to circumstances, other plant oil.

4. Chrrism is made of oil and perfumes or other sweet smelling matter.

5. The preparation of the chrism may take place privately before the rite of consecration or may be done by the bishop during the liturgical service.
II. The Minister

6. The consecration of the chrism belongs to the bishop alone.

7. If the use of the oil of catechumens is retained by the conferences of bishops, it is blessed by the bishop with the other oils during the chrism Mass.

   In the case of the baptism of adults, however, priests have the faculty to bless the oil of catechumens before the anointing in the designated stage of the catechumenate.

8. The oil used for anointing the sick must be blessed for this purpose by the bishop or by a priest who has this faculty, either from the law or by special concession of the Apostolic See.

   The law itself permits the following to bless the oil of the sick:

   (a) Those whom the law equates with diocesan bishops;
   (b) in case of true necessity, any priest.

III. Time of Blessing

9. The blessing of the oil and the consecration of the chrism are ordinarily celebrated by the bishop at the chrism Mass celebrated on Holy Thursday morning.

10. If it is difficult for the clergy and people to assemble with the bishop on Holy Thursday morning, the blessing may be held on an earlier day, near Easter, with the celebration of the proper chrism Mass.

IV. Place of the Blessing in the Mass

11. According to the tradition of the Latin liturgy, the blessing of the oil of the sick takes place before the end of the eucharistic prayer, the blessing of the oil of catechumens and the consecration of the chrism, after communion.

12. For pastoral reasons, however, the entire rite of blessing may be celebrated after the liturgy of the word, according to the order described below.

Notes

1. See II Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium, no. 42.
2. Ibid., no. 6.
3. James 5:14

Blessing of Oils and Consecration of the Chrism

Preparations

13. For the blessing of oils the following preparations are made in addition to what is needed for Mass:

   In the sacristy or other appropriate place:
   —vessels of oils;
—balsam or perfume for the preparation of the chrism if the bishop wishes to mix the chrism during the liturgical service;
—bread, wine, and water for Mass, which are carried with the oils before the preparation of the gifts.

In the sanctuary:
—table for the vessels of oil, placed so that the people may see the entire rite easily and take part in it;
—chair for the bishop, if the blessing takes place in front of the altar.

Rite of Blessing

14. The chrism Mass is always concelebrated. It is desirable that there be some priests from the various sections of the diocese among the priests who concelebrate with the bishop and are his witnesses and the co-workers in the ministry of the holy chrism.

15. The preparation of the bishop, the concelebrants, and other ministers, their entrance into the church, and everything from the beginning of Mass until the end of the liturgy of the word take place as indicated in the rite of concelebration. The deacons who take part in the blessing of oils walk ahead of the concelebrating priests to the altar.

16. After the renewal of commitment to priestly service the deacons and ministers appointed to carry the oils or, in their absence, some priests and ministers together with the faithful who will carry the bread, wine, and water, go in procession to the sacristy or other place where the oils and other offerings have been prepared. Returning to the altar, they follow this order: first the minister carrying the vessel of balsam, if the bishop wishes to prepare the chrism, then the minister with the vessel for the oil of the catechumens, if it is to be blessed, the minister with the vessel for the oil of the sick, lastly a deacon or priest carrying the oil for the chrism. The ministers who carry the bread, wine, and water for the celebration of the eucharist follow them.

17. During the procession through the church, the choir leads the singing of the hymn “O Redeemer” or some other appropriate song, in place of the offertory song.

18. When the procession comes to the altar or the chair, the bishop receives the gifts. The deacon who carries the vessel of oil for the chrism shows it to the bishop, saying in a loud voice: The oil for the holy chrism. The bishop, takes the vessel and gives it to one of the assisting deacons to place on the table. The same is done by those who carry the vessels for the oil of the sick and the oil of the catechumens. The first says: The oil of the sick; the second says: The oil of catechumens. The bishop takes the vessels in the same way, and the ministers place them on the table.

19. Then the Mass continues, as in the rite of concelebration, until the end of the eucharistic prayer, unless the entire rite of blessing takes place immediately (see no. 12). In this case everything is done as described below (no. 26).
Blessing of the Oil of the Sick

20. Before the bishop says Through Christ our Lord/you give us all these gifts in Eucharistic Prayer I, or the doxology Through him in the other eucharistic prayers, the one who carried the vessel for oil of the sick brings it to the altar and holds it in front of the bishop while he blesses the oil. The bishop says or sings this prayer:

Lord God, loving Father,
you bring healing to the sick
through your Son Jesus Christ.
Hear us as we pray to you in faith,
and send the Holy Spirit, man's Helper and Friend,
upon this oil, which nature has provided
to serve the needs of men.
May your blessing +
come upon all who are anointed with this oil,
that they may be freed from pain and illness
and made well again in body, mind, and soul.
Father, may this oil be blessed for our use
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ
(who lives and reigns with you for ever and ever.
R.  Amen.)

The conclusion Who lives and reigns with you is said only when this blessing takes place outside the eucharistic prayer.

When Eucharistic Prayer I is used, the beginning of the prayer Through Christ our Lord/you give us all these gifts is changed to: Through whom you give us all these gifts.

After the blessing, the vessel with the oil of the sick is returned to its place, and the Mass continues until the communion rite is completed.

Blessing of the Oil of Catechumens

21. After the prayer after communion, the ministers place the oils to be blessed on a table suitably located in the center of the sanctuary. The concelebrating priests stand around the bishop on either side, in a semicircle, and the other ministers stand behind him. The bishop then blesses the oil of catechumens, if it is to be blessed, and consecrates the chrism.
22. When everything is ready, the bishop faces the people and, with his hands extended, sings or says the following prayer:

Lord God, protector of all who believe in you,  
bless + this oil  
and give wisdom and strength  
to all who are anointed with it  
in preparation for their baptism.  
Bring them to a deeper understanding of the gospel,  
help them to accept the challenge of Christian living,  
and lead them to the joy of new birth  
in the family of your Church.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord.  
R. Amen.

Consecration of the Chrism

23. Then the bishop pours the balsam or perfume in the oil and mixes the chrism in silence, unless this was done beforehand.

24. After this he sings or says the invitation:

Let us pray  
that God our almighty Father  
will bless this oil  
so that all who are anointed with it  
may be inwardly transformed  
and come to share in eternal salvation.

Consecratory Prayer (A)

God our maker,  
source of all growth in holiness,  
accept the joyful thanks and praise  
we offer in the name of your Church.  
In the beginning, at your command,  
the earth produced fruit-bearing trees.  
From the fruit of the olive tree  
you have provided us with oil for holy chrism.  
The prophet David sang of the life and joy  
that the oil would bring us in the sacraments of your love.
After the avenging flood, the dove returning to Noah with an olive branch announced your gift of peace. This was a sign of a greater gift to come. Now the waters of baptism wash away the sins of men, and by the anointing with olive oil you make us radiant with your joy. At your command, Aaron was washed with water, and your servant Moses, his brother, anointed him priest.

This too foreshadowed greater things to come. After your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, asked John for baptism in the waters of Jordan, you sent the Spirit upon him in the form of a dove and by the witness of your own voice you declared him to be your only, well-beloved Son. In this you clearly fulfilled the prophecy of David, that Christ would be anointed with the oil of gladness beyond his fellow men.

All the concelebrants extend their right hands toward the chrism, without saying anything, until the end of the prayer.

And so, Father, we ask you to bless + this oil you have created. Fill it with the power of your Holy Spirit through Christ your Son. It is from him that chrism takes its name and with chrism you have anointed for yourself priests and kings, prophets and martyrs.

Make this chrism a sign of life and salvation for those who are to be born again in the waters of baptism. Wash away the evil they have inherited from sinful Adam, and when they are anointed with this holy oil make them temples of your glory, radiant with the goodness of life that has its source in you.
Through this sign of chrism
grant them royal, priestly, and prophetic honor,
and clothe them with incorruption.
Let this be indeed the chrism of salvation
for those who will be born again of water and the Holy Spirit.
May they come to share eternal life
in the glory of your kingdom.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

Or:

Consecratory Prayer (B)

Father, we thank you for the gifts
you have given us in your love:
we thank you for life itself and for the sacraments
that strengthen it and give it fuller meaning.
In the Old Covenant you gave your people
a glimpse of the power of this holy oil
and when the fullness of time had come
you brought that mystery to perfection
in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son.
By his suffering, dying, and rising to life
he saved the human race.
He sent your Spirit to fill the Church
with every gift needed to complete your saving work.

From that time forward,
through the sign of holy chrism,
you dispense your life and love to men.
By anointing them with the Spirit,
you strengthen all who have been reborn in baptism.
Through that anointing
you transform them into the likeness of Christ your Son
and give them a share
in his royal, priestly, and prophetic work.

All the concelebrants extend their right hands toward the chrism without saying anything, until the end of the prayer.
And so, Father, by the power of your love,
make this mixture of oil and perfume
a sign and source of your blessing.
Pour out the gifts of your Holy Spirit
on our brothers and sisters who will be anointed with it.
Let the splendor of holiness shine on the world
from every place and thing
signed with this oil.
Above all, Father, we pray
that through this sign of your anointing
you will grant increase to your Church
until it reaches eternal glory
where you, Father, will be the all in all,
together with Christ your Son,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
for ever and ever.

R. Amen.

26. When the entire rite of blessing of oils is to be celebrated after the liturgy of the word, at the end of the renewal of commitment to priestly service the bishop goes with the concelebrants to the table where the blessing of the oil of the sick and of the oil of the chrism are to take place, and everything is done as described above (nos. 20-25).

27. After the final blessing of the Mass, the bishop puts incense in the censer, and the procession to the sacristy is arranged.

The blessed oils are carried by the ministers immediately after the cross, and the choir and people sing some verses of the hymn “O Redeemer” or some other appropriate song.

28. In the sacristy the bishop may instruct the priests about the reverent use and safe custody of the holy oils.
HOMILY SERIES

HOMILY PREPARATION

In this fourth article about the homily, the subject of preparation is looked at from other viewpoints.

As he is preparing his homily, the celebrant might ask himself some questions. The same questions could serve as discussion points for the liturgy committee.

Why Preach?

Our people are being bombarded with words by radio and television. They hear people each day who are better speakers than the celebrant they hear on Sunday.

Preaching is old-fashioned and obsolete. People should dialogue and discuss instead of listening.

Jesus sends his Church to teach and preach his Good News to the world.

Preaching is not like a TV news report. It is not a sharing of the homilist's personal opinions on the meaning of life or the sacred texts.

It is a personal witness, a reflection of the faith, experience and prayer of the individual preacher.

He is there to preach Christ, not himself. He is to share with his people the wonderful fullness of Jesus' life and teaching. He is to share his enthusiasm for the Lord, his belief in the gospel, his striving for perfection, his personal hope and reliance in the strength of the Lord.

When the homilist lets the Spirit speak through him, he is true to his calling. When by prayer and pastoral zeal he encourages his listeners to open their hearts to the action of the Spirit, the word of the Lord can be more active in their lives.

Why preach? If we do not, Christ's gospel will not be known and lived better.

How Well Need I Preach?

“A little dab'll do ya.” Why should we bother to preach well? A few comments each week, leaving us more time for important parish events, are sufficient. We don't want to give our people too much richness.

Just doing a passing job on preaching keeps me busy enough. I don't have time to do any better.

Is Christ satisfied with anything less than our best?

The low quality attributed to much preaching today comes from and leads to weak faith. The less a preacher and his people accept the teaching of Jesus and Paul about preaching, the less important it becomes.

Poor preaching is due to weak faith much more than to faulty techniques.
Unless preaching is filled with faith, it leads to a weakening of the faith of the listeners too.

On the other hand, a homily built on faith and reflecting the strong faith of the homilist, evokes a response in faith from those who hear God's word thus proclaimed.

The more fully a congregation believes, the greater demand it will make for better preaching, and the more it will make sure its priests and deacons have the time and tools and faith required.

A homilist may never become a great speaker. While he should continue to develop the talents God has given him, it is more important for him to ask God to deepen his gift of faith and to help him share it with his hearers.

To give the best we have means to share our faith with our listeners. It is from the fullness of the heart that the mouth is speaking.

**When Should Homilies Be Prepared?**

As many answers could be found to this question as there are readers of the Bulletin. The suggestions on preparing a homily given in the last issue demand much time.

A few preachers start on Sunday night by reading over the texts for the following Sunday. Some make good resolutions each week, but always seem to end up scrambling around on Saturday for last-minute ideas.

Is an hour a day too much to ask a priest to spend in preparation? Prayer, study, discussion are needed if he is to take his responsibility seriously.

Perhaps a prayerful examination of conscience is required by each priest and deacon who is called to preach the word.

And an examination of conscience is required of people and councils who keep their priests so busy administering funds and fixing the plumbing and running the bingo that they don't have time or energy to devote to their God-given tasks of teaching God's word, leading his people in worship and prayer, and being their spiritual father and shepherd.

**Writing and Reading?**

**Writing it down:** Should the celebrant write out his homily word for word, exactly as he intends to give it?

This practice presents a problem, for the homily should be a living explanation of the word of God, (see GI, no. 9) spoken to this particular assembly of his people. Unless the celebrant is preaching during one Mass only, can he be satisfied with such a formalized version of his message?

If however the homily is written out as a guide, helping him to keep his thoughts in line; if he does not limit himself to these words, but leaves himself open to the power of the Spirit and the message of the celebration, a written text will not be harmful. But care should be taken to ensure that the text does not become a crutch.
Reading it off: Should the celebrant read his homily to the people? In the opinion of many, a read homily is a dead homily. It lacks the conviction of a living presentation. It undermines the importance of the celebrant, since anyone could read from a prepared text, and some probably better than the celebrant. It makes one wonder: "If he can't remember what he wants to say, how does he expect me to remember?"

Unless he is making a pontifical statement of policy — and this would hardly be a homily — the celebrant should not read his homily text word for word.

Possible solution: Someone who has been reading his homilies may move away from this practice and back to a living presentation of the living word by use of an outline. After writing out his homily as usual, he can make a brief outline of points or ideas and use these few words as a help when preaching.

Gradually, he should seek to develop his ability to the point where he does not need to write out his text at all.

While he is at this, he might review past Bulletins (no. 34, p. 131-132; no. 35, p. 233-236; no. 36, p. 280-283) and make sure that what he is preaching is truly a homily.

All By Myself Alone?

The fact that only the priest gives the homily does not mean that he needs to do all the preparation by himself. Though he will remain responsible for the homily, others can help him in its preparation.

Some thoughts on discussion as one of the steps in preparing a homily are given in Bulletin no. 35, page 235.

Why not look at these ideas once more, and see how they can be applied in your community?

* * *

In our next issue, the fifth article of this series will present an interview on Anglican preaching.

EASTER CAROLS?

Christmas carols have been part of our popular tradition for many centuries. But today's English-speaking nations have fewer popular hymns to fall back on for Lent and Easter.

Has the time come for composers to start expressing our faith in the risen Lord by means of reverent, catchy folk tunes, as we already have at Christmas?

Easter carols, anyone?
BIBLE STORIES

TELL ME A STORY

Bible stories for pre-school children can lead them to a greater love of God and a deeper understanding of the liturgy.

Most parents and godparents, uncles and aunts, cousins and baby sitters are able to respond when little ones ask for a story. During the day or at bedtime, most of us can recount the exploits of Jack and the beanstalk, or the escape of Red Riding Hood.

Some are able to venture afield with Hansel and Gretel or Robin Hood. We are faithful to the substance of the tale, though details may be foggy since our childhood days, when we ourselves sat, eyes sparkling, eager to hear those wonderful stories time and time again.

Even in these days of television, children are ready to listen to a story told by one who enjoys it and recounts it well: enthusiasm is catching.

But ask a Catholic adult to tell a story about Jesus or any other person in the bible, and a strange, sad reticence comes over him. He is embarrassed and silent because he knows he is on thin ice.

Back to Tradition

Instead of mourning because we were not raised on bible stories, let’s start once more to resituate ourselves in our Christian tradition, in which God forms his people by his word. Let us move back into the living stream whereby children grow up familiar with the people and events of the bible.

One way of coming back to this tradition is to make bible stories part of the spiritual foundation we give our children, part of the heritage we pass on to them.

Stories That Appeal

It is not hard to find positive stories that appeal to children. The suggestions given below indicate the wealth of interesting persons and events in the bible.

Jesus: A Christian child should know many of the gospel stories of the life and teaching of the Lord Jesus. A good source for these is Mark’s gospel.

Catechists remind us that it is not wise to dwell on the physical tortures suffered by Jesus in his passion, until the children are old enough to understand better. It is enough to help them to understand that Jesus suffered because he loves us and wants to help us to love God. God raised him up to new life, and Jesus wants to help us to live as God’s children should.

The simple memorial acclamation, “Christ has died,” may be a good one to teach them their first ideas on the paschal mystery.
While many of the gospel stories tell of cures and marvellous happenings, we should not fail to see Jesus in these episodes as a friend to those in need, someone always ready to help those who are sick or suffering. It is in this willingness to serve rather than in curing the sick that we are to follow Christ.

**Infancy narratives:** The first two chapters of Matthew and Luke belong to a special literary genre, and should be understood clearly before being used in stories. The message that the evangelist wants to give us, rather than historical details, is what is important here. A good commentary, such as the Jerome Biblical Commentary, is helpful.

One certain rule is to avoid all apocryphal stories and fairy tales (pious nonsense) about Jesus and his saints: such fables do not help the child, and detract seriously from the esteem that should be given to God's word.

**Saints of the bible:** God has given his people many heroes and heroines. Peter, Paul, Stephen, Abraham, David, Ruth, to name only a few, can teach us about serving God and his people. Human, tempted, weak they were, but God was with them, helping them to overcome their weakness with his strength; through them, he worked great deeds among men. Their example and obedience to God's will can be valuable inspirations to children growing in their faith.

**Mary:** A special place among God's saints is given to Mary. Presented as a strong character, a woman of God, a servant of the Lord, Mary comes to life. She is the one who loved the Father, who listened to his word, who wanted to do his will.

Apocryphal tales such as the presentation in the Temple, or portraits of a simpering teen awed by the lilies on Joseph's crutch are misleading, and should be avoided. Fidelity to the gospel portrait of Mary as the new Israel, the model of the people of God, will lead us to a proper respect for her role in our salvation.

**Sunday gospels:** Perhaps this is the simplest way to lead little ones to connect the bible stories they hear with the parish liturgy.

Some parents like to read or tell the Sunday gospel story to their children on Saturday or some time before they go to church. Just before the gospel is read during the liturgy of the word, mother reminds the children they are going to hear the story about Jesus that she told them yesterday. During the week, they talk about the gospel event, and what Jesus is saying to them.

By bringing the week's principal reading into the lives of their children in this way, parents are leading them closer to Jesus, and are helping them to understand a little better the mind of Christ. Most important, they are making them sensitive to God's word as the guiding light for their path. They are also helping their little ones to see and use the liturgy as the primary and indispensable source of the true Christian spirit.
Preparing Stories

Children's bible stories need to be carefully prepared to be effective and beneficial.

Choice of stories: It is best to use only stories which help children develop their sense of awe and wonder and appreciation for God's goodness, and which lead them to place their innocent trust in his everlasting love.

Careful preparation: Pre-school children are fascinated by picturesque details, and will easily be distracted by them, with the result that they lose the meaning of the story. For them it should be simple, not complicated. Subplots confuse them.

Example: The cure of the blind man (Mk. 10:46-52):

Skeleton
blind man sitting beside road
heard Jesus was going by
shouted out to Jesus to help him
Jesus asks him what he wants
he wants to see again
Jesus cures him because he believes in Jesus
the man follows Jesus.

Unnecessary details are omitted: the name of the city, the man and his father (we could tell them the man's name if they asked); begging; opposition of crowd and its later eagerness; Jesus summons blind man; cloak. Catechists tell us that too many descriptive details distract the child.

Point: A man in need believes in Jesus, and the Lord helps him. As long as this is kept clearly in mind by the storyteller, it will control which details are left in and what the child grasps. A simple version, concentrating on the main point of this episode, is best.

Response: In most of the stories of Jesus' actions, the evangelists are careful to note the reaction of the people involved. We too should be concerned about the way the child perceives God's action and love (see Expression, below).

Would it be a good idea to write out at least the skeleton of the story we want to tell?

If a number of families developed outlines of gospel stories, they could share them with one another.

Atmosphere of Faith

Children of this age group are quite trusting, and they will accept what adults say. These children do not distinguish between fact and fancy.

We have to help them see there is a difference between the gospel and Mother Goose. The 'Jesus stories" are distinct from fairy tales. By our attitude of reverence and respect, we can show them the important difference between John the Baptist and Jack and the beanstalk.
Listening to a story about Jesus and his friends should be a special event, a privileged moment, a happy, joyful time; perhaps it should be marked by opening and closing with a brief time of prayer.

The danger of telling bible stories to this age group lies in the fact that in a few years, the child will learn that the fairy stories he heard are not true. He is inclined, in his youthful confusion, to discard all his childhood stories with the same label. Hence we must always make sure that bible stories are clearly distinct in our way of telling.

An atmosphere of faith should surround the telling of bible stories. The Spirit, who inspired the scriptures, helps us to tell God's message to these children. This is particularly true when we remain open to the Spirit's action by our prayer and good living.

**Expression**

We should not be satisfied with telling the story and stopping there. Children like to express in their own way what these stories say to them. By retelling a story, by drawing pictures or singing or acting it out, they express what the story means to them.

Such expression is also useful to the storyteller: we find out what message the children received from our narration, for they will express what they took (or mistook) as the main point.

**Prayer**

Stories from the bible should lead us to prayer. After telling children about the wonderful things God has done and is doing, we should encourage them to think about our Father in heaven, and what he wants to do for us. In this way we lead them to thank God and praise him for his love in action. The gospel of Luke, for example, presents Mary in this manner: after being told she is to be the mother of the Lord, she praises God for what he has done in her life: Lk. 1:46-55.

A suitable line or two from the psalms or other scripture passages, or from one of the Mass prayers, may be used as an example of how God wants us to respond to his love by our prayer.

(This is a parallel with the action of the Mass: after listening with faith to God's teaching in the liturgy of the word, we move on to praise and thank him in the liturgy of the eucharist.)

**Parallel Operation**

Grace still builds on nature. It is not enough for us to tell bible stories without showing the children that God is also at work in the world. They need to meet and experience God in the wonders and beauties of his creation, in themselves and in other people.

Such an approach will help them to retain a balance, and will be a firm basis for a later understanding of God's plan.
Resources

People: There are many resource people we might ask to help us in preparing and telling bible stories: catechists, teachers in the early grades of school or Sunday school, children's librarians, or parents who seem to be successful in telling stories. What about some of your Protestant neighbors, or the people who conduct the bible vacation school at one of the local churches?

As a start, try informal conversations with other parents, priest, Protestant parents, some of the resource persons mentioned above.

Books: The first book, of course, is the bible or New Testament, preferably in an illustrated edition. A simple version, such as Good News for Modern Man, helps the storyteller avoid archaic words.

In the Beginning, by Sister M. St. Boniface, CSJ, is published by Paulist Press. This is a paperback handbook for parents on the Christian initiation of pre-school children. (According to the author, bible stories are best avoided, although she seems to permit stories of Jesus' actions.)

Possibilities

Rather than guarantee results, let's consider some of the possibilities that bible stories for pre-school children may open up in the home and in the parish.

Through bible stories, we can gradually encourage children to appreciate the wonderful things God does for us and in us and through us. His love and interest in us are quite real. We want to lead these little ones to know Jesus and love him, and to follow him in praying to the Father. Bible stories can be one means of leading children to a more mature love and reverence for God.

A better listening to God's word, both in the liturgy and at other times, will be another benefit from bible stories. Gradually the children will grow to realize that God is speaking to them through these events, and by his word is ready to guide us in our living.

The galaxy of heroes and heroines in the bible should lead children to want to imitate their virtues. These people were flesh and blood as we are, they were weak and tempted, and they fell sometimes. But they turned to God, repented, trusted — and God was faithful to his covenant. Biblical heroes — men and women and children of faith — can inspire us to greater faith, trust, love.

In a word, the benefit they will receive will be a stronger foundation in faith and action. This is a time for laying foundations; the results will show up later as they grow into full Christian maturity.

Adults also benefit: The greater exposure to God's word, and the effort to understand the message in each of the stories, brings adults closer to the bible. If they approach the word with a spirit of faith, the Spirit will speak to them also, and help them to grasp the message more clearly.

As openness to the word increases, the Spirit is more able to lead them along God's ways.

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A parish where parents and families are growing in the knowledge and love of the bible is indeed a fortunate community, one whose faith will be proclaimed by the Christian living of its members.

As more of its members develop a warm and living love for scripture, the liturgy of the word will take on new dimensions, and the power of the word to produce God's results will increase.

In the years to come, readers will be persons who from childhood have been nourished on these same stories of God's love, and their proclamation of the sacred text will add new fervor to their liturgy.

People whose prayer life is based on the bible will indeed be men and women and children of prayer.

There are no limits to the possibilities of what God can do in a parish that listens to his word.

"I Am in Your Midst"

Jesus has told us that where two or three gather in his name, he is with us. When we come together for any Christian purpose, he is present. Certainly he is with us when we gather his beloved little ones to hear about him: he is touching their impressionable hearts and leading them to him.

PEACE IS OUR JOB TOO

*When speaking about the world day of prayer for peace, the 1973 issue of Guidelines for Pastoral Liturgy suggests that parish councils consider ways of continuing this prayer throughout the year. One small rural parish placed these ideas in its bulletin:*

What can we do to bring peace to the world? We hear of war in the Middle East and in Asia, riots all around the world; strikes, trouble, hatred, dissension. The world is in terrible shape. What can we do to bring some peace on earth?

We can begin by praying daily for peace, asking our Father in heaven to help people and nations to understand one another better, and to help governments work things out in a calmer, more peaceful way.

Once a month in our parish, we will celebrate the evening Mass for peace. Our first peace Mass will be next week, and we will continue this practice around the middle of each month.

As God's people, we will pray for peace, explore the teachings of Jesus about peace, and see how he wants us to work to make this a better, happier world for all.

In this way, we will be doing something to bring the world back to God's way of living — in holy peace.
READERS RESPOND

STIPENDS

In response to the note on Mass stipends, (Bulletin no. 34, p. 127) our readers write:

This is a two-sided question and is one to which there appears to be no easy solution. Some idealistic young priests would like to see the stipend abolished altogether — and wouldn't we all, because of the monetary value the laity associate with the Mass?

On the other hand, I may give as an example what Mass stipends can mean to priests working in very poor parishes throughout the world. I remarked a few years ago to a priest-brother of mine working in the West Indies that there was some talk of abolishing Mass stipends altogether. If any human could live on fresh air alone it would be he, for, though he has always been deeply spiritual, he has learned to be practical more by living than through his own natural disposition.

His immediate reaction to my statement was a look of indignation and the quick rejoinder: “Why, what would we do?” To pay the debts of his backward parish he has to rely on such Mass stipends as I and other relatives and friends have been able to send him.

For answers to this question of Mass stipends perhaps we should look for ideas germinated by certain directives of Vatican II. For example:

1) “Let them avoid every appearance of luxury, of excessive wealth, and accumulation of possessions.” (Renewal of Religious Life, no. 13) Priests as well as religious have this responsibility.

2) “Let families flourish which are penetrated with the spirit of the gospel. . . . Let associations and groups be organized through which the lay apostolate will be able to permeate the whole of society with the spirit of the gospel.” (Missionary Activity, no. 15) The laity must be educated to realize that the “spirit of the gospel” has its temporal and material aspects and needs, for which they should share responsibility with their pastors.

3) “These churches, most often located in the poorer parts of the world, are generally suffering from a very serious lack of priests and of material support. Therefore, they desperately require that the continued missionary activity of the whole Church furnish them with those subsidies which principally serve the growth of the local church and the maturity of Christian life.” (Missionary Activity, no. 19) In other words, responsibility rests with the not-so-poor parishes throughout the world to share generously and continuously with those not so fortunate.
A priest remarked two or three years ago that the full impact of Vatican II will not be felt until about fifty years’ time. Maybe the question of Mass stipends is included in that statement. In the meantime, however, it would be good if some practical measures could be set in motion that would lead ultimately to a settlement of the question such as Christ would like to see for the spiritual betterment of his people.

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I read each successive issue of the Liturgy Bulletin with great interest, and am stimulated by the suggestions, ideas, and questions you pose there. I do hear you when you solicit our opinions and experiences; to this date however, my young priesthood hardly qualifies me with valuable reactions.

Re: Mass stipends, mentioned in no. 34, p. 127: I do everything possible to discuss the problem with each donor, trying to separate the intention from the donation. If people think they are buying a Mass, I can’t accept that money. If people will state their intention, and on the same occasion make an offering for the poor . . . then perhaps their “stipend” becomes acceptable. I am in a situation where I can channel all stipends directly to the needs of the poor, and do exactly that.

The practicalities of priestly support and “tradition” only serve to distract from solving the issue headlong. I cannot accept that a priest earns his keep by offering the liturgy; I do think the “tradition” needs re-orientation in the direction I’ve indicated above.

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Other Questions

Vocations: What is our parish doing about vocations in the field of prayer? of family life? of donations?

What can we do better?

Is there room in our lenten program for this? How should we go about it?

If not during Lent, when are we going to do something about this question of vocations? (The fourth Sunday in the Easter season — World Day of Prayer for Vocations — is a good start, but one day isn’t enough.)

How about enlisting the prayer and suffering of the sick and shut-in members of the parish? Can this be part of our lenten program?
UNLESS . . .

Unless we are growing, we are becoming stunted.

Unless we are vibrant, we are dead.

Unless we are open, we are closed.

Unless we are a door, we are a barrier.

Unless we are gathering with Jesus, we are scattering his work.

Unless we are building up, we are tearing down.

Unless we decrease, Christ cannot increase.