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NON-VERBAL DIMENSIONS OF THE EUCHARIST
National Bulletin on Liturgy
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Editorial commentary in the Bulletin is the responsibility of the editor.

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Non-Verbal Dimensions of the Eucharist

Our liturgies speak volumes through their shape, dynamics, ministries, signs and symbols, movement, posture and gesture, music, beauty, architecture, and assembled people, even without the words that usually accompany these. In this issue we will concentrate on these non-verbal dimensions of the eucharistic liturgy.
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Introduction

The eucharist celebrates and proclaims wholeness. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal begins by stating the following:

1. The celebration of Mass, the action of Christ and the People of God arrayed hierarchically, is for the universal and the local Church as well as for each person the center of the whole Christian life.

All other liturgical rites and all the works of the Christian life are linked with the eucharistic celebration, flow from it, and have it as their end.

3. ... the celebration [should be] planned in such a way that it brings about in the faithful a participation in body and spirit that is conscious, active, full, and motivated by faith, hope, and charity.

5. The celebration of the eucharist ... involves the use of outward signs that foster, strengthen, and express faith.

Wholeness is expressed at the level of the Church, which is described as "the universal and local Church," and as "Christ and the People of God." This Church is "arrayed hierarchically," which means with the full exercise of all ministries and all gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Those who celebrate are "persons" — individuals — who participate "in body and spirit" and whose participation "is conscious, active and full." They use "outward signs" and engage in an "action," which is also described as "celebration" and as "participation."

The worshippers are also "the faithful", motivated by the full range of Christian attitudes and motives, namely "faith, hope and charity." The "outward signs" they use "foster, strengthen and express faith."

The eucharistic liturgy is not simply an isolated hour on Sunday morning, but is linked to "the whole Christian life" and to "all the works of the Christian life."

This issue of the Bulletin explores certain aspects of the celebration of the eucharist that may not always receive sufficient emphasis. The eucharist is an action of whole people, who worship using their whole bodies and whole selves. It is an action that communicates in non-verbal ways as well as in words. Signs and symbols, stories, songs and structures are all involved.

The eucharist is also an action that expresses relationships: relationships among ourselves, our God, our neighbors, our world. Finally, it is an action that is not closed in on itself, but always keeps in mind the needs of others.

Eucharist: Symbols and Ritual

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The Language of Symbols and Ritual

**Language of love:** Liturgy is the language of those who have fallen in love with God. It is the language of those who have engaged their whole being with Jesus Christ, the Alpha and Omega of God. Liturgy is the language by which we increasingly are taken up into Christ’s paschal mystery. Liturgy is not words about God, and is not, therefore didactic in nature, passing information about God from a more knowledgeable person to those who are ignorant. Neither is liturgical language entertaining, relying on a crowd mentality for its efficacy or aimed at getting a desired emotional response from the audience. Rather, the symbolic ritual language of liturgy engages persons by setting us in relation to self, others, and God.

**Verbal and non-verbal:** Liturgical language is not merely verbal, and even liturgical words have a non-verbal dimension insofar as they are essentially metaphorical. For liturgical renewal to continue to unfold authentically, the specifically non-verbal elements of liturgy, that is the symbols, the physical environment, and the ritual interaction of ministries, demand our pastoral attention. Such attention is especially compelling in light of the insight that symbols and metaphor engage persons in a way that dialectic and logic cannot, and they do so for persons who have no capacity for such cognitive operations.

**Metaphor:** Hence metaphor is at the heart of liturgical language, both verbal and non-verbal. At liturgy we sit at God’s banquet table; we are what we eat and drink — the bread of life and the blood of the new covenant; we sing with choirs and angels; we are gifts for the world; our lives are a sacrifice of praise; we are incense rising to God in the very process of burning itself up. Such is our relation to God, others, and self which liturgy expresses, celebrates, and intensifies.

**The paschal mystery:** All liturgical symbols — the assembly, ministers, environment, gestures, objects, stories, action, and images — engage us in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ in which we find the meaning of ultimate reality. The paschal mystery — Christ’s life, self-giving unto death, resurrec-
tion, gift of the Spirit, ascension, and promise to gather all in all — is more than a model on which the individual Christian must pattern his or her life. The paschal mystery is God at work in Christ in us. Christ is the active subject of our faith. At liturgy Christ is at prayer in us. Thus all liturgical prayer is addressed to the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit.

Past, present, future: In order for liturgy to disclose the meaning of ultimate reality it must go beyond the mere recall of historical events. The events of salvation history have happened once and for all. They will not be repeated. Yet, their power is beyond history, spanning all distance and time. It is the paschal mystery in us that must be realized in every age. The entire ritual communicates the paschal mystery not as dogma or facts about God, but as metaphor for all human existence and all creation. We are the life, death, and resurrection of Christ in the world.

The Depth Dimension of Symbols

Ultimate meaning: Liturgical symbols disclose the meaning of ultimate reality through their power to lead participants to a realm of experience beyond the initial encounter with the symbol. Authentic symbols affect the upper levels of consciousness, engaging persons in the processes of attentive experiencing, intelligent understanding, responsible deliberating, and unconditional loving. Liturgical symbols, by their association with feelings, give momentum, drive, and power to these processes of consciousness. Thus, symbols orient us dynamically in a world mediated by meaning. This power or capacity of a symbol may be called its depth dimension.

The Literal Dimension of Symbols

Human experience: However, a symbol can never be divorced from the realm of experience by the senses. Without this encounter, a symbol loses its disclosive power. Bread and wine, for example, never cease to be bread and wine at the eucharist though in faith they are transformed into Christ's body and blood. The material nature of a symbol and its capacity to be experienced by the senses, to evoke memories, elicit feelings, and engage imagination comprise its literal dimension. A symbol cannot function at the level of ultimate meaning if separated from its literal dimension.

Power to communicate: The common tendency to minimize, control, and explain the literal dimension of liturgical symbols threatens their communicative power. For example, pre-broken paper thin communion wafers, withholding of the communion cup, and miniscule amounts of water or oil — these are examples of symbols losing their literal reference. A primary criterion for evaluating and preparing liturgy, therefore, is whether the symbolic actions maintain both their literal and depth dimensions.

Baptism: Consider another example, a ritual of baptism. This pool, this oil, this immersion and anointing, and this community of believers initiate a catechumen into a life patterned on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Such initiation, however, is not realized by mere statements of fact. The language of symbol is essential. Pure flowing water. Enough that one could
drown in it. Plunged under. Getting wet. Plentiful oil. The wrestler greased for the match. The literal dimension of the symbol is not minimalized. The “stuff” of baptism and its impact on all the senses are not abandoned.

**Plunged into God’s love:** Yet in the context of ritual these symbols engage participants in a realm of experience beyond that of sensory experience. Consider the depth dimension of baptism. We are immersed in mystery, wonder, awe, and love. We are plunged into the imperatives of human consciousness, the inner commands to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible. Three steps into the pool — our teetering descent and joyful immersion claim us for both God and the community. You are dead to sin and alive for God in Christ Jesus; you are now one of the faithful. The act of plunging under — the full sign of baptism and the original meaning of the word — engages the catechumen as well as the whole community in the passage to life through death in Jesus Christ. Moreover, the symbolic ritual does so in a way that verbal explanations cannot.

**Just beginning:** Many would say that liturgical revision has been relatively successful. Although further developments are necessary and expected, new prayers and rites have accomplished much of the task of textual revision. However, liturgical renewal has barely begun. In spite of seemingly revolutionary changes such as having the presider face the assembly and lay persons distribute communion, we have far to go. The present path to liturgical wholeness is one on which we will need to recover the treasures of our symbolic ritual tradition, treasures that were obscured if not lost long before the changes of the Second Vatican Council.

**Criteria for Liturgical Planning and Evaluation**

Let us consider criteria by which we may evaluate our present use of liturgical symbols and better prepare the ritual interaction of assembly and ministries in the whole eucharistic liturgy.

**Intentionality**

**Be attentive:** Because liturgical symbols are a language of a people engaged in the process of meaning-making, the quality of liturgy is proportionate to the intentionality — the attentiveness — of the celebrating community. There will be good liturgy insofar as the community recognizes itself as a pilgrim people, is attentive to itself as a people actively oriented to being in love, is intent on celebrating liturgy as a way of continually creating and unfolding the meaning of being in love, and is intent on allowing liturgy to shape attitudes and form relationships that are ways of being in love.

**Symbolic Clarity**

**Be clear:** Although the life of Christians in this world as experienced is often ambiguous, the symbols of liturgy heap up everything that is opposite to sin. You are light. You are food for the world. You are clothed in Christ Jesus. The literal reference of symbol, its aesthetic quality, its ability to evoke all senses, and the deliberateness of action associated with the symbol — these
convey with clarity the demands of Christian conversion, the thresholds through which we must pass. Anything less than clarity in symbol and ritual action suggests that sin is trivial and coming to life in Christ inconsequential.

Inner Tensions of Symbols

**Tension gives meaning:** The literal dimension of a symbol contains within it an inherent tension. Water, for example, is giver of life yet spreader of disease, quencher of thirst yet suppressor of life's breath. Similarly, fire is provider of warmth and guide to safety, yet source of fierce destruction. This inherent tension allows a symbol to engage participants in a realm of meaning beyond the initial sensory experience. It does so by evoking feelings, images, and memories of the existential tension of life itself, the tension we feel at being in between hope and fulfillment, being and becoming, between fragmented human lives and the fullness of God's reign.

**For the sake of transformation:** The inner tension of symbols is further intensified by the mutual dependence of their literal and depth dimensions. This mutual dependence is necessary for symbols to function as authentic liturgical language, that is for symbols to express and intensify in participants the process of transformation. Liturgical renewal is largely a task of maintaining this mutual dependence in our ritual actions; that is, not forsaking the literal dimension of symbols, yet allowing them to give momentum to our being as intelligent, responsible, loving persons.

**Two forms of tension:** The inner tension of symbols, therefore, is twofold. First, the sensible or experiential quality of the symbol creates an inherent tension. Second, the mutual dependence of its literal and depth dimension holds a symbol in creative tension, enabling feelings and the upper levels of consciousness to work together. Let us consider criteria for evaluating practices which either maintain or diminish this inner tension of liturgical symbols.

**Tension Maintained By:**

- Fullness of sensible character; can be tasted, touched, smelled, heard, seen.
- Attention to primary symbols.
- Carefully planned and well executed gestures.
- Allowing ritual gestures to speak for themselves; respect for polyvalent nature of symbols
- Adherence to ritual.
- Aesthetic quality; beautiful materials.

**Tension Diminished By:**

- Minimalism and petrification of sensible quality.
- Superfluity of secondary symbols; domination of secondary over primary symbols; gimmicks, novelty.
- Sloppy, casual, rigid or perfunctory gestures.
- Mini-homilies throughout liturgy; trying to explain what a symbol means.
- Unbridled spontaneity.
- Cheap disposable materials.
Simplicity.

Full, conscious, active participation in symbolic action.

Integrity with entire ritual action.

Clutter; duplication of symbols.

Participation in symbolic action restricted to select persons.

Poor timing; lack of rhythmic flow from one moment to the next.

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LITURGICAL CALENDAR FOR 1989-1990

The 1989-1990 edition of Guidelines for Pastoral Liturgy — Liturgical Calendar is now available for parish liturgy committees, choir leaders, clergy, religious communities, and others involved in planning and leading liturgical celebrations.

This 264-page book gives full information on the Mass and Liturgy of The Hours for each day, and provides pastoral suggestions for celebrating many events within the liturgy. It is the key to each day's liturgical celebrations, and enables the community to make more fruitful use of the rich options available.

Extensive pastoral notes provide an up-to-date picture of all current liturgical standards and regulations, as well as challenging each Christian community to continue to improve its worship and prayer life.

Covering the period from the beginning of Advent 1989 to the Saturday after the celebration of Christ the King in 1990. The calendar sells for $5.50 per copy plus postage and handling.
The Liturgical Environment

Environment as symbol: What has been said of architecture is true also of our liturgical environment: initially we shape it, and thereafter it shapes us. Everything in the liturgical environment, everything that is heard, seen, tasted, smelled, and touched, is part of the symbol that all of liturgy is. From foyer to sanctuary and from banners to bread, the elements of the environment and their relationship to one another and to the worshipping assembly speak the ritual language by which we situate ourselves in relationship with the One who brings us to worship.

Primary symbols: The liturgical environment is a conflation of symbols, some more important than others. Primary liturgical symbols at eucharist include:

• Assembly
• Baptismal Font
• Ambo
• Altar Table
• Bread
• Wine
• Presider’s Chair
• Music

Secondary liturgical symbols at eucharist include:

• Lectionary/Book of the Gospels
• Processional Cross
• Water
• Candles
• Incense

Assembly
Consider the following paragraph:

As common prayer and ecclesial experience, liturgy flourishes in a climate of hospitality: a situation in which people are comfortable with one another, either knowing or being introduced to one another; a space in which people are seated together, with mobility, in view of one another as well as the focal points of the rite, involved as participants and not as spectators. (n. 11)¹

Hospitality is the sine qua non of liturgy. Persons coming to liturgy need to feel “at home” in the ritual language with which they are about to celebrate.

The gathering of the assembly is itself part of the symbolic language of liturgy. Gathering and hospitality are the literal dimension of the symbol of assembly. Without these basic qualities the assembly’s ability to engage in liturgical prayer is diminished, if not made impossible.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations in this chapter are from Environment and Art in Catholic Worship (Washington: Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy 1978).
Being welcome: As stated above, people must feel that they are welcome, feel comfortable with others, and experience themselves as participants, not spectators. Consider two elements of the liturgical environment that either gather or scatter the assembly: the vestibule and seating.

Vestibule

Being gathered: When the entire liturgical environment has a quality of integrity and unity within itself, then the worshipping assembly develops a sense of being gathered. The vestibule (also known as foyer or narthex), has a special function in creating such a quality. Some ancient churches had large atriums through which worshippers would walk into the nave of the church. These transitional spaces helped persons move into the spirit of liturgical prayer.

Gathering space: A foyer can serve as a gathering space for “introductions, conversations, the sharing of refreshments after a liturgy, the building of the kind of community sense and feeling recognized now to be a prerequisite of good celebration” (n. 54). Alternatively, a foyer can be a bottleneck, forcing hasty departures and stifling communication. As you look at the foyer of your church, consider the vestibule of your own home. What do you want to communicate to your guests? Would cluttered bulletin boards, newspapers, stacks of extra chairs, lost and found items, salt and snow shovels convey a warm sense of welcome? Regrettably, we often unwittingly “decorate” our church gathering space with such items.

Baptismal water: Conversely, imagine a large open foyer with abundant foliage. Welcoming faces greet you sincerely, perhaps even by name! A corner for community announcements and the like catches your attention, but does not overwhelm you. What is most striking is the baptismal pool and the sound of flowing water. You have to walk around it to enter the church nave. Reaching in to touch the water, then blessing yourself, you feel your own spiritual thirst; you remember moments by the ocean; you recall catechumens being immersed here last Easter; and you wonder yet again about the meaning of your own baptism. On any given Sunday you are touched differently by the experience. And you suspect that water from a soppy little sponge would not have quite the same effect.

The parish church: This image, of course, reflects an ideal. We expect such ideal designs in our new church buildings. Older churches, however, are often locked into their present space. Nevertheless, every liturgy committee would do well to spend time evaluating the vestibule and taking steps to enhance parishioners’ sense of being gathered as they enter the liturgical environment.

Seating:

Spectators or participants: One of the greatest obstacles to good liturgical celebrations is the usual form of seating we find in churches: pews all in straight rows. When you stop and think about it, facing a panorama of posters is hardly conducive to common prayer. As more churches are renovated and new buildings constructed, however, the wide variety of flexible church seating now available should be explored. Flexibility allows us to
create circular, semi-circular, or inward-facing seating designs. Such designs give worshippers mobility, foster togetherness, and place people in proper relation to one another as well as to the focal points such as altar, ambo, presider, and songleader. Good liturgical seating involves worshippers as participants, not as spectators.

**The reign of God**: The assembly must maintain an inner tension if it is to function authentically as a liturgical symbol. Being comfortable with and knowing others is important, but too casual and cozy an environment can gloss over the tension in which we stand as God's reign breaks into our lives. The assembly is gathered, but not to be either introspective nor self-congratulatory. We are disciples, waiting on God yet rejoicing that victory over sin has been won in Christ Jesus.

**Liturgical hospitality**, therefore, is not "country club" style. There are no positions of honor or privilege, no restrictions on membership, no pampering or patronage. The hospitable environment is not one of fireplaces and recliner chairs. At liturgy Christ welcomes, gathers, and offers a sacrifice of praise in us. Christ, the paschal mystery of our salvation, is present in the assembly gathered. Liturgical hospitality, therefore, welcomes worshippers into the existential tension of human life, into a pattern of life whereby psychic, intellectual, moral, and religious growth are the only processes for human authenticity.

**No compromise**: The tension between who we are and who God calls us to be is almost unbearable: neither Gentile nor Jew, slave nor free, woman nor man. Our culture continually tempts us to compromise, to opt for the comfortable pew, to choose triviality over mystery, to claim superiority of man over woman. If the church yields to such temptation, its sin will be manifested in its public liturgy.

**Reclaiming the ownership** of the liturgical action as the baptismal right of all the faithful is at the heart of liturgical hospitality. The liturgical action belongs to all who are assembled, and hospitality is reflected in the full, conscious, and active participation of which Vatican Council II spoke. Such participation is not superfluous, nor merely for the sake of involving more people. Participation is essential to our experience of Christ at prayer in us at liturgy.

**Relearning**: Romano Guardini, writing on the essence of the liturgical act, asked “when we shall relearn a forgotten way of doing things and recapture lost attitudes.” Such relearning and recapturing are the ongoing task of renewal. Liturgy will be renewed as worshippers experience liturgy — its symbols, environment, gestures, and actions — as prayer itself, not as stimuli to private devotion. Gathering, singing, listening, proclaiming, processing, blessing, eating, drinking — all must be performed with competence, yet all must be experienced as the liturgy of Christ who prays in us.

**Cultural Attitudes and Liturgical Renewal**

**Positive and negative values**: Liturgy planners would do well to recognize that our whole culture is poised to pounce on those who would attempt to

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2 A letter from Romano Guardini reprinted in *Assembly*, vol 12, no. 4, April 1986. *Assembly* is the publication of the Notre Dame Center for Pastoral Liturgy.
"relearn a forgotten way of doing things." True, our liturgical celebrations necessarily reflect elements of our cultural setting. We have nothing but our own culture's expressions of language, music, and art with which to celebrate. Cultural values, however, are often at odds with liturgical values. In our liturgy, therefore, as in our lives, we Christians must be counter-cultural, witnessing faithfully to the spirit of the gospel.

Three cultural values that dominate our North American society are 1) pragmatism, the good is what is practical; 2) didacticism, the good is what is informative; and 3) passive consumerism, the good is what is entertaining. These values are not totally bad, but neither should they be adopted uncritically. Serious contradictions arise when liturgical communities acquiesce in them. When worshippers come to the celebration of the eucharist with the same expectations they bring to the shopping mall, the classroom, or concert hall, the result is liturgical atrophy. Liturgical ritual, in the midst of its cultural expressions, must remain prophetic, revealing the limitations of cultural values, exposing society's false gods.

Pragmatism

Why worship: First, our society is pragmatic in its approach to life. We measure the value of activities by their practical application and benefit. We certainly need to exercise some practicality when preparing liturgy, but if we let pragmatism dominate we diminish our liturgical experience. Participating in Sunday liturgy, for the practical-minded, requires some observable purpose. Thus, liturgy becomes a method for keeping the family together, for instilling religious values in children, for socializing with friends.

Useless time: While these secondary benefits may accrue, the meaning of worship goes deeper. Liturgy is not a means to an end. It is, in fact, "useless" time, time to bask in wonder and awe, to join in praise and thanksgiving for the marvellous deeds God has done in Christ. In the face of daily concerns, engaging in such activity has no practical purpose. To recover our childlike desire and ability to "waste" time in prayer, to wonder and be absorbed in beauty and love, is to make a prophetic counter-cultural statement.

Loss of the sacred: On the contrary, deferring to practical concerns assigns to liturgy the function of merely maintaining the status quo. If we act in this way, we might never touch the divine life for which we were made. It is not, as some suspect, the removal of Latin and Gregorian chant or the introduction of guitars that leaves worshippers longing for an experience of sacred mystery, but rather an overly practical approach to liturgy.

Symbolic minimalism: Pragmatism, when accepted as a dominant liturgical value, whittles away our rich liturgical heritage and leads to symbolic minimalism. By its dictates the primary criterion for decisions such as whether to have communion with both bread and wine, whether to have communion bread that appears and tastes like actual food, or whether to baptize by immersion, becomes "is it practical?" rather than "is it worthwhile?" Without questioning their practices, pragmatists give communion regularly at Eucharist with hosts from the tabernacle, withhold the cup of salvation, expeditiously wipe off oil after anointing, and proclaim the word of God from flimsy pamphlets. These common practices diminish the sign value of liturgical symbols. Still, defended on the basis of practicality, such habits continue, and the people of God are left languishing liturgically.
Didacticism

Information: Second, our lives are crowded with information. Consider the enormous impact of computers on our ability to collect and distribute data. Without a word processor, for example, this article would never have met press time. When information-giving dominates the liturgical experience, however, our worship is impoverished.

The meeting of lovers: Instruction in the faith is not the primary function of ritual, its symbols, gestures, and texts. While this may seem more apparent for symbolic action, liturgical words likewise must be free from the constraints of didacticism. Whether in prayers, proclaimed in Scripture, or expounded in the homily, liturgical words call us into a personal relationship, an encounter with God in Christ. Liturgical words facilitate the meeting of lovers. Through repetition and evocative metaphor, our own life experiences are illumined by faith, given meaning as we discover that our lives share in the mystery of God's own life.

Repetition is not boring, but an informational approach to liturgy is. Think of two young people in love talking on the telephone. They can go on and on, saying the same thing over and over again, simply enjoying their mutual presence. The assembly's ritual interaction with its symbols celebrates the experience of being in love with God, nothing less. Only lovers would share the same words and engage in the same affectionate gestures week after week, year after year, finding new life in each ritual repetition.

Words and relationships: Like other liturgical words, the metaphorical quality of prayers also draws worshippers into a relationship with one another and with God. The purpose of prayers is not to explain symbols, or to advance particular ideologies. So, for example, words accompanying the baptismal ritual should not present catechesis on water, light and oil. Comments such as “now we anoint the baby with oil because Christ means the anointed one”, are inappropriate. Running commentaries turn liturgy into a shallow information exchange and trivialize our participation in the paschal mystery.

Passive Consumerism

Entertainment: A third dominant cultural value is our society's love of entertainment. However enjoyable, a diet of excessive entertainment subjects us to a very passive existence. Television evangelism “succeeds” by satisfying people's desire to be entertained. Attempts to do the same in our liturgical celebration, however, are ill-begotten. Novelty and gimmick-laden performances treat an active spirit-filled assembly as a mindless audience, to the detriment of both our liturgy and our faith.

True Christian life: Rather than trying to stimulate worshippers by way of exciting musical performance, novel decorations, cute plays or comical homilies, liturgical planners must begin by acknowledging that the assembly, with Christ as its head, is the primary subject of the liturgical action. The assembly is the celebrant, the priest is the “presiding” celebrant, the common action of the assembly is the prayer. Thus, the criterion by which we choose, execute, and evaluate the music, prayers, gestures, symbols, architectural space, words, and ministries is their effectiveness in drawing the assembly into the reality of true Christian life.
Counter-cultural: Such attention to the primacy of the assembly in the liturgical act allows liturgy, though essentially situated in a particular cultural context, to maintain a counter-cultural tension. Without this tension, the liturgical symbol of the assembly would lose its depth dimension and thus its ability to engage worshippers in the paschal mystery being celebrated.

Baptismal Font

Waters of liberation: No one comes to the eucharistic community but through baptism. As we enter the church building the font and its flowing water awaken our senses. This baptismal pool situates us in relationship to one another and to God who has called us into being through the chaotic waters of creation, the waters of liberation from all that enslaves, and the waters of human solidarity into which Jesus was baptized.

Life-death; healing-disease; calm-turmoil. Water holds in itself the tension we feel within human existence. The literal dimension of baptism, namely flowing water, deep pool, and plunging under, must be fully expressed to maintain the symbols' inherent tension. Facing the depths of baptismal water, the catechumen wonders whether this initiation will bring life or death. Just as well, for Christian faith takes us to life through death. And what our world uncritically accepts as the good life can be death-dealing indeed.

The symbol of water: The ritual context of font and water expresses the depth dimension of the symbol. Situated in the path to the altar table, the font sets before the assembly an image of who they are and who they are called to be as they come to the Lord's table. The baptistry, located at the one entrance to which all paths from the parking lot lead, rightfully replaces sponges and sterile stainless steel holy water receptacles. Worshippers come to delight in dipping their hand in the pool and signing themselves with abundant water as they enter the church.

In the main aisle: Funeral directors and wedding planners might initially panic at the sight of this “obstacle” in the main aisle. Nevertheless, liturgy celebrated well is its own best catechesis. How appropriate that bride and groom or the body of the deceased must pass by these waters once again, waters in which they joined themselves to the death of Christ when they first embarked on the Christian journey.

The body of Christ: Week after week, this primary liturgical symbol welcomes and gathers the body of Christ. The images, feelings, and memories evoked by the community's repetitive interaction with its baptismal pool immerse the assembly in a spirit of liturgical prayer in a way that no amount of ad lib verbiage could ever hope to approximate.

Ambo and Altar Table

Balance and interaction: When the altar and ambo are designed, constructed, and positioned in a particular church, careful thought must be given to the assembly's interaction around these symbols. Altars and ambo are not monuments to be admired, but symbols around which the people of God ritually join their lives with the paschal mystery —the life, death, resur-
rection, and ascension of Jesus, the gift of the Spirit, and Christ’s promise to return. This ritual includes both word and eucharist, two parts of the mass so intimately connected that they form one act of worship.

**Two tables:** Gone are the days when a Catholic might think he or she had fulfilled the Sunday obligation by arriving at Mass in time for the consecration or communion. Our Sunday liturgy has two tables — a table of the word at which we break open the scriptures, and a table of the eucharist, at which we break the bread and share the cup of salvation. We do not eat at the latter without first being fed at the former.

**Communication or distortion:** The environment alone is able to communicate this truth, that is, to situate worshippers equally as hearers of the word and partakers in the eucharist. Alternatively, the physical space can distort the balance of our ritual relationship to word and eucharist. An overwhelming altar table adjacent to an insignificant ambo fails the task. Imagine, as an alternative to most of our worship spaces, an altar table that is off-centre in the sanctuary but balanced, nonetheless, by an ambo that shares its design and material qualities. The altar table initially is bare — no cloth, no lit candles surrounding it. It defers to the ambo for the liturgy of the word, and the ambo commands attention both by its prominence and by the carefully performed proclamation that it serves.

**Ambo**

**For the word of God:** First, let us consider the ambo, the proper term for the liturgical reading stand. Its whole purpose is to be a place for proclaiming the sacred scriptures. The lay reader, deacon, homilist, and cantor(for the psalm), are the ministers who approach the ambo. From it they must be able to communicate with the assembly. The ambo, therefore, to facilitate visibility and audibility, should not seem remote. It should be “beautifully designed, constructed of fine materials, and proportioned carefully and simply for its function. The ambo represents the dignity and uniqueness of the Word of God and of reflection upon that Word” (n. 74).

**Not a multi-purpose podium:** To express its depth dimension, the ambo must be used solely for the proclamation of scripture and the homily. It is not a multi-purpose podium. Announcements, songleading, and general intercessions require a simpler lectern in another location, one that does not compete with the ambo for attention. A multi-purpose ambo communicates mixed messages, thereby diminishing the significance of scripture in both liturgy and life. Such confusion impedes our recovery of a liturgical ritual that situates us unambiguously as hearers of the word.

**Servant of the word:** While drawing attention to the word, the ambo should not distract from the minister’s proclamation nor the assembly’s listening. Although excessively ornate designs sometimes overwhelm the ritual, more commonly in our churches we risk trivializing the liturgical act of listening by draping slogan-laden banners on the front of the ambo. An attentive assembly, a competent and well prepared reader, a good quality sound system, and a simple ambo, its significance reflected in rich, natural materials and design — these non-verbal dimensions of the liturgy of the word are integral to our experience of Christ himself speaking to us when the scriptures are proclaimed.
The second table: Having begun the liturgy at the table of the word, the assembly then moves to the table of the eucharist. How does the altar table — its design, construction, and position — support this change in focus and unite the assembly in their sacramental meal?

[It] is the common table of the assembly, a symbol of the Lord, at which the presiding minister stands and upon which are placed the bread and wine and their vessels and the book. It is never used as a table of convenience or as a resting place for papers, notes, cruets, or anything else. It stands free, approachable from every side, capable of being encircled. It is desirable that candles, cross, any flowers or other decoration in the area should not be so close to the altar as to constitute impediments to anyone's approach or movement around the common table (n. 71).

A centre for action: We violate these principles frequently, perhaps because we think of the altar as an object, or as a place reserved for the presider. It is, rather, a centre for action. Gathered around this table, the faithful, led by their presiding minister, take gifts of bread and wine, give thanks, break the bread, and eat and drink the body and blood of Christ.

Assessibility: The literal dimension of this symbol demands critical reflection on some commonly accepted practices. The front of the altar table, for example, must cease to be a catch-all for flowers and thematic displays such as crèches, cornucopias and first communion banners. Candles need not always symmetrically flank the altar table; we might experiment with other aesthetic arrangements of candles and processional cross in the sanctuary area. The informality of asymmetrical design is more appealing to contemporary sensitivities, yet it can still retain a feeling of balance. Above all, the primary liturgical symbols of assembly, bread, and wine will need to be given first place in relation to the altar table.

Symbol of Christ's presence: The construction of an altar table holds in tension both its literal and depth dimensions. As a symbol of Christ's presence it should be, of course, beautifully designed. Though it is physically impossible for an assembly of several hundred people to gather closely around this relatively small piece of liturgical furniture, an uncluttered altar table will gather people by focusing their attention on the symbol and the ritual actions that are performed around it. Whether the relationship of seating to sanctuary conveys a message of openness or of restricted access to the altar table will further affect the assembly's experience of gathering around this common table.

For the whole assembly: The altar table is designed for the action of the assembly presided over by a single priest, not by concelebrants. It should, therefore, be square or slightly rectangular, not elongated or out of proportion to its function. Because the sacrifice that we offer with Christ is a memorial sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, and not a bloody immolation, we may question the use of sarcophagus-like slabs for altar tables. The material qualities of symbols are part of the liturgical prayers and must reflect what we believe to be the right way of praying, that is orthodoxy in the original sense of the word. A stone structure must invite worshippers to eat and drink. Conversely a wooden altar table must invite the assembly to offer
a sacrifice of praise. "Altar" and "table" act as mutual qualifiers. Neither oversized tombs nor mere dining room tables will hold the elements of sacrifice and meal in ritual tension.

Bread and Wine

Both bread and cup: Some worshipping communities bake their own unleavened bread rather than purchase commercially produced wafers. Their desire for the fuller sacramental sign is consistent with the directive of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (nos. 240, 283) that eucharistic bread should appear and taste like natural food. In many places, the entire assembly also shares regularly the cup of salvation, a more complete sign of communion. Some parishes and dioceses, however, restrict participation in this fuller sign to special occasions and feasts. We would do well to carry over our concern for the richness of these symbols of bread and wine to the Church's most important liturgy, Sunday eucharist.

Use the tabernacle seldom: A liturgical malpractice of great concern — one that continues virtually unquestioned — is the still common trek at communion to the tabernacle for hosts consecrated at a previous eucharist. Reserved hosts, however, are for the sick and dying; they also provide an occasion for devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. Imagine sitting at a banquet table with friends. Most of the guests are served. Your meal, however, is in the refrigerator and has to be warmed up in the microwave oven. The food is the same as that given to the others. But your inner hunch suggests that something isn't quite right about this gesture.³

Eucharist is active prayer. Eucharist is taking, blessing, breaking, and sharing the Body and Blood of Christ. Regular use of the reserved sacrament at eucharist minimizes the significance of the symbol of bread, diminishes the importance of the faithful's presentation of the bread and wine as their gifts, and erodes the unity of the assembly. Going to the tabernacle for hosts at the beginning of the communion rite should be a rare exception, not the norm. Our efforts to eliminate this abuse are long overdue.

Minimalism of the symbols of bread and wine communicate ambiguity as to the assembly's intentions at worship. Further, such liturgical anomalies stifle the assembly's inner drive for religious meaning. In a search for symbolic ritual clarity with eucharistic bread and cup, parish liturgy committees also find themselves confronting excessive concerns over hygiene and pragmatic protests over the logistics of moving large congregations to receive both the bread and cup. However, these are all within the abilities of liturgy planners and pastors to deal with, if there is the will to express better the intention of Christ. With catechesis and liturgical maturity we can hope to recover the rich symbolism of one bread and one cup regularly at our eucharistic celebrations.

³ Editor: The General Instruction, 56h, and other official documents make the point very strongly.
Liturgy is dynamic: Just as structures of verbal language such as sentences and paragraphs have a dynamic shape, so too the structure of the liturgy moves dynamically from beginning to end. There is a building up, climax, and diminution. Liturgy's dynamic rhythm and the cadence-like quality of its non-verbal elements are characteristic of the symbol that the entire liturgy is. The shape of liturgy itself must exhibit the literal and depth functions essential to liturgical symbols. Its shape will be affected in large measure by the environment — the architecture, aesthetics, acoustics, sights, sounds, smells, etc. But the ritual interaction of people is what makes symbols liturgical. Symbols are actions; they are not static. The assembly makes this celebration a living meal, a living sacrifice, a living proclamation.

Skilled ministers: One element of this ritual interaction is skill in performance. Basic competence in performing the function demanded of a particular ministry is part of the literal reference of the symbol we are as assembly. As we move through the various parts of Sunday eucharist, consider the skills and qualities required of assembly, presider, lector, songleaders, etc. Where a presider or reader, for example, lacks necessary competence for that ministry, the entire liturgy loses some of its power to engage participants' memory, imagination, feelings, and senses. The literal function of the symbol of assembly is compromised and the depth function of liturgy is consequently diminished. Incompetent ministers stifle the assembly's engagement in the paschal mystery of our salvation. In short, the disposition of Christian conversion which the faithful are expected to bring to liturgy is neither celebrated nor intensified. Competence, therefore, is crucial.

Two high points: Imagine the shape of Sunday eucharist as two hills, side by side with a valley in the middle. From the left of your image you can see the rising shape of liturgy begin to build as people arrive. The entrance rite — procession, greeting, penitential rite, Gloria, and opening prayer — further build this shape, preparing the assembly for the proclamation of Scripture.

First climax: The liturgy of the word — first reading, silence, psalm, second reading, silence, gospel procession and acclamation, gospel, homily, silence, creed, and prayer of the faithful — is the top of the first hill. It is a climactic moment of the liturgy.

The preparation of the gifts — collection for the poor and the needs of the church, presentation of bread, wine, and material offerings, and setting the altar table — is a transitional moment, the valley between the two hills.

Second climax: The remainder of the liturgy of the eucharist — eucharistic prayer, Lord's prayer, gesture of peace, breaking of the bread, communion, communion prayer — is the second peak and balances the word. Liturgy of the word and liturgy of the eucharist are mutually dependent and harmoniously intertwined; neither dominates the other.

The dismissal — announcements, blessing, dismissal, recessional — is the winding down of the liturgy. It is surprisingly abrupt. Perhaps liturgy's unceremonious conclusion, rather than lengthy good-byes, best communicates the urgency of our mandate to live what we have celebrated.
Four important elements: The literal dimension of liturgy is the basic design of its shape. Adherence to the elements of good design in liturgical performance, therefore, will allow the shape of liturgy to communicate authentically. In his delightfully sagacious book *Everybody Steals From God: Communication as Worship*, Edward Fischer describes four such elements, namely unity, variety, harmony, and balance.

Unity requires a dominating theme or motif. Liturgy has one theme — the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, and it is encountered ritually in word and sacrament. The assembly is the dominant symbol in this ritual. The environment and all particular ministries serve to bring the paschal mystery to life in the assembly.

Variety keeps unity from getting dull. Fingerprints and snowflakes express God’s insatiable desire for variety as a companion to unity. At liturgy, unity is in the repetition while variety is in the rhythm. Liturgy’s rhythm of speech and song, movement and stillness, and its arousal of all the human senses are not mere ploys for maintaining interest. Rather the rhythm and the sensory quality of liturgy reflect the very designs we find in nature itself, rhythms of time and seasons in a universe bursting in myriad explosions of sound, sight, taste, smell, and touch. Liturgy’s rhythms and sensate qualities, therefore, invite us to be attentive, to wonder, and to celebrate; but authentic liturgy defies our efforts to control or manipulate.

Balance, which we recognize as essential to the design and healthy function of ecological systems, is similarly necessary for authentic communication. Liturgical balance shows up in the environment, the integral relationship of various symbols within the entire worship space. Balance is likewise an element of ritual interaction, evident as assembly and ministers shift their focus during moments of the liturgy, with their whole being actively attending to whatever objects, persons, sounds, and images invite participation. Less significant or inappropriate elements do not weigh down more important parts, thus bogging down authentic ritual participation. For example, singing a hymn at the preparation of the gifts and then merely reciting the Sanctus would betray a lack of balance.

Harmony has to do with things being right. “As an excellent example, an Olympic figure skater performs so that nothing can be rightly added and nothing rightly taken away.” Liturgical harmony results from such deliberateness and intentionality in the dispositions of those at worship, where every gesture, every word, and every symbol impinge upon the meaning of our lives. Harmony at liturgy also demands the participation and cooperation of all. A musical string whose tension is out of proportion to others on the same instrument produces an annoying dissonance. The harmonic clarity of the liturgical act, the conviction by which we express and intensify conversion as the meaning of our lives, depends on every object and every person acting in an interconnected fashion.

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2 Ibid., p. 16.
Non-verbal elements: Let us consider the following non-verbal elements of the entrance rite, better called the gathering rite: arrival, gathering song and procession, greeting, penitential rite, opening prayer.

Making transitions: We human beings need to make transitions from one activity to another. Like small talk before getting down to business or the spacious welcoming lobbies in public buildings, the entrance rite helps prepare us to enter into the liturgy of the word. In order for the entrance rite to be an effective time of transition, it is essential that persons coming to worship have a feeling of belonging.

Arrival

Hospitality: Assembly, ministers, and environment work together to create an ambience of liturgical hospitality. Friendly salutations belong here at the arrival time rather than later with the ritual greeting. Here they help establish rapport between presider, other particular ministers, and the assembly.

A coordinator: A common problem in parishes is that the presider is running helter skelter a few minutes before mass getting forgotten items ready and replacing missing ministers. The presider’s frenzy fills the atmosphere and influences the communal feeling of the gathering assembly. Consider, as an alternative to that scenario, a ministry of liturgy coordinator. The job description for this position is an extension of that of the familiar sacristan. The liturgy coordinator, who may be an individual or a couple, takes care of liturgy’s myriad of practical concerns. Such a ministry allows presider and other ministers to attend to people and their transition from being scattered individuals to an assembly gathered in prayer. The liturgy coordinator frees up time and energy in order that an atmosphere of hospitality and trust — two essential elements for common worship — may be created.

Ushers

Ministers of hospitality: Ushers, traditionally a special group of men, are being redefined in many parishes as ministers of hospitality. For some ushers this revisioning is a natural outflow of the gifts with which they already serve their parish. For others the challenges of change may be threatening. Ushers now do more than usher. These ministers of hospitality, a term which better describes their new function, are envisioned as men and women, young and old, filled with a welcoming spirit and a gift for gathering, familiar with the elements of liturgy, and trained to attend to emergencies and the physical needs of worshippers.

A change of roles: When drawn from the ranks of long established ushers, these ministers may have to painfully shed much of their past identity. The inclusion of women in this ministry is a particular sore spot for those who want the ushers to be a men’s club complete with a uniform that sets them apart. What is communicated by such exclusion, however, is that in Christ there is partiality and discrimination. This is inimical to Christian liturgy.
Full participation of ministers of hospitality in the liturgy is another essential demand of the job. To have an isolated group chatting at the back of the church or slipping outside for a cigarette does tremendous damage to the unity of the worshipping assembly. Ministers of hospitality serve the assembly.

Music Ministers

Musical preparation: What is the music group doing during this time of gathering? Last minute tuning or vocal exercises within earshot of the gathering assembly can be distracting. A prelude prior to the beginning of the eucharist helps to focus the assembly on what they are about to do. Also, a trusted songleader can rehearse a psalm refrain, song, or mass part before mass. This practice, done on a frequent basis, builds confidence, invites people to full, active participation, and frees them to pray what they sing.

Inviting participation: The assembly’s ability to participate in liturgical song is basic to the role of music as a liturgical symbol. Inviting participation is not a ploy to make liturgy relevant or keep the young people interested. Full, conscious, active participation is essential to the fullness of liturgical language.

Gathering Song and Procession

Processions are playful and delightfully useless. When choreographed carefully, with ministers spaced well apart, attentive to the movements of their bodies, and reverent toward the symbols they carry, the opening procession breaks loose from utilitarian confines and becomes ritual gesture, the assembly's aesthetic prayer.

A major hurdle for liturgical communities, however, is the power of ill-performed processions to split the assembly into “they” and “we.” “They” are those in the procession and those who will take their places in the sanctuary. “They” are the actors in a ritual drama. “We” are those in the pews, gazing at one another’s backs. “We” are the spectators who will be told about God by “they.” Perfunctory or careless processions portray such a caricature of the assembly.

From the parking lot: In centuries past, when the church was the centre of urban life, public processions to eucharist were common. In our own day, the walk from parking lot to church entrance is a kind of loose ritual as well. Although this repetitive ritual “procession” is usually given little attention, it has the potential to become a source of liturgical renewal.

One chief door: Several doors make access to the church convenient, but lacking in symbolic significance. An alternative scenario: there is only one path to the main entrance, the only entrance accessible from the outside. This path is adorned with beautiful foliage, flowers, rock gardens, and trees. It takes time to pass through this transitional space, but such a waste of time is good preparation for the liturgy.
Symbols in procession: Although our contemporary liturgical processions usually do not include several hundred participants, a procession performed well by particular ministers can engage the entire assembly. Ministers can do this by helping the assembly focus on the symbol of their ministry, maintaining personal transparency by not drawing excessive attention to themselves. For example, the cross-bearer leads the procession and holds the cross with poise and dignity. In contrast, a drooping processional cross sets the tone for careless prayer. Similarly, acolytes are attentive to candles and the thurifer to censer. The presider bows deeply at the altar table and profoundly kisses this sacred symbol. The lector sets the assembly in relation to the word of God in its midst by holding the lectionary high during the procession. Such practices require a commitment to training and rehearsal so that over time they become more easily performed while losing nothing of their reverential quality.

Within the assembly: Upon arriving at their places, all particular ministers focus their attention on the songleader and continue to participate in the opening music. Thus they communicate clearly that everyone comprises the assembly; there are no spectators and no entertainers.

The song of gathering, or opening hymn, opens the celebration, deepens the unity of the people, introduces them to the mystery of the season or feast, and accompanies the procession. This song is not simply “travelling music”. Therefore, the number of verses should not be determined by the length of time it takes the presider to reach the sanctuary. Such a practice suggests that the assembly serves the presider when, in fact, the opposite is true.

Music leads us in: Text, form, and style together make music a liturgical symbol, drawing the assembly into ritual actions of gathering and procession. As a symbol, music’s power and function is to “introduce” us to the mystery of the season or the feast. Such introduction is not didactic, but performative. The music, the gathering, and the procession are the prayer. They are not stimuli for devotion nor preparation for prayer; they are the prayer itself. The assembly, engaged in these actions in this musical environment is immersed in the paschal mystery, which is nothing less than Christ at prayer offering us, his body, as a sacrifice of praise.

Type of opening song: In light of an understanding of procession, gathering, and the power of music as a liturgical symbol, musicians might do well to reconsider the common four-square hymn or verse-refrain style of song with which we customarily begin worship. Ostinato responses, antiphonal or responsorial psalms, litanies, and chants can also engage participants effectively in both gathering and processing. The images and feelings elicited by the readings and prayers of the day will suggest the liturgical tone our gathering music should create and support.

During lent: Some imagine a day in the future when in seasons such as lent, the liturgical tone would be established by not having a formal entrance procession. Ministers would quietly and inconspicuously take their seats. The community, remaining seated, would sing a Kyrie chant for some time, until the songleader feels the people have been gathered. All stand and the presider says the opening prayer. The liturgy of the word begins. This form of gathering, with a simplicity expressive of the particular season, effectively assembles people for prayer.
Greeting

At the chair: The presider ministers from the presider's chair, not from the ambo, or in front of or behind the altar table, or in the centre aisle. The not uncommon practice of the presider leading the entrance rite from in front of the altar table stems perhaps from a desire to be in closer proximity to the assembly. It undermines the significance of the presider's chair and may even draw undue attention to the person of the presider. Liturgy is not a talk show where the host takes centre stage or wanders among the audience.

Sign of the cross: Consider the gesture by which the presider invites us to begin our liturgy: broad movements of hand and arm, everyone together, countless generations of Christians in choreographed prayer — in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Such is the sign by which God makes a divine claim on us. From its opening gestures — procession led by the cross, sign of the cross — the liturgy proclaims our passing to life through death in Christ, the ongoing journey of conversion.

The paschal mystery: Liturgy's language of ritual and symbol thrusts us into the existential tension of human living. Any who have struggled painfully with moral decision, humbly sought psychic liberation in counselling or therapy, searched tediously for intellectual clarity, waited patiently in prayer, contemplated attentively the wonders of nature — such persons know that life is not to be trivialized. The sign of the cross, feeling the pressure of my hand on four points of my body, common gesture, the metaphors of Father, Son, and Spirit — by this symbol we are set before the sublime. This symbolic gesture maintains the depth dimension of gathering, setting us in relationship to the existential tension that pervades our paschal journey from life to death.

An inappropriate greeting: In contrast, an assembly's enthusiastic “Good morning Father,” sometimes demanded again if it wasn't loud enough, gives excessive attention to the presiding minister. Although such casual intercourse may be an attempt to establish friendly rapport, the non-verbal communication of such an exchange unwittingly may set presider and assembly in a relationship that shows patronization and condescension. Most significantly, the ambience of anticipation and the healthy tension established by our gathering under the sign of the cross are smoothed over. Convivial greetings at this moment of the liturgical act trivialize the paschal mystery at work in us.

The place for casual greetings: When hospitality exudes at the church entrance there will be no need to repeat casual good mornings after the opening ritual greeting. “Good morning” and the assembly's salutary response are not liturgical language. Such a greeting has no history in our liturgical tradition and there seems to be little reason for introducing this innovation in our own time.

Penitential Rite

The present practice of having a penitential rite at every Sunday eucharist seems an intrusion into the dynamic and flow established by procession,
gathering song, and greeting.\textsuperscript{1} It may suggest unworthiness and emphasize the individuality of participants, neither of which is appropriate during this time of corporate gathering and praise. Such emphasis contradicts the primary acts of assembling and praise in these initial moments of the liturgy.

Image the alternative “sprinkling” rite, that is, the blessing and sprinkling of water. It evokes memories, images, and feelings associated with baptismal conversion as well as with water itself. The presider moves through the assembly, generously swinging an evergreen branch. The people continue raising the joyful strains of the gathering song. People feel water on their hands, arms, and heads. On many Sundays and certainly during Easter season this much neglected rite better serves the liturgical act of gathering than does the “I confess” or “Lord have mercy” as they are presently used.

Opening Prayer

\textbf{Silence and gestures:} This prayer concludes the entrance rite and leads the assembly into the liturgy of the word. By gesture and eye contact the presider should clearly invite the people to prayer with the invitation “Let us pray.” Substantial silence follows. The \textit{orans} gesture of the presider, that is, arms extended, elbows slightly bent, and palms of the hands facing upward, both collects and offers the prayer of the assembly.

Summary

The gathering rite requires a basic simplicity and sense of welcome. It should not be overemphasized by too much song, wordy intervention, or mini-homilies. Yet this rite is not to be rushed. Hospitality, skillful ministers, an intentional procession, a balanced rhythm of gesture, stillness, music, speech, and silence, and an assembly glad to be together in prayer all contribute to making the gathering rite a vestibule to the far more important liturgy of the word.

\textsuperscript{1} John F. Baldovin, “Kyrie Eleison and the Entrance Rite of the Roman Eucharist” \textit{Worship} (1986) 345.
The Liturgy of the Word

We live in language like fish in water. Yet we often find ourselves drowning in a sea of verbiage. Advertisers, media, salespersons, politicians, bureaucrats and even preachers bombard us with words, sometimes to inform and inspire, but often to manipulate. The language of ritual and symbol confronts the distractions of verbosity as it invites us to live life attentively, think critically, judge prudently, and act responsibly. The liturgy of the word, in spite of its verbal character, also functions dynamically as non-verbal communication. This dimension is evident in both the metaphorical quality of scripture and in the ritual rhythm of speech, silence, gesture, stillness, and music that carries the assembly in mutual address with the Author of life.

Salvation history: Judaeo-Christian salvation history weds the human and divine. Its stories tell how God has been with us and we with God. We proclaim our history not for nostalgic reminiscing, but to make the story ever new in the lives of God's people. When the great narrative of the exodus is retold at passover, the participants are reminded that “in every generation it is the duty of each of us to imagine that it is we — we ourselves — who were saved from the bondage of Egypt. Not only our ancestors did the Holy One, Blessed be God, redeem; God liberated us along with them.” Such an understanding of liturgical remembrance is inherent in our liturgy of the word as well.

Presence of Christ: When the assembly listens, when the ambo elicits attentiveness, when the reader proclaims, and when the cantor sings, then Christ is present among us. “He is present in his word, since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church.” Roman Catholics are better rehearsed at ritualizing Christ's presence in eucharistic bread and wine than in the proclamation of the word. Nevertheless, our reverence for scripture has increased dramatically over the past few decades. Let us consider, therefore, some of the ongoing tasks for liturgical renewal, especially mindful of how the ritual gestures and symbols of the liturgy of the word set us in relationship to God, others, and self as persons addressed continually by God.

The Reader

Pay attention: Imagine the assembly seated after the opening prayer. When the shuffle subsides the reader rises from his or her seat in the nave, not too far from the sanctuary, walks silently up the centre aisle, bows to the altar table, and proceeds to the ambo. The message conveyed by this action is clear: what is about to happen is important; it deserves our attention.

The ritual action is proclaiming and listening. The interactive communication between reader, cantor, and assembly is that of Christ's own self. The assembly, to carry its weight of the symbolic interaction, must be attentive to gestures, the reader, the proclamation, and the silence. The interactive

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1 Constitution on the Liturgy, n. 7.
dynamic of the assembly and reader precludes printed copies of scripture readings in the hands of those listening, whether in missalettes or special-occasion programs. Oral proclamation and aural attentiveness are the literal dimension of this ritual. As with all authentic symbols, this dimension must be maintained. If some members of the assembly are hearing-impaired, special devices can be attached to the church sound system.

The reader, for his or her part, engages self and others through a relaxed though not casual physical presence. Eye contact is made at appropriate moments during the reading, but this form of communication must serve the scriptures and maintain the personal transparency of the reader. The proclamation itself is a two-edged sword, every word and phrase piercing the imagination, psyche, intellect, conscience, and spirit. The concluding phrase, “This is the word of the Lord,” refers to the proclamation just experienced, not to the lectionary. Therefore, accompanying these words with a gesture of raising the lectionary is inappropriate. Rather, the quality of proclamation (thus ministerial competence and an adequate sound system), the reader’s physical demeanor, the assembly’s attentiveness — these are the ritual elements by which all will know the Lord has spoken.

Silence

Where the art is: Pianist Artur Schnable once said, “The notes I play as well as any other pianist, but the pauses between the notes — that is where the art resides.”

Pauses and silence: Pausing during the sentences and phrases of a scripture reading, and allowing ample silence following the first two readings, is an art. Like all artistic endeavor, it requires discipline and practice. Where assemblies are unaccustomed to silence after the readings, the reader might remain at the lectern and, with head bowed, use body language to invite all to reflect silently. Otherwise, if the reader immediately returns to his or her seat, an assembly not expecting this contemplative moment will begin to look around anxiously, wondering who forgot their cue.

Liturgical silence is deliberate, well planned and carefully executed. There is no embarrassment over the quiet. Silence is used as an important form of active participation in the liturgy. The quality of the proclamation will determine the quality of the silence that follows and vice versa. Silent moments in the liturgy are like the valleys between mountains. The former's gentler contours are nature’s way of harmonizing rows of mighty peaks. Without valleys, mountains would run jagged into one another, repulsing the innate human sensitivity to beauty. So it is with the liturgy of the word when there is no rhythm of speech, music, and silence. Worshippers will simply be unable to attend to the proclamation of scripture, not necessarily through any fault of their own but because the liturgical rhythm is unfaithful to the elements of design with which God has imbued all creation.

The cantor, whom we expect to have a finely honed sense of timing and intuitive empathy for the assembly, may determine the length of these silent

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2 Constitution on the Liturgy, n. 30.
bridges. After an appropriate time, she or he then proceeds to the ambo, also bowing to the altar, and begins the psalm. Because the psalm is scripture, an appropriate place from which to sing it is the ambo.

**Singing the psalm:** Many music directors continue to struggle with “getting the people to sing” the psalm. However, greater attention and reverence for the ritual gestures and the rhythmic interaction of ministers and assembly that accompany its performance can inspire participation and appreciation. A verbal introduction such as “please turn to number 222 in the Catholic Book of Worship and join me in singing our responsorial psalm . . .” tends to chop the liturgical flow. Competent proclamation and the ensuing silence have established a feeling in the assembly, a sense of having been addressed by God, engaged by the sublime. In whatever fashion the psalm is introduced and performed, its emergence from the deep silence must maintain balance and harmony with the elements of the liturgy of the word that have preceded it and that will follow it.

**The non-verbal dimension:** Amidst its tremendous flow of words, the liturgy of the word is also powerfully non-verbal. The spoken word has a ritual context and this ritual requires rhythm and balance. The primary symbols are assembly, reader, and ambo. Each is ritually engaged with the other and their relationship is to be expressed with great care, with authenticity and beauty.

**Drama does not help:** Some liturgy planners attempt dramatization of scripture readings, perhaps as an alternative to excessive liturgical verbiage. Amateur actors and script writers, however, seldom possess the skills and discipline required to create an art form worthy to serve as a liturgical symbol. The ritual context of proclamation provides the “dramatic” element, that is, the rhythm of gesture, sound, and silence by which God’s word engages persons in the authentic unfolding of their life story as salvation history.

**Prayer of the Faithful**

**Feelings are important:** We feel human needs before we understand them intellectually. The prayers which voice our common desires, therefore, must first evoke feelings. Conversely, persons who write these prayers must attend to their own feelings at prayer and to the images those feelings elicit. Symbol, imagery, and metaphor — not cause-and-effect style clauses — are the evocative language of petitionary prayer and comprise its essential literal dimension.

**Evocative language:** Compare, for example, two prayers that might be offered during a time of drought. The first says: “That God will bring an end to this drought by sending rain to help farmers, we pray to the Lord.” The second says: “That the heavens will open and shower their waters on our parched and thirsty land, we pray to the Lord.” The evocative quality of the latter prayer better maintains the literal dimension of prayers of intercession. This dimension, in turn, serves the depth function, that is to unite the assembly in prayer and lead worshippers to compassionate response.

**Musical response:** Music, when combined with imagery-laden texts, serves especially well to intensify in the assembly their experience of hopeful vigilance. A multitude of musical settings for litanies is available, and chants
such as those from the Taizé monks are easily adapted for sung petitions. Singing the general intercessions requires keeping the prayers moving, without long pauses between each petition. This dynamic movement, along with the interaction between cantor and assembly, engages the assembly in a rising spiral of prayerful pleading.

**Musical balance** within the liturgy must be re-examined when a new element is inserted. When the prayer of the faithful is sung, therefore, there should be no congregational hymn during the preparation of gifts. Instrumental or choir pieces during the less important preparation rite better maintain balance and appropriate emphasis.
The Liturgy of the Eucharist

Nourished by the word of God, we come to celebrate at the table of the eucharist. First, let us consider non-verbal dimensions of the preparation rite, that is, the collection, procession with gifts, preparation of the altar table, and bread and wine, as they shape the transition between liturgy's two tables. Second, let us attend to the ambience surrounding the eucharistic prayer, and finally to two elements of the communion rite, namely, the kiss of peace and the breaking of the bread.

Collection

What images and symbols surrounding the collection enable this action to surpass utilitarian confines and become a prayer of the assembly? Imagine two scenarios. First, burgundy jacket-clad men march to the front of the church, perfunctorily genuflect together, then make their way to the back of the church, pushing longhandled baskets in and out of pews. How does this scene feel? Uniforms and rigid gestures create an atmosphere of inflexible institutionalism. Although liturgy is formal, it is not stiff. Perhaps the most engaging moment is when children put their parents' envelope in the basket.

More participation: Second, imagine both women and men overseeing the collection baskets as they are passed hand to hand among the assembly. People touch the baskets and visibly acknowledge others in handing them on from one person to the next. The overseers make their way from back to front and, when all has been gathered, place the baskets off to the side of the sanctuary, not in front of and certainly not on the altar table where they will distract from the primary symbols of bread and wine. What do the non-verbal dynamics of this ritual interaction convey? People participate more clearly in the presentation of their monetary gifts. The presentation takes on greater significance, not because of what anyone says but simply because of the manner in which the gifts are collected. The collection becomes a symbolic ritual action rather than a purposeful function.

Procession with the Gifts

Procession as prayer: "The rite of carrying up the gifts continues the spiritual value and meaning of the ancient custom when the people brought bread and wine for the liturgy from their homes." This gesture, like the collection, is not merely functional. It comprises the prayer of the assembly. As parishioners arrive for mass the liturgy coordinator can ask some of them to participate in this procession of the gifts. Its solemnity might vary with the season and the community. The greater the solemnity, however, the greater the preparation required.

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1 General Instruction of the Roman Missal, n. 49.
Presenting the gifts: However formal or flexible, the attentive and reverent gestures by which some of the faithful present the assembly’s gifts will direct the prayerful participation of all other members. Persons who carry the community’s gifts in this procession must be well rehearsed.

Preparation of the Gifts

Preparation versus offering: Though sometimes mistakenly called the “offertory,” this liturgical action offers nothing. Bread and wine are prepared without fanfare. Silence or instrumental or choral music can support the simplicity of this transition from the table of the word to the table of the eucharist.

The altar is for all: Imagine women and men setting the altar table. They vest it with its cloth and prepare the gifts of bread and wine with dignity and simplicity, while the presider remains seated and attentive to their actions. Music appropriate to the day and liturgical season — not a congregational hymn — accompanies the planned and practised gestures of table setting. The non-verbal communication of the ritual is poignant in these times of liturgical renewal: the altar table belongs to all of us.

Eucharistic Prayer

The central prayer: Calling the eucharistic prayer the “center and high point of the entire celebration” is no guarantee that the assembly will experience it as such. Regrettably, people often sense the eucharistic prayer as a monotonous intrusion. The reasons for this are numerous. Let us consider, however, some non-verbal elements that should give momentum to this climactic prayer in terms of the rhythm and balance of liturgy.

A posture of kneeling fosters an attitude of either penitence or adoration among the assembly, neither of which conveys the tone of thanksgiving that permeates the text of the eucharistic prayer; nor does the posture engage worshippers in its intention. In the early church kneeling was indeed a significant prayer posture, but it was forbidden on Sunday. Standing is the posture for praise and thanksgiving, and it is far better that the whole assembly stand from the opening dialogue to the Great Amen.

A subtle historicizing gesture carried out during the institution narrative is the practice of displaying the host and chalice to all corners of the church for the visual appreciation of the faithful. The accompanying words are usually “he gave it to his disciples, and said 'Take this, all of you . . .'” Are we being asked to imagine we are at the Last Supper, with the presider as Jesus and the assembly the apostles? Or is this gesture an invitation to ocular communion? These liturgical and theologically shallow “show and tell” gestures are inimical to the authentic spirit of eucharistic praying.

Our non-verbal communication should speak the truth clearly. For example, the presider engages the assembly by extending his arms gracefully in the
orans position. Eyes are not raised to the ceiling but may focus on a point just above the heads of persons at the back of the church. Eye contact between presider and assembly is not significant at this time in the liturgy and can, in fact, be distracting. The quality of the presider's voice will be especially important for engaging the assembly. As such the style and tone of proclamation throughout the eucharistic prayer will reflect its various elements: thanksgiving, acclamation, epiclesis, narrative, anamnesis, offering, intercession, and doxology. The presider will give particular attention to evocative images in the eucharistic prayer text, letting metaphors such as fountain, blood, bread, light, and sacrifice wash over the assembly, gently but steadily nudging us to seek God, to discover in Jesus Christ the source and goal of our inner drives to wonder, to act responsibly, and to be in love.

Music has a special role in establishing a common feeling of unity as the assembly prays the eucharistic prayer. The use of three acclamations (Holy, Acclamation of Faith, Doxology/Amen) that share a common musical setting will create integrity in this ritual moment. Acclamations are not songs. As part of the symbol that music itself is, acclamations possess a symbolic quality of their own. Their literal and depth functions depend on their being performed according to their genre, that is, with short introductions and a driving musical style that fills the air with an aura of what is acclaimed. Such acclaiming unites worshippers and further enables them to experience the eucharistic prayer as their own.

The presider's careful attention to the dynamics necessary for proclaiming the eucharistic prayer, and music ministers' awareness of the role of acclamations throughout, will engage worshippers in the prayer itself. Freed from the monotonous bonds of spectatorship, the ritual interaction of presider, music ministers, and assembly will set the entire community before God as a people giving thanks for the grace of salvation.

Kiss of Peace

The kiss or handshake is a sign of solidarity and reconciliation among Christians. Early believers were exhorted to greet one another with a holy kiss, and ancient records include it as part of the Christian liturgy. This moment, however, is not one of presidential cordiality or renewal of old acquaintances. Convivial exchanges are a prelude to liturgy. This ritual greeting is extended to persons nearby and it is the peace of Christ that is communicated in the gesture.

Breaking of the Bread

Loss and restoration: Around the eleventh century the gesture of breaking the one loaf was lost. Today attempts are being made to restore this basic and crucially significant action. However, the Roman Rite compromises on several important details: it insists that the bread used at the eucharist appear and taste like actual food while paradoxically maintaining that the bread must be unleavened. It states that the gesture of breaking a single loaf is most desirable and more clearly shows the eucharist as a sign of unity and charity, since the one bread is being distributed among the members of one
family. Yet the rite tries to respect the requirements of large assemblies and admits the use of small hosts at times.³

The full symbol: Many attempts have been made to provide mass-produced bread-like hosts, with some small success. Liturgy committees should ensure that they are receiving the best communion breads available. Since one loaf is the ideal, the presider, at the very least, should break the large host and share it with some of the faithful.⁴ Another problematic practice concerns the Lamb of God. This litany originally was introduced to accompany the lengthy breaking of the bread. Routinely singing it at liturgies where the ritual of breaking has been abandoned seems to draw attention to a gaping hole in the liturgy left by our minimalistic action of breaking a single host.

Communion

Eating and drinking the sacramental body and blood of Christ culminates and flows from our eucharistic prayer. Thus, communion is a time of shared joy, celebrating our unity in Christ. The eucharist is food shared together; this action is not merely individual communion with Jesus, but our communion with others at worship, our communion in and with Christ.

Expressive symbols: When planning the communion rite, and imagining how its shape will come to life through the full expression of symbols and by the ritual interaction of the assembly and its ministers, we do well to keep in mind a piety that has been handed down to countless generations of Catholics and continues to influence our liturgical practices.

Little participation: By the ninth century eucharistic spirituality was distorted by superstitious attitudes about the consecrated bread, by a theology espousing excessive reverence for the sacrament and by an exaggerated emphasis on the privileged position of the clergy. The practice of receiving common bread in the hand disappeared; thin wafer-hosts placed on the communicant’s tongue became the norm. Communion from the cup ceased. Human unworthiness was emphasized. Passivity and adoration replaced participation and communion, and private piety took precedence over a sense of union and sharing.

Poor communion practices: Consider some common practices that continue to convey remnants of this piety. Communion wafers that neither taste nor appear as real food are distributed with machine-like efficiency. People enclose themselves in private devotional cocoons by kneeling after communion. Choirs lead us in individualistic meditational songs focusing on “I” rather than “we.” Lay communion ministers publicly wash their hands — a gesture that has no liturgical significance, can be distracting, and may unwittingly suggest that laity are unworthy to handle the eucharist. Ordained ministers who have not participated in the liturgy from the very beginning parachute in to “help out” with communion, further eroding the integrity of the celebrating assembly.

³ Ibid., n. 283.
⁴ Ibid., n. 283.
Symbolic power: The opposites to all these practices, of course, are needed to engage worshippers in the full symbolic power of the communion rite. “Happy are those who are called to His supper.” Every symbol, gesture, action, and person echoes this invitation to come joyfully to the wedding feast of the Lamb (Revelation 19: 5 ff). The ritual symbolic action in which all share is the prayer and self-gift of Christ himself. Christ at prayer in us transforms the simple act of sharing bread and wine into a paschal feast.

ORDER OF CHRISTIAN FUNERALS

AVAILABLE EARLY IN 1990

The bishops of the Second Vatican Council called for a revision of the funeral rites so that they more clearly express the paschal character of Christian death and correspond more closely to the circumstances and traditions of various regions (see Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 81.) The Ordo Exsequiarum was issued in 1969. The English text was prepared by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) and was issued the same year. In 1973 an adapted text was prepared for use in Canada.

Following a broad consultation, the bishops’ conferences around the English-speaking world asked ICEL to provide an updated and expanded edition of the funeral rites. The Order of Christian Funerals was approved by the Canadian bishops in 1986 and the text was subsequently confirmed by the Congregation for Divine Worship.

The new Canadian edition will include extensive pastoral notes, complete rites for adults and for children, and a great number of texts to be used in special circumstances (e.g., tragic death, suicide, cremation). New rites for the first pastoral visit following death, rites for gathering in the presence of the body and for the transfer of the body to the church will be included. The Canadian edition will contain nine models for the vigil for the deceased as well as two models for evening prayer.

Pastors, liturgy committees, musicians, ministers who lead or take part in the vigils for the deceased and funeral liturgies, funeral directors, and those who work with bereaved individuals and families will find this edition a carefully arranged pastoral resource for liturgical celebrations of Christian death.
The principles and reflections on the eucharistic liturgy in the first part of this issue help us to see our Sunday worship in a new light. This permits and encourages the following detailed reflection on two parts of our Sunday liturgy: the communion rite and the concluding rites (which here will be called the rites of going forth). This reflection will emphasize the implications for human relationships that are expressed in these parts of the mass, and as well the relationship between the eucharist and our daily lives in the world.

Communion Rite

The communion rite begins following the singing of the Great Amen. It contrasts with the eucharistic prayer in several respects. There is more action and more verbal and sung participation by the people. The visual focus is more on the assembly as a whole.

What we see in the communion rite is a succession of acts that signify and effect unity among persons within the worshipping community, and between them and Christ. The centre of this part of the eucharistic liturgy is the sharing of the holy food by the holy people.

The act of communion is the basis for the use of descriptions such as "the Lord's Supper," "the paschal meal" and "the banquet that gives us [Christ's] body and blood." The General Instruction (n. 56) says: "Since the eucharistic celebration is the paschal meal, it is right that the faithful who are properly disposed receive the Lord's body and blood as spiritual food as he commanded. This is the purpose of the breaking of bread and the other preparatory rites that lead directly to the communion of the people."

The altar-table, upon which the bread and wine rest, and which is surrounded by the entire assembly, is the visual focus. The altar is described as "the table of the Lord and the people of God are called together to share in it." Speaking of the liturgy of the word and liturgy of the eucharist together, the General Instruction adds, "the table of God's word and of Christ's body is laid for the people of God to receive from it instruction and food."

The meal itself is preceded by several elements of preparation, and it is followed by silent, sung and spoken prayer. All stand for most of the communion rite, though they may sit for silent prayer following communion.
Christ-centered: The texts of the communion rite are more explicitly christological, and hence less explicitly trinitarian, than other parts of the eucharistic liturgy.

Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer itself is preceded by an invitation, and followed by the embolism and by the doxology.

A eucharistic prayer: The text of the Lord's prayer echoes and summarizes several points already referred to in the eucharistic prayer. In addition, it constitutes a model for liturgical prayers of petition such as the collects, inasmuch as it consistently uses the imperative voice in its petitions: "give us, forgive us, lead us not, deliver us." Finally, it is the first of several elements of the communion rite that were explicitly given by Christ to his disciples.

The General Instruction (n. 56a) says: "This is a petition both for daily food, which for Christians means also the eucharistic bread, and for the forgiveness of sin, so that what is holy may be given to those who are holy." Both the Lord's Prayer and the sign of peace are viewed, at least in part, as acts of reconciliation among members of the assembly in preparation for the sharing of communion.

The address of this prayer uses the divine name "Father," as do the prefaces and most of the eucharistic prayer. "Hallowed be thy name" echoes the "Holy, holy" and the first phrase of the eucharistic prayers.

"Thy kingdom come" echoes the penultimate thought in the eucharistic prayers, e.g., "Then, in your kingdom, freed from the corruption of sin and death, we shall sing your glory with every creature through Christ our Lord." "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" is a description of God's kingdom.

"Give us this day our daily bread" echoes the prayer of blessing and acknowledgment which accompanies the placing of the bread and wine on the table at the preparation of the altar and the gifts. Seen as a eucharistic reference, it also echoes the first epiclesis and the institution narrative.

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" and "lead us not into temptation" make us think of the second epiclesis, in which the Holy Spirit is invoked to live in the community to bring about unity and constant fidelity.

Said by all: The Lord's Prayer brings all the members of the community together inasmuch as it is said in unison. Because of the image of God as loving parent, it is often referred to as the "family prayer" of the church. In addition, in its origins it is a prayer for those who are disciples of Christ, and hence for those called to continue his ministry in the world today. It may be seen as a gift given us by Christ to enable the ministry which we carry out in his name.

A footnote to the General Instruction (n. 112) records a query referred to the Vatican for official interpretation which is of interest here. "In some places there is a current practice whereby those taking part in the Mass replace the giving of the sign of peace at the deacon's invitation by holding hands during
the singing of the Lord's Prayer. Is this acceptable?” The Reply quite rightly
says that it is not acceptable to hold hands during the Lord's Prayer to
replace the sign of peace. However, it does not condemn the former gesture
in itself: “The prolonged holding of hands is of itself a sign of communion
rather than of peace. Further, it is a liturgical gesture introduced spontane­
ously but on personal initiative; it is not in the rubrics.”

Embolism: Following the unison prayer of the entire community, the pre­
sider alone elaborates on the last verse of the Lord’s Prayer. In content the
embolism contains three negative elements: “every evil, sin, all anxiety,” and
asks God to “deliver us, keep us free, protect us.” The positive element is
“grant us peace in our day.” Finally, we are described as waiting “in joyful
hope.” Our temporal perspective is both present and eschatological: “for the
coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ,” both in communion and in the parousia.

The “evil” that is referred to can be understood at least in part in terms of the
communal and societal evils which beset our world today. It is well to name
and reflect on these, and to ask God’s help in exorcising them. In addition,
we need to realize that we may be God’s instruments in overcoming these.
“Evil” is the antithesis to God’s kingdom, the obstacle to be overcome before
the kingdom can be realized. It is our individual and collective mission to
seek to remove these obstacles so that the kingdom will indeed be realized.

The term “anxiety” (Latin: perturbatione) presents difficulties to some, who
interpret it from a psychological perspective. It may be understood in rela­
tion to the biblical verse, “Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be
afraid” (John, chapter 14).

The positive side of the embolism, “grant us peace in our day,” is the first
reference in the communion rite to the theme of peace. Like the first part of
the embolism as a whole, its temporal reference is the present.

Doxology: The congregation (but not the presider) responds to the embo­
Iism and concludes the Lord’s Prayer as a whole with the doxology:

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
are yours, now and for ever.

Prayer of praise: This is identified as a doxology, that is, a short prayer of
praise. It is also described as a conclusion and as an acclamation. Clearly it
builds on the last phrase of the embolism.

The doxology echoes the conclusion of the eucharistic prayer sung just a
few moments previously. It also refers to the beginning of the Lord’s Prayer
itself: “thy kingdom come, thy will be done.”

Sign of Peace

A prayer to Christ: The presider now addresses a prayer to Christ. This is
most unusual, as liturgical prayers almost always are addressed to God, the
first person of the Trinity. This address, however, is consistent with the tenor
of the communion rite as a whole, which emphasizes the personal presence
of Christ.
A basis for petition: As is often the case, the address is followed by a phrase which provides a basis for the petition that follows. In this case it includes a quotation of the words of Jesus (John 14: 27):

     Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your apostles,
     I leave you peace, my peace I give you.

The main petition is:

     grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom.

This is preceded by a preliminary petition which is couched in negative terms:

     Look not on our sins,
     but on the faith of your Church.

The prayer concludes with a standard formula:

     where you live for ever and ever.

And all respond: Amen.

The greeting: Following this prayer, the presider greets the people, and the people greet him in return:

     The peace of the Lord be with you always.
     And also with you.

The invitation: The deacon or priest now invites the assembly to perform an action:

     Let us offer each other the sign of peace.

The sign of peace: The rubrics add: “All make an appropriate sign of peace, according to local custom.” A separate rubric directs, “The priest gives the sign of peace to the deacon or minister.”

The General Instruction (n. 56b) describes the sign of peace in this way: “Before they share in the same bread, the faithful implore peace and unity for the church and for the whole human family and offer some sign of their love for one another.” In another place it says: “All exchange some sign of peace and love.”

Peace is Christ's gift: Like the Lord's Prayer and the eucharist itself, peace is one of Christ’s gifts to his disciples and his church. It is also his promise.

From John’s Gospel: The context of the words of Christ that are quoted is the high priestly prayer of John’s version of the Last Supper. It is of interest as well that Jesus uses the greeting, “Peace be with you” three times in this gospel in the context of his post-resurrection appearances (John 20: 19,21,26).

Three key words: The term "peace" has already been introduced in the embolism. "Unity" is the gift of the Holy Spirit that is invoked in the second epiclesis. “Kingdom” has already been mentioned toward the end of the eucharistic prayer and in the Lord’s Prayer.
The negative petition, like the embolism, refers to sin, but in a different way:

Keep us free from sin (embolism)
Look not on our sins (peace)

The present text assumes human frailty, but contrasts “sins” with “faith.” To some extent there is a contrast between the individual and the community. From another point of view, however, the “your Church” that is referred to is not separate and distinct from the “us” of “our sins.” Because of baptism we are members of the Church, and hence up to a point this can be rendered “Look not on our sins, but also on our faith.” In addition, “church” is also understood in broader terms, e.g., as the Body of Christ and hence more than simply its individual human members.

The greeting is an expansion of the more common exchange, “The Lord be with you / And also with you,” which always recalls to us the presence of God. In this context “Lord” refers to Christ — the Risen One, and Christ’s presence is specified in terms of his promised gift of peace. His presence, which is also the presence of the kingdom, brings peace — “his peace.” The greeting adds, “always”. The peace of Christ is our constant gift, not simply our liturgical experience.

Biblical shalom: In considering the rite of peace as a whole, we need to recall the biblical meaning of the word peace. The Hebrew word shalom refers to total wholeness.

When we pray for peace, it is not only personal peace within ourselves or even social peace within the church community that we seek. We pray for peace — shalom — for all humanity. We seek peace wherever there is discord, whether in individual hearts, in families, in work and social situations, in all dimensions of society; we seek peace with justice between nations around the world.

We not only pray for peace, we not only recall that this peace is identified both with Christ and with the kingdom, but we now — each one present — engage in an action that will be a sign of this peace. Our action in sharing the sign of peace illustrates that a basic dimension of the peace we seek is healed human relationships. To reach out to another person and pray Christ’s peace for them — and as well, to accept this prayer from another person — is to pray that all relationships be whole. It is also to commit oneself to doing whatever one can to ensure that all one’s own relationships — and all human relationships in general — are as wholesome as possible.

Commitment to peacemaking: In sharing the sign of peace with other members of the worshipping community, one is practising how to be a peacemaker in all aspects of one’s life. It is to commit oneself to the work of peacemaking wherever it is needed.

Always an action: How the action that is called the sign of peace is actually carried out depends on local custom. But it is always an action. The commonly used dialogue, “The peace of Christ be with you / And also with you”
is nowhere specified or even suggested. If the exchange of these words is the local custom, however, it is to be viewed as an action, not simply a verbal exchange.

**Touching another person:** In our society the sign of peace generally involves touching other persons, whether by handshake, hug or kiss. We touch those whom we ordinarily would not; we may touch others — of the same or opposite sex — more intimately than we would on other occasions. And we say that such touching is a sign of the peace of Christ. In a time and society where there is so much physical violence against persons — child and spouse abuse, muggings, pornography, rape, murder, terrorism, war — we proclaim that we can touch others gently, with respect and affection. Furthermore, we say that this is a model of how humans should always touch each other, and we practise and commit ourselves to this model of human relationships.

As already noted, the *General Instruction* (n. 56b) also interprets the rite of peace in terms of "love" as well as peace: "some sign of their love for one another; a sign of peace and love."

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**Breaking of the Bread**

The first preparatory elements of the communion rite — the Lord's Prayer and sign of peace — are directed at the assembly. Having completed these, we turn to an element which has a dual purpose. One is to prepare the bread and wine for the sharing of communion itself. The second is symbolic.

**Breaking the bread:** The rubric merely says, "[The priest] takes the host and breaks it over the paten." The bread is broken into pieces that are appropriate for serving to communicants.

**A loaf of bread:** The breaking of bread goes beyond a pragmatic preparation for communion, though it is that as well. Of course it presupposes that there is some kind of loaf of bread to break; otherwise it makes no sense. The use of wafers implicitly views this rite in a purely pragmatic way, though the priest's host is always broken in memory of Christ's action at the Last Supper.

**Not merely functional:** The *General Instruction* (n. 56c) says: "In apostolic times this gesture of Christ at the last supper gave the entire eucharistic action its name. This rite is not simply functional, but is a sign that in sharing in the one bread of life which is Christ we who are many are made one body."

**A Jewish practice:** The breaking of bread is first of all part of the Jewish practice of saying grace before meals. The bread is held by the family head, the prayer is said ("Blessed are you . . ."), and then the bread is broken and some is eaten.

**Because the eucharist is liturgy and not drama, the acts of giving thanks, breaking, and eating have been separated and developed into separate liturgical rites.** Some presiders break the bread during the recital of the institution narrative; this misses the point and is a bad practice. Logically, one should commune immediately as well.
The early Church: The phrase, breaking of the bread, recalls the description of the early Christian community given in the Acts of the Apostles:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (2: 42).

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts (2: 46).

We especially recall Paul's interpretation in his first letter to the Church in Corinth:

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the same loaf (10: 16-17).

An important symbol: The loaf which is broken is, in this view, a tremendously important symbol of the communal nature of the church, of eucharistic worship, and of humankind in general. To use wafers is simply to contradict Paul and to give a countersign; it is to promote and foster individualism at worship and in society.

In order to share: Finally, the purpose of the breaking of the bread (and pouring out of the wine into several cups) is to share these holy foods, a communal and relational act that will be considered further below.

Lamb of God

While all of these actions are taking place at the altar, the assembly sings or says the Lamb of God:

Lamb of God, 
you take away the sins of the world: 
    have mercy on us. 
Lamb of God, 
you take away the sins of the world: 
    grant us peace.

The first verse is sung as many times as necessary to accompany the action of breaking the bread. Thus this song may have as few as two or three verses, or many.

As a song that is sung while an action is being performed, it necessarily interprets that action. The text is addressed to Christ under the title, Lamb of God. This image brings to mind the passover lamb and passover meal, as well as the slain but victorious lamb of the book of Revelation. The words are quoted, however, from the gospel according to John, where they are the cry of John the Baptist (John 1: 29, 36). The biblical quotation is shortened, however, by the omission of the word "behold."
The next day [John] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said:

Behold, the Lamb of God,
who takes away the sin of the world.
This is he of whom I said,
After me comes a man who ranks before me,
for he was before me. (1: 29-30)

The next day again John was standing with two
of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus
as he walked, and said:
Behold, the Lamb of God.
The two disciples heard him say this,
and they followed Jesus. (1: 35-37)

An acclamation: The text is an acclamation of those who recognize Christ, a
shout of recognition, a profession of faith, a warm greeting. It is associated
with the baptism of Jesus and with his anointing for ministry with the Holy
Spirit. It is a call to discipleship, a call to follow Jesus, and this call is a
communal one. It is a cry of those called to be his disciples.

Address to Christ: The “you take away the sins of the world” is not simply a
basis for the subsequent petition, as would be the case in a collect. Rather, it
is part of the direct address to Christ.

A christological acclamation: The Lamb of God recalls the christological
acclamations that surround the proclamation of the gospel: "Glory to you, Lord; Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ."

Communion

Showing the bread: The priest takes a piece of bread and “raises it slightly
over the paten.” The General Instruction (n. 56g) says: “The priest then
shows the eucharistic bread for communion to the faithful.” Both here, in
reference to the congregation as a whole, and later in relationship to indivi
dual communicants, the priest or other minister “shows” the bread to the
people.

As he carries out this action, the presider says:

This is the Lamb of God
who takes away the sins of the world.
Happy are those who are called to his supper.

The people join the priest in continuing:

Lord, I am not worthy to receive you,
but only say the word and I shall be healed.

Dialogue or unison: In form this superficially appears to be dialogue. The
rubrics indicate, however, that it is a single text, which the priest begins but
in which he is then joined by everyone else. This is an unusual form of litur
gical speech.

Humility: The General Instruction (n. 56g) calls this “the prayer of humility in
words from the Gospels.”
Communion of the People

People process to the front to receive communion. This is the only formal, liturgical procession that involves all of the people, and more than the other liturgical processions, is manifestly and intensely communal. It actually involves the lay members of the community, and not merely their representatives. It recalls and recapitulates the informal procession which brought everyone from their homes to the church prior to the liturgy.

All gathered: While everyone has figuratively been gathered around the table since the preparation of the altar and the gifts, only the priest and acolytes have been really close to the table. Now everyone comes up from their pews or chairs to approach the table. All go to communion together.

From the table: As the entire assembly at least figuratively receives communion from the table of the Lord, the places actually taken by the communion ministers should not be too far away from it.

Music for the procession: As is usually the case with liturgical processions, it is accompanied by music, in this case congregational singing. The General Instruction (n. 56i) describes the communion song as follows: “Its function is to express outwardly the communicants' union in spirit by means of the unity of their voices, to give evidence of joy of heart, and to make the procession to receive Christ’s body more fully an act of communion.”

“The song begins when the priest takes communion and continues for as long as seems appropriate while the faithful receive Christ's body.”

Fostering unity: Music in Catholic Worship (62) adds: “The communion should foster a sense of unity. It should be simple and not demand great effort. It gives expression to the joy of unity in the body of Christ and the fulfillment of the mystery being celebrated. Most benediction hymns, by reason of their concentration on adoration rather than on communion, are not acceptable. In general, during the most important seasons of the Church year, Easter, Lent; Christmas, and Advent, it is preferable that most songs used at the communion be seasonal in nature. During the remainder of the Church year, however, topical songs may be used during the communion procession, provided these texts do not conflict with the paschal character of every Sunday.”

Showing the bread: The rubrics specify that the communion minister take a host, raise it a little, and show it to the communicant while saying, “The body of Christ.” The communicant responds “Amen” and receives communion.

The cup is given in a similar way, being shown to the communicant while the minister says, “The blood of Christ”; the communicant again responds “Amen” and drinks from the chalice.

A dialogue: In form the exchange, “The body/blood of Christ / Amen” is an exchange of acclamations. In content this dialogue is described as a profession of faith and a way in which communicants may participate actively in the eucharistic liturgy.

Communion is a receiving of food and a sharing of food. We do not simply eat the bread and drink the wine, or help ourselves, but receive food from another. We feed each other, knowing that it is really Christ who is both host
and food. We recall and experience the truth of Christ’s words: “This is my body which will be given up for you; This is the cup of my blood . . . . It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven.”

All the same: We all receive (more or less) the same amount of food. At this table all share equally, no matter how differently we eat at our own tables during the week.

Just a little: We also all receive just a little food, a small amount of bread, a sip of wine. Sharing any meal creates bonds among those who participate. We become what we eat. We become bread and wine for others, bread broken and wine poured out. We become Christ for others.

After Communion

The procession has two directions. It not only leads everyone to the altar-table, but also back to their pews or chairs. As the procession of the gifts arose out of the gathered people, this is where the communion procession is concluded.

Silent prayer: When all are seated, there may be a period of silent prayer, or a song or praise, or both. The General Instruction (n. 56j) states: “After communion, the priest and people may spend some time in silent prayer. If desired a hymn, psalm, or other song of praise may be sung by the entire congregation.”

Song after communion: Music in Catholic Worship (n. 72) adds: “The singing of a psalm or hymn of praise after the distribution of communion is optional. If the organ is played or the choir sings during the distribution of communion, a congregational song may well provide a fitting expression of oneness in the Eucharistic Lord. Since no particular text is specified, there is ample room for creativity.”

Prayer after Communion

At an appropriate time, all rise.

Concluding with a collect: As with other parts of the liturgy that include a procession (entrance, preparation of altar and gifts), the communion rite concludes with a collect, “here” called the prayer after communion. Like the prayer over the gifts, this is a short collect with a short concluding formula rather than a longer collect like the opening prayer.

A prayer of petition: The General Instruction (n. 56k) says: “In the prayer after communion, the priest petitions for the effects of the mystery just celebrated and by their acclamation, Amen, the people make the prayer their own.”

As a collect, the prayer after communion is a prayer of petition, and not a prayer of thanksgiving. It generally names the action (communion) that has just been completed, using a variety of images.
To bear fruit: In content it asks that the sharing of the bread and wine of communion bear fruit in the lives we live after the liturgy. We ask that our lives be different, that this communion may lead to a more Christ-like life in the future.

Individual prayers after communion may specify the future in terms of daily life, of God's kingdom, or of eternity (heaven). With this the communion rite and the liturgy of the eucharist as a whole, concludes. All remain standing.
The Going Forth

What happens at the end of the Sunday eucharist? Who do we see and hear?

**People:** As at the beginning of the liturgy, we see people. And we see and hear them going forth. Once again they enter upon their journey. This action occurs in four main stages:

- concluding prayers
- procession, and perhaps concluding music
- going from seats to the door of the church
- going from the church to their homes

**The basic shape** of the concluding rites is the reverse of those at the beginning of the liturgy. Using some license, the following scheme shows that the beginning and end of the eucharist are close to being mirror images of each other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coming In</th>
<th>Going Forth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journey</td>
<td>Journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song</td>
<td>Song or other music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity/cross</td>
<td>Trinity/cross/blessing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greeting</td>
<td>Dismissal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Announcements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penitential rite/water</td>
<td>Solemn blessing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrie/Gloria</td>
<td>(Song after communion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opening prayer</td>
<td>(Prayer after communion)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This scheme adds the song after communion and the prayer after communion to the concluding rites. There indeed is some justification for this other than symmetry. The prayer after communion, at least, looks forward to new life transformed by the experience of communion.

**A rapid conclusion:** It is noteworthy that the conclusion comes so soon after the communion, and indeed overlaps the end of the communion rite to some degree. Some persons are frustrated and disappointed at this, as they would prefer to have some time for reflection, meditation and thanksgiving. They would like to spend some time alone with the Christ just received in communion, with the Christ with whom one is so closely united at this moment.

**A brief pause:** This desire and expectation is honored to some extent. And yet with what is really only a brief pause the flow of the liturgy proceeds to its conclusion.

**A journey:** The action that takes place is again that of a journey, procession, pilgrimage, parade. The people go from their communal and public activity of worship back to their homes and daily lives. Having stepped aside from the journey of their daily Christian lives for a short time, they now get up again and return to it.

**The liturgy is not over:** But they do not go home as if the liturgy were all over and completely left behind. Instead, they go forth, they are sent forth, they are called forth. And they go as though the celebration of the eucharist will make a difference in their lives in the coming week.
Announcements

**Not an interruption:** The rubrics state, “The priest may conclude the entire sacred action with a few words. If there are any brief announcements they may be made at this time.” The announcements pull us back to the daily life of the church and its members very quickly after communion. They sometimes seem to be an interruption in the flow of the liturgy, intrusive and awkward. It sometimes is assumed that this is the only place they can be fitted in, and rather than omit them completely, their appearance here is the lesser of two evils. Of course the descriptions, “a few words” and “brief” should be taken seriously. Additional announcements may be provided in written form in the bulletin.

**A weekday life:** And yet there is a serious theological message to the placing of the announcements where they are. They pick up on the point made in the prayer after communion that our communion is expected to be fruitful in our subsequent daily lives. The announcements remind us in the most concrete way that the church has a weekday life and that there is a needy world beyond the doors of the church gathered for worship.

**We are active:** The juxtaposition of communion and announcements tells us that communion is for something; that having been transformed, we have a task and a week of Christian living ahead of us. The announcements are an ecclesiological message. We are an active, engaged church, not a church that emerges only on Sunday or exists only for worship.

**Relationships not forgotten:** Among other things, we are reminded that the transformed human relationships that have been forged and formed among members of the local church community during the eucharistic liturgy cannot just be forgotten or ignored until next Sunday. They continue during the week, as there is need or opportunity to come together for service, study or prayer. At the very least, the other members of the assembly are carried in prayer during the week.

Greeting

**Another exchange:** Standing, the priest extends his hands, and he and the people again exchange greetings:

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

**This is the fifth time** that this greeting (or a close equivalent) has been exchanged. The previous occasions were at the very beginning of the liturgy, before the gospel, at the beginning of the eucharistic prayer, and at the sign of peace. It marks the beginning of a particularly important part of the liturgy, therefore, and once more is both a prayer and a proclamation that Christ/God is present with us. This greeting, together with other elements of the liturgy, helps us appreciate that in our worship we encounter God. The greeting is a corporate act, and one in which the mutual care of priest and people is expressed.
Blessing

Three forms: The greeting serves to introduce the concluding blessing, which may take three forms: the simple blessing, the solemn blessing, and the prayer over the people.

What does it mean to ask God's blessing? The greatest blessing has already been implied in the preceding greeting: the continued presence of God with us as we journey on. We ask to be blessed with God's abiding presence, inspiration, strength, etc. We are asking especially for the life of the Holy Spirit in us as we walk on.

Dismissal

The dismissal is a forceful one. The three alternative texts given are:

- Go in the peace of Christ.
- The Mass is ended, go in peace.
- Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All respond:

Thanks be to God.

It is a diaconal text, and the deacon (or priest) says simply, “Go.” We are not to tarry or linger, but go, and the concluding rites themselves are brief enough to convey that message in their very structure.

Forceful: We are not simply told that the liturgy is over, nor are we issued a polite invitation to leave (“let us go . . .”). Instead, we are sent forth: “go.”

Called forth: With reference to earlier parts of the liturgy, we can also see ourselves as being called forth. The needs of the church and the world that have been stated or implied in the general intercessions, collection and announcements have an urgency that calls us to ministry outside the liturgy.

Communal: The dismissal is not addressed to isolated individuals, but to the church as community and to the individuals-in-community who are its members. It addresses a church that is ministerial and missionary, and that has an active life during the week.

For the laity: The fact that the dismissal is addressed to the congregation indicates that the laity have a major responsibility for the weekday life and ministry of the church. This responsibility is shared with the priest, of course, but is certainly not the priest's alone.

A responsibility: It is clear that the weekday life of the church is not identical with its life during the Sunday eucharist. The church is not as visible or as focused, the bonds between its members are not as close (or at least, these bonds are not expressed in the same way) as during the eucharistic liturgy. It is a time for greater individual responsibility and greater responsibility for the many domestic churches that exist in the community. It is a time when closer bonds are forged with persons outside the worshipping community.

Peace: The other word which is consistently used in the formulas of dismissal is “peace.” “Go in peace.” Peace is a word which is related to God's
kingdom, reign or dominion. It is what God dreams of for humankind. It signifies — evokes — an image of transformed relationships.

**This peace**, with which we are to go forth, is not something we are to acquire after we have left church or after the liturgy is completed. It is not something we are given in the last few moments of the liturgy.

**Transformed relationships**: Rather, peace names the experience of transformed relationships that have characterized the liturgy from start to finish, though certainly it has grown and been strengthened as the eucharist has proceeded.

**To be shared**: And if one goes forth in this peace, it is not as a possession, not as something precious one keeps for oneself. By its nature it is to be shared. By its nature it needs to be expressed in transformed relationships during the week.

**God’s dream**: Throughout the eucharistic liturgy we have practised God’s dream. Now it is time to take this dream and help make it a reality in the world outside the walls of the church.

**Thanks**: The response, “Thanks be to God,” is used only here and at the conclusion of the first and second readings. However, we are also reminded of the third response of the preface dialogue, “It is right to give [God] thanks and praise.”

**Sent to bring peace**: Certainly it does not mean that we are thankful the liturgy is over so we can get on with our Sunday rest or other activities. It is rather a specific response to the “Go” of the dismissal. We are thankful to God that we are being sent out to bring peace and love and serve God in our homes and daily lives. It is an acceptance of our missionary commission.

**To live in new ways**: The response, “Thanks be to God,” also has reference to the other key terms of the dismissal: peace, love, serve, Lord. These all convey some dimension of the transformation that has been experienced in the celebration of the Sunday eucharistic liturgy. Persons and community transformed in such ways do not become untransformed when the liturgy is concluded. Rather, the transformed community and its transformed members live in new ways during the week.

**Eucharistic**: “Thanks be to God” is also a eucharistic phrase, summing up our eucharistic experience in this liturgy. We have given thanks, now we go to live thankful lives in the days ahead. Because of its other use, this response also reminds us of the word of God and our encounter with the living Word, Jesus Christ. In our weekday lives, we live with and under the word, and preach it to others.

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**Reverence and Procession**

**The priest kisses the altar**, in a way saying “good-bye” to that symbol of Christ. We recognize at the same time that other tables will play eucharistic roles during the week.

**Procession**: The priest and other ministers then bow, and process out following the cross. Again, this is far more than a merely pragmatic movement
of persons from one place to another. The processional party symbolizes
the church, shows by example what everyone will soon do, and names the
task of the church to leave the space and time of worship and move out into
the place and time of eucharistic daily life.

**The priest models:** Though the priest (or deacon) has sent the congregation
forth in a way that might suggest that he is staying behind, the procession
reveals another dimension of the concluding rite. Here the priest, preceded
by the cross and book, leads the people forth. The procession follows the
cross, showing what example and inspiration guides the daily lives of the
Christian people.

**Music and the procession:** The procession may or may not be accompanied
by music. Unlike other processions, the rubrics do not specify music here.
*Music in Catholic Worship* considers this point under the title, "Supple­
mentary Songs." "The recessional song has never been an official part of the
rite; hence musicians are free to plan music which provides an appropriate
closing to the liturgy. A song is one possible choice. However, if the people
have sung a song after communion, it may be advisable to use only an
instrumental or choir recessional" (n. 73).

**How music functions:** As with other music, the question needs to be asked,
How might music aid and help express the meaning of the concluding rite,
namely, the sending forth and going forth of the assembly? Such music may,
for example, refer to ministry in daily life, express transformation, joy and
hope, etc.

**Not too long:** From a negative point of view, music at this point in the liturgy
should not interfere with the function of the concluding rite. Thus it should
not be unduly long. It has an entirely different function than does the en­
trance song, and is not intended to accompany the procession.

**Back to everyday life:** As the procession passes, the lights and the vestments
disappear from view. These signs of parade and festivity and of stepping
aside for a moment recede from sight and bring us visually back to the life of
the everyday world.

**The procession** of the people again takes an informal shape, graced by
hospitality and care for each other. It not only takes people to the door of the
church and then to their homes. It continues all week and merges into the
procession which takes them to next Sunday's eucharistic liturgy.

**We go forth:** Having been comforted and challenged, having rested and
been re-created, we go forth. And we do so with joy and with hope. We go to
live more fully, to be engaged and ministerial, to give of ourselves.

**Entrance, not exit:** The door of the church through which we now process is
not simply the exit from the church. It is at the same time, and even more
importantly, the entrance into the world which so desperately needs the
peace which we are to bring. All those red "exit" signs really should read
"entrance."
"Gift of Finest Wheat"

Marjorie Moffatt

The songs we sing at worship are integral parts of the liturgical rites, and hence are as much our official, corporate prayer as other liturgical texts. They deserve to be reflected upon and prayed upon outside of liturgical celebrations by all of us, but especially by the musicians who will lead these sung prayers during worship. Our songs may also legitimately be referred to in the course of preaching, and this is to be encouraged.

To promote prayer and preaching based on our liturgical music, Canadian liturgical musicians have been asked to reflect in depth on selected songs from Catholic Book of Worship II. "Gift of finest wheat" is number 570 in this hymnal. The following article should be read with CBW II open in front of you.

"Gift of finest wheat" was composed by Robert Kreutz and Omer Westendorf for the 41st International Eucharistic Congress in 1976. The four-part SATB version of this hymn was used as a communion hymn at the eucharistic celebration presided over by Pope John Paul II in Montreal during his 1984 Canadian visit.

This hymn is one of the finest expressions of the theological and spiritual meaning of the action of sharing communion, while expressing a link between this action and the action of the eucharist itself, the great prayer of thanksgiving. What is so amazing about this hymn is its dynamism, which is a musical and poetic reflection of the most important theological truth of the eucharist: the eucharist is action — of gathering, listening, praising, sharing, and transformation for service in the world.

The refrain, "you satisfy the hungry heart," sings of the joy of the human heart at sharing this bread of life and resonates the words of scripture about "never hungering again" and about Jesus being the "bread of life" (John 6). It is a statement of commitment that contrasts the disciples with the people in this story who went away and would follow Jesus no more. As the refrain is repeated it expresses our commitment to what each verse says about who we are and what we do as eucharistic community, living out the new covenant.

Each verse of the hymn reflects a special and important dimension of the eucharist.

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1 Sister Marjorie Moffatt has earned a Doctor of Ministry degree from The Catholic University of America and has served on the National Council for Liturgy and the Editorial Committee for the Catholic Book of Worship II. She is a trained musician, and has much experience with music for parish liturgies and in the area of liturgy with children.
Verse 1 refers to the hospitality of Jesus the host and the readiness of we who gather around at the table.

This dimension of hospitality is also linked with the importance of the eucharist as a gathering, one of the essential parts of the eucharistic action. The gathering of the community is so often taken for granted, and yet our spirituality in the past has so often been one that privatized the eucharist. The eucharist was seen as a precious personal moment between God and the worshipper rather than a unifying action of the whole gathered community. Christ is our host and calls us to the banquet, uniting us in himself. We hear the call and we respond, we gather and we listen so that we may follow our master and live the life he teaches us to live. This aspect of listening at eucharist is clear in this first verse as well. The listening that we sing about is an active listening that leads us to follow joyfully in the way our master leads us.

Verse 2 expresses the praise and thanksgiving of the community that shares this heavenly food.

The original meaning of the eucharist, from the Greek, is “thanksgiving.” The whole eucharistic prayer is an act of thanksgiving for the wonders that God has done for us, especially in the person of Jesus Christ who “counts us worthy.” These words echo the very words of the eucharistic prayer: “you count us worthy to stand in your presence and serve you” — linking the idea of “sharing this heavenly food” with the call to service. This is the most dramatic element of the eucharist, its transforming power. This group of needy and wounded people, represented in the gifts of bread and wine, is changed into the body of Christ, given in service to the world. This is what happens when God is blessed and glorified for the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and for our own lives in this same Jesus. We, along with the bread and wine, are consecrated, our holiness is made manifest as dramatically as the bread is broken and the wine is poured. The bread and wine help us to see to what extent we are to “share this heavenly food” even to becoming, ourselves, food for the world.

Verse 3 proclaims the unity of us all in the one cup — “our oneness in the Lord.”

The sharing of the one cup was in the early church, and still is today, a very strong symbol — packed with endless meaning — of the intimacy, trust, and close bondedness, between those who dare to share. This is not the simple sign of friendliness of people who touch glasses at a meal. This is even more than those who express their solidarity by touching glasses after a toast. This is sharing in the one cup, of joy and of suffering, in the Lord. We are reminded of the Lord’s warning to the ambitious disciples whose mother wanted to see them at places of honor: “Are you ready to drink of the cup that I will drink?” We know that the wine is the blood of the Lord, but so often the contents of the cup come as a surprise or even a shock to us as we follow the Lord in daily life. And there are joyful surprises too, after the initial bitterness is over, as we follow the Lord into His death and passover to life.

Verse 4 acclaims the presence of the Lord.

The mystery of this “real presence” we sing is beyond the powers of the human tongue. So much has been written and declared about this presence,
but we sing that all is insufficient to express its full meaning. Yet this simple verse expresses one of the most important meanings: that Jesus is present through the love of our own human hearts, living there, being brought to life there. In the action of the eucharist, we become the body, the blood, the life, the presence of Jesus in the world. This God of ours, whom “the whole world cannot contain” lives in us for the life of the world. We must conclude then, that God’s presence is enhanced by the quality of our presence to others. God created the world, is visible through creation, yet is most visible through the loving presence of human beings in whom God dwells through Jesus Christ.

**Verse 5 refers to the transforming power of the eucharist.**

The generosity of our host, Jesus, in giving himself to us, is the most powerful invitation to give of ourselves in return. In John’s account of the last supper, the words of institution “this is my body” — “this is my blood,” are not found. Instead, John describes Jesus as taking the role of a servant and washing his disciples’ feet. He also insists that his disciples “do the same,” that He is “giving an example.” Recall his words following the words of institution: “do this in memory of me.” This insistence on the part of Jesus is very striking. The eucharist means service, humble service. Many homilies on Holy Thursday speak about this dimension of the eucharist. It is one that the writer of John’s gospel wanted to bring out, and one that the church today wants to bring out during the paschal triduum. Many people benefit from the re-enactment of the mandate of Jesus to “wash each other’s feet.” The last National Bulletin, on “Small Group Liturgies” (no. 116, March 1989), suggests how families could experience the power of literally carrying out this mandate. Anyone who does will testify to the transforming power of this humbling gesture.

The eucharist transforms us in the same way. We see the bread being broken and the wine being poured out, the body and blood of the Lord. We share this sacred food. We say “Amen” to becoming one in the Lord, to becoming the body and blood of the Lord, to being transformed into what we eat. We say “Amen” to being the loving presence of the Lord by our lives of service. This “Amen” is not a “maybe” or “when I’m ready” or “if it doesn’t hurt too much.” This “Amen” is radical, with all its counter-cultural and death-dealing implications. The breaking of the bread, when there is rightfully bread to break, is a violent act, full of call to commitment, to service, even when it means dying in many ways. The pouring out and sharing of wine, when it is rightfully done, is a violent invitation to put our lives “on the line” in service. We “drink the cup” that the Lord gives us, always aware of the struggle within us, like James and John, whether to be self-serving in leadership or to be other-serving.

We are called to live, serve, suffer, “for the sake of the name” — “to serve each other in your name.” In the priestly prayer of John’s Gospel, Jesus repeatedly tells the disciples to pray in his name, to ask the Father in his name. This command of Jesus to ask the Father in his name has influenced the way Christians pray all through the centuries — we pray to God the Creator and conclude our prayers with “we pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord” or “through Jesus Christ our Lord...” This is also a fundamental dimension of the eucharist: the prayer of thanksgiving is addressed to God the Creator and concludes with the doxology: “Through Him, with Him, and
in Him.” We thank God in his name, we live in his name, our lives are lives of praise in his name, we serve in his name.

The last words of the hymn are “in truth and charity,” reminding us of the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman: “We will all worship in spirit and truth.” In this world of so much denial, where our culture encourages us to live in a fantasy world, we are called to be prophets of truth, to serve the truth and to serve in truth. More and more Christian worshippers are discovering the social teachings of the church and joining together to carry them out in daily life. This is the result of facing the truth together about the folly of war, greed, and consumerism and of all forms of injustice. We enter into solidarity with God’s poor and discover a deep love, God’s love, the Spirit. This is true worship; this is the gift of the eucharist — “the gift of finest wheat.”

“The Gift of finest wheat,” because of the combination of sound theology and excellent musicality, is one of the finest hymns in The Catholic Book of Worship II.
Learning With The National Bulletin

Over the years, the issues of the National Bulletin on Liturgy have come to constitute an extensive library of liturgical theory and practice. This library is easily accessible to those who wish to learn more about our worship, as back issues are inexpensive and easy to obtain (see inside front cover for details). Back issues of the Bulletin constitute a valuable resource for seminary and theological college teachers and students, liturgy committees and commissions, RCIA leaders, catechumens, and adults preparing for confirmation or reception, school teachers, adult study groups, and those who wish to learn on their own.

The following list presents some of the issues that may be especially helpful. Complete indices are to be found in issue 61 (for 1965-1977) and issue 101 (for 1978-1985). The numbers given below are those of individual issues of the Bulletin; the title of the issue and year of publication are also given.

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Our Next Issue

A fine, new, revised rite of funerals will be published soon. The next issue of the Bulletin will contain a commentary on this rite. The reason this liturgy was revised, its new rites and pastoral notes, alternatives and options, as well as content, structure and ministry, will all be discussed in depth.
The International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL), has received this year's prestigious *Michael Mathis Award* of the University of Notre Dame for its work in preparing the liturgical books for English-speaking Roman Catholics across the world.

The *Michael Mathis Award* is named for Father Michael Mathis, a priest of the Congregation of the Holy Cross (C.S.C.), who died at Notre Dame in 1960. Father Mathis had a fascinating life, the first twenty-five years of his priesthood having been spent in Washington where he tirelessly promoted the Holy Cross foreign missions and other missionary endeavors. In 1924 he founded the Holy Cross Foreign Mission Seminary and in 1925 he joined with Mother Anna Dengel in founding the Medical Mission Sisters, the first Roman Catholic women's community to have trained medical doctors in its membership. In 1936, after being assigned to a hospital chaplaincy at South Bend, Indiana, Father Mathis had what could almost be called a conversion or awakening to the work of liturgical renewal. A man of unflagging energy and enthusiasm, the rest of his life was spent in that cause. He promoted an awakened interest among students at Notre Dame and various religious communities in the liturgy of the hours, including in this effort the provision of the office in the vernacular. He championed the idea of liturgical preaching and showed the way by preaching at every Mass he celebrated. He oversaw the translation of the American *Collectio Rituum* of 1954, the first official sanctioning of English in the liturgy in the United States. Undoubtedly, his most enduring legacy is the renowned graduate program in liturgical studies that he founded in Notre Dame in 1948. The contribution of Notre Dame to the work of liturgical renewal has been immense, and ICEL itself has benefited in many ways from the contributions of people trained at Notre Dame, from members of its faculty of liturgical studies, and from its Center for Pastoral Liturgy.

The Episcopal Commission for Liturgy and the National Liturgical Office congratulate ICEL for their recognition and contribution to the life of the Church. The text of the award follows.
The Notre Dame Center for Pastoral Liturgy

presents the

1989 Michael Mathis Award
to the

International Commission on English in the Liturgy

in recognition of its steadfast commitment to the pastoral implementation of the liturgical reform by providing words for our prayer, music for the words, and presenting them in a fashion that is worthy of the dignity they possess and the function they serve in the public prayer of the Church.

In the twenty-five years since it was established, ICEL has dedicated itself to the faithful translation of the official Latin texts, the creative composition of original English texts, the careful preparation of ritual commentary, and the pastorally effective arrangement of the Liturgical books. ICEL has been a model of collegiality, collaboration, and consultation for the universal Church. Searching out the many gifts which the Spirit gives, ICEL has engaged women and men of every English-speaking nation in the challenging and awesome task of weaving the words of our common Christian prayer.

In recognition and sincere appreciation for its service to the pastoral needs of the Liturgy, we present this award on the 22nd day of June, in the year of our Lord one thousand, nine hundred and eighty-nine.

Eleanor Bernstein, cmj

Director
THE CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS MASSES

The following guidelines were prepared by the National Liturgical Office at the request of the Episcopal Commission for Liturgy and the National Council for Liturgy.

The Establishment of the Feast

In 274, the Roman emperor Aurelian established December 25 as the feast of the unconquered sun. This feast which occurred at the time of the winter solstice was adopted by Christians following the Council of Nicea (325) and given a new meaning. Instead of celebrating the birth of the unconquered sun, Christians celebrated the mystery of the Incarnation: the birth of Christ who is the “light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower” (John 1: 5).

The Liturgical Celebration of the Feast

Mass During the Day: In Rome the eucharistic celebration of the feast originally took place at the newly constructed basilica of St. Peter on the Vatican Hill. Early sources indicate that this celebration occurred at the usual morning hour, around 9:00 a.m. The lectionary texts assigned to this liturgy were Isaiah 52: 6-10, Hebrews 1: 1-12, and John 1: 1-14. These same texts are proclaimed today in the Mass during the Day.

Vigil and Mass at Midnight: Following the construction of the Roman basilica of St. Mary Major (c. 440) and the addition of a side chapel corresponding to the Cave of the Nativity in Bethlehem, elements of the liturgical celebration of the Epiphany in Bethlehem were transferred to Rome. They included a vigil at the basilica in the evening before the feast and a nighttime celebration of the eucharist at its conclusion.

During the vigil, the Matthean account of the birth of Christ was proclaimed (Matthew 1: 18-21). This same text was incorporated into the Vigil Mass (December 24) which developed later. In the present lectionary, this text has been extended to include the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1: 1-25).

The nighttime eucharist eventually developed into the Mass at Midnight in Rome. The epistle used in Bethlehem (Titus 2: 11-14) was incorporated into this celebration together with Luke 2: 18-20. The epistle has been retained in the present lectionary. The gospel, however, has been transferred to the Mass at Dawn and replaced by Luke 2: 1-14.

Over the years, the Mass at Midnight has enjoyed great popularity. The dramatic description of the events surrounding the birth of Christ in the gospel for this Mass seems to appeal to people's imagination more than the Johannine proclamation of the mystery of the Incarnation in the Mass During the Day. In addition, the darkness of the midnight celebration draws
people to the light and darkness motifs of the feast. The holy night is made radiant with the splendor of Jesus Christ, the true light of the world. (See the opening prayer for the Mass at Midnight.)

Mass at Dawn: In the late sixth century, the Byzantine ambassadors living in Rome celebrated the commemoration of St. Anastasia on December 25 at the church which bears her name. In deference to the ambassadors, the pope began to celebrate the eucharist there in the early morning between the nighttime Mass at St. Mary Major and the daytime Mass at St. Peter's. The commemoration of St. Anastasia soon gave way to the celebration of the Nativity of the Lord.

The epistle for the Mass at Dawn was chosen because of its identification with the Byzantine feast of Epiphany: “...the kindness and love of God our savior for mankind were revealed” (Titus 3: 4-7). The gospel (Luke 2: 15-20), used in Bethlehem the day before Epiphany at the Place of the Shepherds was chosen for the Mass at Dawn. Both readings have been retained in the present lectionary.

Guidelines for celebrating Christmas Masses

Next to the celebration of the paschal mystery at the Easter Triduum, the Church holds most sacred the annual celebration of the birth of Christ. It is fitting that parish communities prepare well for this celebration. The following guidelines are offered to assist pastors and parish liturgical committees in their preparation of the Christmas Masses.

Respect the Tradition and Liturgical Texts

In the Roman Catholic tradition, the liturgical celebration of Christmas includes four distinct celebrations of the eucharist. The Vigil Mass of Christmas may be celebrated in the evening of December 24, either before or after evening prayer I. On Christmas itself, following the ancient tradition of Rome, three masses may be celebrated: namely, the Mass at Midnight, the Mass at Dawn, and the Mass During the Day.

Each celebration possesses a unique character which is defined by its proper texts and the time of day when it is to take place.

Whenever possible, the full cycle of Christmas Masses should be celebrated with their proper texts. Out of respect for the unique character of each celebration, the Masses are to be celebrated at their proper times.

Provide a Welcome to All

Christmas Masses attract large numbers of people from diverse backgrounds who bring with them a wide variety of faith experiences. Among those who celebrate with the Church at Christmas are faithful parishioners, their relatives and friends, those who are irregular in their participation in
the liturgical life of the Church, and complete strangers. It is important that all are made to feel welcome so that as God's people, they will be united in the prayer of the Church and give thanks and praise for the gift of salvation offered to them in Christ.

Select Appropriate Music

Music is an integral part of every liturgical celebration. Those who are responsible for selecting music for the eucharist should remember that the purpose of music in the liturgy is to support and enrich the liturgical texts and to accompany the actions of the community. Liturgical music also serves to foster the participation of all the members of the assembly who sing those parts of the Mass which properly belong to them.

When selecting music for Christmas Masses, priority is to be given to the singing of strong acclamations before the gospel and during the eucharistic prayer. These acclamations should be well known to the parish community. Hymns which are sung during Mass should also be well known and must be appropriate to the parts of the Mass during which they are sung.

Hymns and other forms of sacred music which are sung by the choir alone or by a soloist are best included before the liturgy begins.

Encourage Good Proclamation

When the scriptures are proclaimed during the eucharist, God reveals to his people the mystery of redemption. Christ is present and God's people are nourished. All are led in the Spirit to give thanks to God for the gift of salvation.

In general, out of respect for the unique character of each celebration, the particular readings assigned to each of the Christmas Masses are to be proclaimed. Since the scripture readings form the main part of the liturgy of the word, it is never permitted to replace them with non-biblical texts.

The readings for the Christmas Masses are very familiar to the people who gather each year to celebrate the Lord's birth. However, it is important that these readings be proclaimed with special care and with deep faith. Readers are encouraged to prepare the readings well. The use of two readers, one for each of the first two readings, the observance of a period of silence following each reading, and the singing of the responsorial psalm will contribute to the effective proclamation of God's saving deeds in Christ.

Christmas pageants and tableaux, even though they may be based on the scriptures, are not permitted during Mass. They belong outside the celebration of the eucharist.

Encourage Sound Preaching

In the homily, the liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the eucharist are united to become a single proclamation of God's saving deeds in Jesus Christ. The purpose of the homily is to proclaim Christ's paschal mystery.
The homily should be the fruit of prayer, careful exegesis and preparation. It should be suited to the needs of all who participate in the liturgical celebration.

Homilies which focus exclusively on the historical events surrounding the birth of Jesus are inappropriate during the Masses of Christmas. Likewise, reflections that are trite or sentimental are to be avoided. While the homilist needs to be sensitive to the needs of particular groups within the assembly (e.g., young children, visitors and strangers) he must never depart from preaching to the entire community.

Arrange for Ministers

Whenever the Christian community gathers for the liturgy, a variety of ministers is required so that all may participate fully and actively in the celebration.

When additional Masses are needed, and where larger than usual crowds participate in the Christmas Masses, pastors and liturgical committees will have to arrange for and prepare additional ministers. Additional readers, musicians, special ministers of the eucharist, servers and ushers will likely be needed so that every celebration of the eucharist at Christmas is prayerful and a worthy expression of the Church’s faith.

Guidelines for scheduling Christmas Masses

Anticipated Masses

It is permitted for the faithful to fulfill their obligation to participate in the Sunday Mass by their participation in the celebration of Mass on the preceding Saturday evening. The Instruction on Worship of the Eucharist clearly instructs pastors to “teach the faithful the meaning of this favor” and to “take steps to prevent its lessening in any way the sense of what Sunday is” (Eucharisticum mysterium, no. 28). This same Instruction notes that permission for anticipated Masses is a concession which is meant to enable the faithful in today’s conditions to celebrate more easily the day of the Lord’s resurrection. Finally, the Instruction leaves it to the local ordinary to determine the hours for anticipated Masses.

All of these points apply to the celebration of Mass that, for the same reason, is permitted on the evening before a holyday of obligation.

Normally only one anticipated Mass may be celebrated in a church, and this is permitted only for genuine pastoral need. It is never permitted simply for convenience.

Additional Masses

Where pastoral need exists, additional celebrations of the Vigil Mass may take place prior to the Midnight Mass, and additional celebrations of the
Mass at Dawn or Mass During the Day may be scheduled for December 25. (Examples of need would be to provide Mass for a mission which is some distance from the parish church, or to alleviate overcrowding at the other Christmas Masses.)

The following questions will be helpful to pastors and liturgical committees when determining a schedule of additional Christmas Vigil Masses and/or Masses on Christmas Day.

1) Is there a genuine pastoral need for additional Masses in this parish, or are additional Masses being considered simply for convenience?

2) Will the multiplication of Vigil Masses diminish or obscure the importance of December 25 as the day on which the universal Church celebrates the Nativity of the Lord?

3) Can the needs of special groups (e.g., families with young children) be met more properly within a regularly scheduled Mass of Christmas Day?

4) Are there sufficient liturgical ministers available for additional Masses so that a worthy celebration can take place without undermining the quality of celebration during the Midnight Mass or the regularly scheduled Masses on Christmas Day?

5) Will the scheduling of additional Masses place an undue burden on the parish priest, or necessitate his celebrating more than three Masses on the feast of Christmas?

Particular Diocesan Legislation

Pastors and liturgical committees are to respect any diocesan legislation concerning the number of Masses or the hours for Christmas Masses which have been determined by the local Ordinary.

When Christmas Is Celebrated on Saturday

It is important to keep the celebration of Christmas and Sunday distinct, and to be mindful of the extra demands which are placed upon priests and other liturgical ministers when Christmas and Sunday are celebrated on consecutive days.

The following recommendations will be helpful.

1) If possible, additional celebrations of the Vigil Mass of Christmas are to be avoided.

2) If necessary, only one anticipated Midnight Mass should be celebrated around 10:00 p.m.

3) The regularly scheduled Saturday evening Mass in anticipation of Sunday should be omitted altogether.
When Christmas Is Celebrated on Monday

Sunday is the original and primary feast day for the Christian people, and the heart of the liturgical year. Christmas, the celebration of the incarnation of the Son of God and of his birth as our Savior, is a distinct feast. For this reason, the two celebrations should be kept distinct. It is therefore recommended that no Sunday Mass be celebrated on Sunday evening, in order to avoid any confusion between the two celebrations. If possible, additional Vigil Masses for Christmas should be avoided, and if necessary, only one anticipated Midnight Mass should be celebrated around 10:00 p.m.

NEW EDITION
RITE OF BAPTISM FOR CHILDREN

The English translation of the *Rite of Baptism for Children* was prepared by the International Commission on Liturgy (ICEL) in 1969, and was published with the approval of the Canadian bishops the following year. Since this ritual book is no longer available in Canada, the Episcopal Commission for Liturgy requested that a new edition be prepared.

The new Canadian edition provides the complete rites for celebrating baptism within Mass and in Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest.

In addition to the celebrations contained in the *Rite of Baptism for Children*, the new edition includes:

- Rite of Welcome for an Adopted Child Who is Baptized;
- expanded models for the general intercessions;
- the complete lectionary texts for baptism;
- pastoral notes;

Pastors, catechists, lay presiders, parish musicians, and baptismal preparation teams will benefit from having and using this book to prepare and celebrate the baptism of children.

- 264 pages, 18 x 26 cm, two colors, hardbound, three ribbons, gold stamped: $14.95 each, plus postage and handling.