Weekdays of Lent
National Bulletin on Liturgy
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Editorial commentary in the Bulletin is the responsibility of the editor.

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Weekdays of Lent
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The Weekdays of Lent

The 1969 Roman lectionary now in use provides not only new scripture readings for Lent but also a new understanding of this liturgical season. This appreciation of Lent, which restores the concept and experience of the early church, is also expressed in the prayers of the sacramentary, and in the readings and prayers of the liturgy of hours and office of readings.

According to the General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar:

Lent is a preparation for the celebration of Easter. For the Lenten liturgy disposes both catechumens and the faithful to celebrate the paschal mystery: catechumens, through the several stages of Christian initiation; the faithful, through reminders of their own baptism and through penitential practices. (n. 27)

Our first need was to come to appreciate the meaning and significance of the scriptures for the Sunday eucharistic celebrations of Lent. This became even more important with the introduction into parish life of the rite of Christian initiation of adults. We now have a wealth of introductions, commentaries, homily aids and study guides to the Sunday readings for Lent, and indeed for the entire year.

This issue: Our liturgical books also provide many fine scripture readings for the weekdays of Lent, and these too express the renewed concept of Lent as a preparation for the celebration of Easter. This issue of the Bulletin begins to explore some of the richness of these weekdays; clearly such a brief treatment cannot be exhaustive.

Overview

Sunday scriptures: The weekdays of Lent, of course, cannot be considered entirely separately from the Sundays. To provide this context, therefore, here is the description of the Sunday readings provided in Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass:

The gospel readings are arranged as follows: The first and second Sundays retain the accounts of the Lord's temptations and transfiguration, with readings, however, from all three Synoptics.

On the next three Sundays, the gospels about the Samaritan woman, the man born blind, and the raising of Lazarus have been restored in Year A. Because these gospels are of major importance in regard to Christian initiation, they may also be read in Year B and Year C, especially in places where there are catechumens.
Other texts, however, are provided for Year B and Year C: for Year B, a text from John about Christ's coming, glorification through his cross and resurrection and for Year C, a text from Luke about conversion.

On Passion Sunday (Palm Sunday) the texts for the procession are selections from the Synoptic gospels concerning the Lord's triumphal entrance into Jerusalem. For the Mass the reading is the account of the Lord's passion.

The Old Testament readings are about the history of salvation, which is one of the themes proper to the catechesis of Lent. The series of texts for each Year presents the main elements of salvation history from its beginning until the promise of the New Covenant.

The readings from the letters of the apostles have been selected to fit the gospel and the Old Testament readings and, to the extent possible, to provide a connection between them. (n. 97)

The Weekdays

The weekdays of Lent begin with what the lectionary refers to as the "weekdays before the first week of Lent," that is, Ash Wednesday and the Thursday, Friday and Saturday following. They continue through the first, second, third, fourth, and fifth weeks of Lent, and the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of Holy Week. Technically they also include the Chrism Mass of Holy Thursday, but this is of such a special character that it will be set aside for now.

The Introduction to the Lectionary has this to say about the scripture readings for Mass for these weekdays:

The readings from the gospels and the Old Testament were selected because they are related to each other. They treat various themes of the Lenten catechesis that are suited to the spiritual significance of this season. Beginning with Monday of the fourth week of Lent, there is a semi-continuous reading of the Gospel of John, made up of texts that correspond more closely to the themes proper to Lent.

Because the readings about the Samaritan woman, the man born blind, and the raising of Lazarus are now assigned to Sundays, but only for Year A (in Year B and Year C they are optional), provision has been made for their use on weekdays. Thus at the beginning of the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Weeks of Lent optional Masses with these texts for the gospel have been inserted and may be used in place of the readings of the day on any weekday of the respective week.

In the first half of Holy Week the readings are about the mystery of Christ's passion. For the Chrism Mass the readings bring out both Christ's messianic mission and its continuation in the Church by means of the sacraments. (n. 98)

The readings for the optional Masses referred to above will not be considered here, as they are properly texts for Sundays.

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Several other observations may be made about the readings for weekday Masses:

- There is only one cycle of readings, used each year. The three-year cycle used for Sundays, and the two-year cycle used for weekdays of ordinary time, do not apply.
- Though the Old Testament readings have been chosen to relate to the gospel of the day, the nature of the relationship between these two readings varies from day to day. In some cases the entire Old Testament reading is clearly related to the gospel; in some cases only a few verses seem directly related to the gospel; in still other cases the relationship seems to be more at the level of general theme.
- The responsorial psalms are individually chosen to relate to the first reading of each day; they are taken from 30 different psalms. Though psalm 34 is used twice, and psalm 51 four times, different verses are taken each time. Twice the responsory verses are taken from a book other than the book of psalms: from Daniel on Wednesday of week 5 and from Jeremiah on Saturday of week 5. Though not considered any further here, these psalms are a rich resource that call for our serious reflection.

Three sections: It is important to grasp that, so far as the gospel readings are concerned, the weekdays of Lent are divided into three sections.

- The first section includes the "weekdays before the first week of Lent" and those for the first, second and third week of Lent. The gospels for these days are all from the Synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke.
- Twelve weekday gospels are from Matthew, one from Mark, and eight from Luke.
- The second section includes the readings for the fourth and fifth weeks of Lent. These are all from John’s gospel.
- A third section includes the Saturday before Passion Sunday and Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of Holy Week. Although all but the Wednesday gospel are from John, they have a special character because all refer specifically to the last days of Jesus.

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Literary Genre

The gospels: It is helpful to learn where the gospel readings come from, how they are related to the overall structure of the gospel from which they are taken, and what literary genre they express.

Matthew

Six of the readings from Matthew come from the Sermon on the Mount:

- The fulfillment of the Law (5.17-19) – Wednesday 3
- The new standard is higher than the old (5.20-26) – Friday 1
• The new standard is higher than the old (5.43-48) – Saturday 1
• Almsgiving in secret; prayer in secret; fasting in secret (6.1-6, 16-18) – Ash Wednesday
• How to pray: the Lord’s Prayer (6.7-15) – Tuesday 1
• Effective prayer (7.7-12) – Thursday 1

One reading comes from that section of Matthew’s gospel known as the Community Sermon (chapter 18):
• Forgiveness of injuries and Parable of the unforgiving debtor (18:21-35) – Tuesday 3

An additional reading is taken from the section of Matthew known as the Final Sermon (chapters 23-25):
• The Last Judgment (25.31-46) – Monday 1

This leaves four readings that are taken from other parts of Matthew’s gospel. One is a narrative passage inserted within the section known as the cycle of ten miracles:
• A discussion on fasting (9.14-15) – Friday before week 1.

The last three passages are taken from the narrative section that relates events on the road to Jerusalem and events there; it immediately precedes the final sermon section:
• Third prophecy of the passion; the mother of Zebedee’s sons makes her request; Leadership with service (20.17-28) – Wednesday 2
• Parable of the wicked husbandmen (21.33-43, 45-46) – Friday 2
• The scribes and pharisees (23.1-12) – Tuesday 2

Thus the lenten readings for the weekdays of Lent from Matthew’s gospel are all sermon texts or other narrative material. There are no healings or miracles.

Mark

The one passage from Mark used for the weekdays of Lent comes from a section of Mark known as the Jerusalem ministry:
• The greatest commandment of all (12.28-34) – Friday 3.

Luke

Four of the passages from Luke’s gospel are taken from the section known as the Galilean Ministry (4.14 – 9.50):
• Jesus at Nazareth (4.24-30) – Monday 3
• The call of Levi; Eating with sinners in Levi’s house (5.27-32) – Saturday before week 1
• Compassion and generosity (6.36-38) – Monday 2
The other five passages from Luke's gospel come from the section known as the journey narrative (9.51 – 19.20):

- Jesus and Beelzebul (11.14-23) – Thursday 3
- The sign of Jonah (11.29-32) – Wednesday 1
- The prodigal son (15.1-3, 11-32) – Saturday 2
- The rich man and Lazarus (16.19-31) – Thursday 2
- The pharisee and the publican (18.9-14) – Saturday 3

John

The passages from John's gospel that are used for the weekdays of the fourth and fifth weeks of Lent are taken from the chapters four (one selection), five (three selections), seven (two selections), eight (four selections), and ten (one selection). They are read in the order in which they are found in John.

- Healing the official's son (4.43-54) – Monday 4
- Jesus on the Sabbath: Cure of a sick man (5.1-3, 5-16) – Tuesday 4
- Jesus on the Sabbath: Discourse on his Sabbath work (5.17-30) – Wednesday 4
- Jesus on the Sabbath: Discourse on his Sabbath work, continued (5.31-47) – Thursday 4
- Jesus at Tabernacles: Jesus goes up to Jerusalem and teaches there (7.1-2, 10, 25-30) – Friday 4
- Jesus at Tabernacles: Fresh discussion on the origin of the Messiah (7.40-53) – Saturday 4
- Jesus at Tabernacles: The woman caught in adultery (8.1-11) – Monday 5
- Jesus at Tabernacles: The unbelieving are warned (8.21-30) – Tuesday 5
- Jesus at Tabernacles: Jesus and Abraham (8.31-42) – Wednesday 5
- Jesus at Tabernacles: Jesus and Abraham, continued (8.51-59) – Thursday 5
- Jesus at Dedication: Jesus as Messiah and Son of God (10.31-42) – Friday 5

The Last Days of Lent

- The authorities decide on the death of Jesus (John 11.45-57) – Saturday 5
- The anointing at Bethany (John 12.1-12) – Monday of Holy Week
- The treachery of Judas (John 13.21-33, 36-38) – Tuesday of Holy Week
- The treachery of Judas (Matthew 26.14-26) – Wednesday of Holy Week
Prayers of the Sacramentary

Opening prayers and prefaces: The prayers of the sacramentary have a rhythm – and of course content – all their own. There is, for example, a unique opening prayer for each weekday of Lent. There are also two prefaces (nos. 10, 11) that are designated for the weekdays of Lent, and two others (nos. 8, 9) that may be used on weekdays, though they are also intended for Sundays that have no special preface.

Liturgy of the Hours

A different rhythm: The readings of the liturgy of the hours have rhythms that are quite different from those described above for the eucharist. A cycle of six readings from the Hebrew scriptures is given for morning prayer, beginning on Ash Wednesday and extending to the Tuesday of week 1. This cycle is then repeated beginning again on Wednesday 2, Wednesday 3, and Wednesday 4. The last cycle is truncated to four readings, as it ends on Saturday 4.

The same system is applied to the readings for evening prayer, though of course the texts come from the Christian scriptures.

Second pattern: Beginning on Monday of week 5, a new set of six readings from the Hebrew scriptures is begun; this cycle is begun again on Monday of Holy Week and continues through morning prayer on Holy Thursday.

Similarly, for evening prayer a new set of six readings from the Christian scriptures begins on Monday of week 5. It begins again on Monday of Holy Week, but ends the evening of Wednesday of Holy Week.

Office of Readings

Exodus and Hebrews: The office of readings expresses yet another dynamic. From Thursday before week 1 through Saturday of week 4, including Sundays, extensive passages from the book of Exodus are read in order. The pattern then changes, and from Sunday of week 5 through Wednesday of Holy Week, the readings are taken from the letter to the Hebrews.

Lenten Addresses of Paul VI

We can profit from reflecting on two addresses given by Pope Paul VI at the beginning of Lent. Here are excerpts from these talks.

Ash Wednesday, 1968

What, then, are the themes of the liturgical pedagogy of Lent?

There are many and they are woven into a long poem that reaches its climax in a drama of tragedy and triumph in the celebration of the paschal mystery. In
the Lenten liturgy, as in a catechism, we can review as a first theme the true human condition. This is presented to us against a background light, the light of God. As it is reflected on the human being, God's creature and masterpiece, that light reveals havoc, restlessness, conflict between flesh and spirit, deformity, the need of restoration along with the inability to achieve it, radical unhappiness, that is, sin, and therefore the human need to be saved, redeemed, called back to life again.

This doleful reality provides the pattern of the other Lenten themes. Prominent among them is prayer, born of a stricken and humbled conscience that only the hope in Christ as Saviour and Mediator draws back from despair, from that cynicism and bewilderment of absurdity and moral anarchy that so often express the condition of the contemporary soul. Along with prayer there is repentance, the expression of a sorrow in the soul that is impelled to translate itself into outward signs of penance and expiation.

Let us recognize how the discipline of the Lenten fast gave expression with a realistic severity to the needs of a conscience that was convinced of its own state of guilt. Now the fast is no longer obligatory, except on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday; for everyone, however, there remains the obligation to do penance, to which the liturgy of Lent so urgently summons us.

There is another, consequent theme: the hearing of the word of God. The first message it receives is one of repentance, but then suddenly this hearing brings us the first lines in the divine plan of salvation. It is in the word of God that we have the proclamation of the truth that is life, the proclamation of faith, of mercy, of the means of our rebirth, above all of baptism.

From this a further dominant theme emerges.

The "baptismal elements" belong properly to the Lenten liturgy and run throughout its catechesis, its prayer, and its rites. To remember baptism means for us to remember that we are Christians, how we became Christians, and why we remain Christians. Christ emerges, therefore, as the focal point of this pedagogy of the liturgy. He is not a merely ideal and abstract Christ, but the Christ in the twofold reality of his historical appearance, culminating in his passion and resurrection, and of his saving mission. In making us participate through the sacraments in his life as man and God, Christ's mission infuses a new source of life into us — grace, the Holy Spirit, through whom we live and are Christians.

Such is the picture of Lent and we must not forget it, not be satisfied to look at it as outsiders, with a distracted and casual glance. The pedagogy of the liturgy is so to speak, existential; it is meant to become a human reality, to be personalized, to cast all of us under its salutary spell. That spell will free us from the many other spells cast on us by the senses and the world and will lead us to live in the reality of Christ.1

Ash Wednesday, 1978

Lent is a period of preparation for the sacraments and first of all, in the case of catechumens, for baptism. In the case of Christians already baptized Lent is supposed to be not merely a reminder of the first sacrament received, cleansing and regenerating them, but a psychological and moral renewal in virtue of that baptism. For this sacrament includes with the acceptance of faith a way of life consistent with faith because, by the logic of the spiritual principle enunciated by St. Paul, "The just live by faith" (Romans 1.17). The living out of baptism is a continuing process of development and practice.

Lent also has as its objective the reconciliation of the repentant. The entire teaching on sin committed after baptism has in Lent its primary articulation and also reaches its inexpressible effect, which consists in the peace of a conscience restored to God's friendship through the sacrament of penance. Lenten preparation then receives its own in the predispositions for Easter, when the eucharistic sacrifice will open to the faithful the way to communion with Christ himself, "the paschal lamb sacrificed" for us (1 Corinthians 5.7).

These sacraments are the focal point for the practice and transformation of the Christian's life. That life is marked by an intensifying of the religious spirit, of mortification, and of charity. The listening to the word of God becomes more attentive and frequent.

It may be true that today there are no longer large congregations at Lenten courses. But every thoughtful Christian must find the time and the means to attend at least an Easter preparation preached for some special group. The fact is that this form of preaching fortunately has become widespread and readily available. Through it the lamp of prayer is rekindled, almost spontaneously, or better, through the hidden encounter with the Holy Spirit made present in the soul. This fills the atmosphere of Lent with its own special light of both remorse and joy.²

Selected Reading


Richard Chilson, A Lenten Pilgrimage: Dying and Rising in the Lord (New York: Paulist Press 1983)

Jay Cormier, Roadsigns: Spirituality and Homily Ideas for the Weekdays of Lent (San Jose: Resource Publications 1987)

² DOL 461, pp 1192-1194

*Homily Aids for Lent* (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops 1975). This is a particularly good resource.


Reflections on the Readings

The many scripture readings for the Masses of the weekdays of Lent provide a rich resource for our reflection and meditation, as well as for preaching. Most of the resources listed previously consider the readings one by one and day by day. In contrast, the brief reflections that follow try to discern patterns, rhythms and major themes among the readings taken as a whole.

Personal reflection and preaching, of course, will see more in the scripture readings for weekday Masses than simply a kind of bible study. They are for us today; they speak to our lives in the late twentieth century; they have to do with preparing for Easter; they show us something of the nature of catechumenal preparation for Christian initiation.

The reflections that follow clearly are just a beginning, just a few of one person's insights, just a stimulus and starting place for the reflection of you, the reader. You will want to have a copy of the lectionary at hand.

The First Three Weeks

The weekdays of Lent from Ash Wednesday through Saturday of week 3 are here considered together.

Return to God

The first reading for the first day of Lent calls us to "return to me [God] with all your heart. Return to the Lord, your God, for [God] is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing."

This call to conversion, this reminder of how much God loves us, is addressed not just to individuals but indeed to the entire community and to the people of God as a whole. "Call a solemn assembly, gather the people, sanctify the congregation." All are included in this call: the aged, children and infants, newly-weds, the priests.

The call to conversion is restated in the first readings of the Friday and Saturday of week 3, the last two days of the first part of Lent. Reading from Hosea, we hear God say to us, "Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled . . . ." We need to admit our own responsibility for moving away from God. As well, we need to admit that worldly power is unsatisfying. The great love of God is then restated: "I will love them freely . . . . I will be like dew to Israel . . . . They shall again live beneath my shadow . . . . those who are wise understand these things."
On Saturday of week 3 we again read from Hosea: “Come let us return to the Lord . . . he will heal us. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.” We of course hear an Easter message in this: the resurrection of Jesus Christ on the third day.

The first part of the gospel for Saturday before week 1 recounts the call by Jesus of the tax collector Levi. In the second part, Jesus says that he has come to call sinners (such as Levi) to repentance. The first reading gives some practical examples of how one responds to God’s call, such as “offer[ing] food to the hungry, satisfy[ing] the need of the afflicted,” and honoring the Lord’s day. Some rewards of living in this way are also described.

**Reflection:** Turning or returning to God is to be seen in the context of preparing for Easter; it is for the sake of deeper and fuller participation in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ as we celebrate the great three days of Easter. Easter – the three days and the fifty days – needs to be the conscious goal of the forty days of Lent, right from Ash Wednesday on.

The process and experience of the catechumenate will include the weekday liturgies and weekday scripture readings as well as those of the Sundays of Lent – at least this will be a goal to look forward to.

The first reading for Ash Wednesday reminds us that our lenten return to God concerns not only ourselves as individuals, but also our parish or community as a whole. Do our communal activities – in addition to liturgical celebrations – reflect the lenten journey of preparing for Easter?

**Fasting**

The return of God to which Joel speaks on Ash Wednesday is expressed and supported by changes in our attitudes and in our behavior: “with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing.” In the gospel for Ash Wednesday, Jesus assumes that his disciples will fast.

The gospel for Friday before the first week of Lent again refers to fasting. Apparently, during the lifetime of Jesus, his disciples did not have to fast. However, “when the bridegroom is taken away from them . . . then they will fast.”

That serious fasting is more than merely refraining from food or going on a diet, is shown in the first reading for the same Friday. Isaiah speaks of a false kind of fasting when “you serve your own interest . . . and oppress all your workers . . . you fast only to quarrel and to fight . . . . Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?”

In contrast, true fasting is this: “to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free . . . to share your bread with the hungry, bring the homeless poor into your house . . . .”

**Reflection:** Fasting means putting aside some of the material needs of our bodies and things that we enjoy, in order to make room for God in our lives. We have only so much time and energy; fasting means readjusting our priorities, seeking a better balance in our lives. The demands of daily living inevitably erode the time we give to love of God and love of neighbor. Lent is the time to say “no” to some of these demands in order to make room for a more holistic approach to living, one that has ample room for spirituality and justice.
Almsgiving

The second behaviour that Jesus assumes his disciples will undertake, in the gospel for Ash Wednesday, is almsgiving. The sharing of our resources, our concern, and our time with persons in need is also the focus of both readings on the Monday of week 1. The gospel presents Matthew's view of the Last Judgment. The criteria for entrance into eternal life are these: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”

The doing of justice is also the message of the reading from Leviticus, where the doing of justice is equated with holiness. Specific acts of justice are named in a negative way: “You shall not steal . . . you shall not revile the deaf . . . you shall not render an unjust judgment . . . you shall not bear a grudge.” The list of more than a dozen items concludes, “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

The gospel for Thursday of week 2 is the story of the poor man, named Lazarus, and the rich man, who is nameless. In the present context, the rich man is a person who does not give alms, who does not share what he has with someone who has less and who is in need.

The climax of the first reading for Thursday of week 2 speaks to both our attitudes and our actions: “I the Lord test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings.”

Reflection: The weekday readings of Lent contain a powerful message regarding social justice. They remind us that the two commandments of love of God and love of neighbor need to be appropriately balanced. Prayer by itself, a focus solely on spirituality, is insufficient. We are also called to help others, locally and around the world. Today we appreciate that this involves more than charity, the meeting of immediate needs. It also includes trying to change systems and structures that foster poverty and injustice.

The impetus to work for justice is of course addressed not only to individuals, but also to parishes and other communities as a whole. It needs also to be a significant part of the catechumenal process – and not just during Lent. Taking serious the readings just considered constitute one criterion for an adequate RCIA experience.

Prayer

In the gospel of Ash Wednesday Jesus assumes that his disciples will pray. This expectation is made more concrete in the gospel for Tuesday of week 1; this passage has three parts. In the first, Jesus warns against “empty phrases [and] many words;” these are not what God wants. In the second section Jesus teaches the brief, comprehensive and profound prayer, “Our Father in heaven . . . .” The third part expands on the note of forgiveness.

The first reading reminds us that prayer is more than our saying words, even the Lord’s prayer. Prayer is dialogue, and depends on God taking the initiative. God’s word “shall accomplish that which I [God] propose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

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Reflection: Ours is a highly verbal and sound-filled culture. Lent seems to provide an important opportunity to promote the virtue of silent prayer, both privately and where called for within our liturgies. In silence we listen for God’s word before responding with our own.

Interior Conversion

In the gospel for Ash Wednesday, the three practices of almsgiving, prayer and fasting are simply listed. The main concern of this reading is the attitudes with which we give alms and pray and fast. Doing any or all of these to impress others, or to seek their approval or admiration, are absolutely condemned. As is clearly pointed out in other passages already referred to, what God desires is first of all a change of heart and mind — a true conversion of our whole person. Such a conversion will manifest itself in appropriate behaviour, but behaviour without true change of heart is not only insufficient but fraudulent.

This concern with our motivation is continued in the readings for Tuesday in week 2. In the first part of the gospel reading, Jesus condemns those who show off their religiosity, who seek prestige, and who “do not practice what they teach.” In the second part, Jesus condemns similar attitudes and practices that seem to have been of concern to Matthew. Again, we are advised not to seek titles, prestige and power: “all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

In the first reading for the same Tuesday, Isaiah preaches a message of justice: “seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. Zion shall be redeemed by justice . . . .”

The second part of the gospel reading for Wednesday of week 2 also speaks to the question of attitudes. The mother of the sons of Zebedee asks Jesus that her sons be given a privileged place in the kingdom of God. The other disciples were angry because they might have less power and prestige. Jesus chastised all of them for acting like “the rulers of the Gentiles.” Among his disciples, “whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave.” He himself is our example and model in this regard.

Another reading that speaks to our attitudes is the gospel for Saturday of week 3; it is the story of the Pharisee and the publican. One boasts to God, the other is humble. One believes he has a right to God’s favour, the other simply says, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” The conclusion: “all who exalt themselves will be humbled, [and] all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Reflection: These readings urge us to examine our consciences, both individually and collectively. Do we ever show off, do we ever boast, do we seek prestige and power, do we think that we are especially favoured? Do we think that our parish or our church is better than others? Do those who hold positions of authority always act from the purest motives?

We are reminded that true exaltation is that of being lifted up on the cross in free self-giving for the life of others.
Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Another aspect of conversion – both in our attitudes and in our actions – that is strongly emphasized in the lenten readings is that of forgiveness and reconciliation. This topic is raised first in the brief commentary on “forgive us our debts . . .” given at the end of the gospel for Tuesday of week 1.

In the gospel for Friday of week 1 Jesus tells us “if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you . . . be reconciled . . . and then come and offer your gift.” The first part of the gospel deepens our understanding of how we can injure other persons through disrespect.

On Monday of week 2, Jesus says, “be merciful . . . do not judge . . . do not condemn . . . forgive . . .”

The story that we call the prodigal son is the gospel for Saturday of week 2. If the son is prodigal in becoming a wastrel, the father is prodigal in his unlimited love and desire to take the son back and honour him as a precious part of the family. The first reading shows how the father in the gospel story is like God: “Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of your possession? . . . [God] delights in showing clemency . . .”

The gospel for Tuesday of week 3 comes from chapter 18 of Matthew, where the evangelist depicts important characteristics of the ideal church. In the first part of this reading, Jesus tells Peter to forgive seventy-seven times – that is, without counting. The second part is a parable on forgiveness, in which the king says, “I forgave you . . . should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave . . .?”

**Reflection:** Some Eastern churches have the custom of exchanging forgiveness and reconciliation in families; this is virtually a prerequisite for the Easter communion. In one parish recently a man who is recovering from a long bout of depression publicly asked the forgiveness of his family and the entire community for being so difficult to live with during his recovery. Some Canadian churches have apologized to and asked forgiveness of the aboriginal peoples of Canada for past wrongs. What acts of forgiveness and reconciliation are appropriate for us as individuals, households, parishes, dioceses and national church?

Life and Love

Other readings consider the true nature of human life and of love, and challenge us to make appropriate choices. In the second part of the gospel for Thursday before week 1, Jesus says, “those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.” In the first reading Moses says, “I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey . . . then you shall live . . . Choose life . . . loving the Lord your God . . .”

In the first reading for Friday of week 1, Ezekiel tells us that those who turn “away from all the transgressions that they had committed, they shall surely live; they shall not die.”

On Friday of week 3 we have the story of the scribe who asks Jesus, “which commandment is the first of all?” He applauds Jesus’ reply regarding love of
God and love of neighbour and repeats it in his own words. Jesus says, "you are not far from the kingdom of God."

Reflection: These readings remind each of us to discern and deal with aspects of our own lives that keep us from being as fully life-giving and loving as we are called to be. Then the questions they pose need to be asked of our parish and other local communities and our diocesan church. Do we always manifest life and love? Where do we need to improve? Among other things, do our liturgies truly show life and love?

Today there are many challenges to life and love in our society: violence in homes, schools, on the streets, on television and in movies; abortion; forced sex; euthanasia; economic policies that are life-diminishing; terrorism; continuing conflict in Bosnia, the Middle East, Central America; discrimination and prejudice of many kinds. How are we – as individuals, parishes, dioceses, responding? And is there harmony among those called to work on individual life issues? Is there a “consistent life ethic” that embraces all these issues?

Passion

The preaching of Jesus during the first three weeks is punctuated with predictions of his passion and death that lie ahead. For the second day of Lent, the Thursday before week 1, one such passion prediction is taken from Luke’s gospel: "[I] must undergo great suffering ... be rejected ... and be killed, and on the third day be raised." Matthew’s account of this prediction is read on Wednesday of week 3.

Reflection: These passages remind us that we are on a journey and that our goal is the celebration of the paschal mystery during the great three days of Easter. They need to be interpreted so that cross and resurrection go together as two aspects of a single mystery.

Controversy

Another recurring theme is controversy between Jesus and those who did not believe. Interestingly, the Old Testament reading becomes the key to understanding the gospel story in several of these.

On Wednesday of week 1 Jesus complains that “this generation is an evil generation; it asks for a sign.” He then speaks of “the sign of Jonah,” and, speaking of himself, says "something greater than Jonah is here." The first reading, then, is from the book of Jonah, telling of the prophet's preaching. “The people of Nineveh believed God . . .” and all “turned from their evil ways . . .” and God responded mercifully.

On Friday of week 2 we hear a parable that Jesus spoke to the chief priests and the pharisees, which concludes “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. . . . They wanted to arrest him, but feared the crowds . . . .” The first reading is part of the story of Joseph, how his brothers “sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver.”
In the gospel for Monday in week 3 Jesus challenges the people of Nazareth, saying "no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown..." and reminding them that "There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian... When they heard this, all... were filled with rage." The first reading, then, tells of the conversion and healing of Naaman, and his response to God's mercy: "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel."

Another controversy is recounted in the gospel for Thursday of week 3. After casting out a demon, some accused him of working through the devil. The first reading is one of five passages from Jeremiah that are read on the weekdays of Lent. In these the trials of Jesus are compared with those of the prophet. The other occasions are Wednesday and Thursday of week 2, Saturday of week 4 and Friday of week 5.

Reflection: These readings can be seen as encouraging us to engage in controversy, when appropriate, and not to retreat from it. That is, we are always called to be prophetic when it is necessary to confront and challenge the principalities and powers of the world. We need to challenge values that are not life-giving, that diminish human dignity, that are contrary to God's dream for humanity. We are baptized to be prophets as Jesus was prophet. Of course, this is not always comfortable, and not always welcomed.

Weeks Four and Five

The readings for the fourth and fifth weeks of Lent are more difficult than those earlier in this season. The gospels are all from John, and in them Jesus is telling who he is. The people and their leaders respond with both belief and disbelief; there is a great deal of controversy in the gospel readings.

Healing

In the gospel for Monday of week 4 Jesus heals the son of a royal official, and for Tuesday he heals a man at the pool of Bethesda. The first healing led to belief on the part of the royal official; the second led to persecution "because he was doing such things on the sabbath." The first reading for Monday presents part of Isaiah's vision of the messianic times: "no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in [Jerusalem], or the cry of distress;" all will live long lives and eat their fill. On Tuesday the first reading, from Ezekiel, gives a beautiful vision of the healing, life-giving river that flows from the Temple.

Reflection: These are the only healing stories among the weekday readings of Lent. They hold up a great – and challenging – vision of wholeness, health, dignity, and right relationships among God, humanity and all of creation. We are then called to work towards the implementation of this vision, to the best of our ability.

Equal to God and Messiah

The healing on the sabbath described in Tuesday's gospel leads to controversy because this was understood as Jesus making himself equal to God. In
Wednesday's gospel, Jesus replies, "My Father is still working, and I also am working. . . . For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. . . . I seek to do . . . the will of him who sent me." This controversy continues in Thursday's gospel, where Jesus speaks of the kinds of testimony that shows that he and his deeds are of God.

The first reading on Wednesday validates Jesus and his work: "I have . . . given you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages," to free prisoners and liberate those in darkness. On Thursday Moses reminds God of God's promise to Abraham, Isaac and Israel to "multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven."

The gospel readings for Friday and Saturday in week 4 show that the controversy had intensified. The authorities doubt that Jesus is the Messiah, and Jesus replies that God has sent him. "I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him." Whether Jesus is Messiah or not is considered again in the Saturday reading, where even the police say, "Never has anyone spoken like this."

The Old Testament passages reinforce the theme of controversy and persecution. On Friday, "the ungodly" are quoted as saying, "Let us lie in wait for the righteous man . . . let us test him . . . let us condemn him to a shameful death." However, " . . . they did not know the secret purposes of God." On Saturday, Jeremiah cries out, "But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter."

Reflection: See below, after "Sent By the Father."

The Persecution of Women

The readings for Monday of week 5 are of a different character than those for the days that have proceeded and that follow. The gospel is the story of the woman taken in adultery, and the first reading is the story of Suzanna, accused of adultery. The first woman is guilty of adultery; Suzanna is innocent. Yet in both cases the people really on trial are the men involved: in the gospel, men who want to condemn her; in the first reading, the men who have falsely accused Suzanna because she refused to have sex with them. Suzanna has traditionally been seen as a figure of Christ because she was falsely accused, condemned to death, and then liberated.

Reflection: Violence and discrimination against women is pervasive in our society; today we are more aware of this than used to be the case. These readings raise many questions. What are the causes of discrimination and violence against women? What might be solutions? To what extent does discrimination and violence against women take place in the church? What special role might the church play in alleviating this problem? How might laws, institutions and social institutions be changed to support women? How can the dignity of women be affirmed? What should be done about prostitution and pornography in our neighborhood, city, province and nation? How can male children be raised and educated to have better attitudes toward women?

Sent by the Father

In the gospel readings for Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday of week 5, Jesus keeps trying to speak of the Father and of his own relationship with the Father. While some believe, others engage in dispute and seek his arrest.

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The Old Testament readings in a sense jump ahead to Good Friday and Easter. On Tuesday we have the story from Numbers about the bronze serpent that Moses made and put on a pole, so that “whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live,” an image of Jesus on the cross. On Wednesday there is the story of the three young men cast into the roaring furnace but emerging unscathed because they were faithful to God; this is a traditional image of death and resurrection. On Friday Jeremiah proclaims, “praise the Lord! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers.”

Reflection: Very difficult and complex issues are raised by the Johannine readings toward the end of Lent. Who is Jesus for me today? How do I understand his nature? How do I understand titles such as Messiah and Son of Man? How do I personally and our church generally speak about Jesus in a society that increasingly is non-Christian, and in some places, even antagonistic to Christianity? What does it mean to believe today?

In some respects, what Jesus was doing was to challenge and alter the way in which people thought about God. Today theologians and others are also challenging the way some think about God; how do we respond to these challenges? Is our concept of God indeed too small, too narrow, as some assert?

Some of the people who did not believe in Jesus were among the most pious people of their day; they took religion extremely seriously. How do the pious – of any period – respond to challenges, new ideas and ways of thinking, new religious practices? How do people and religious authorities respond to prophets who rise up in their midst? How do we discern and deal with prophets, who almost always make us feel uncomfortable? How important is law, custom and good order in the face of unsettling prophetic challenges?

These readings also raise questions about our views of the Jewish people in Jesus’ day and the Jewish people today. Are they understood in ways that supports antisemitism? Who was responsible for the death of Jesus?

Controversy and Belief

It is clear that the gospel readings from Tuesday of week 4 on contain much controversy. People and authorities reject Jesus, or are puzzled by his words; they seek his arrest and death.

At the same time, however, others believe. The gospel passages for Monday, Wednesday and Thursday of week 4, and those for Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday of week 5, all refer to belief in one way or another.

Reflection: Questioning and belief coexist in most people. How do we deal with conflicting feelings and understandings regarding Jesus, regarding the church, regarding being a Christian today?

The Last Days

The gospel reading for Saturday of week 5 tells of the crucial decision of the authorities to kill Jesus. “What are we to do? If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our
holy place and our nation." The reasoning: "It is better . . . to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed."

The first reading confronts the narrow, pragmatic and immoral stance of the authorities by presenting Ezekiel's vision of what the nation should really be. God will gather the people, bring them to their own land, make them one nation with one ruler. They shall leave all idols and transgressions: "they shall be my people, and I will be their God." David will rule and they will follow God's statutes. God will make a covenant of peace with them, bless them and multiply them, and dwell with them.

The gospel readings for Tuesday and Wednesday of Holy Week tell of Judas' treachery, first according to John and then according to Matthew.

Between condemnation and betrayal we read how Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus' feet, wiped them with her hair, and "the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." Jesus understands that the anointing is in preparation for his burial. Even at this point Jesus was considered to be a threat to the authorities, for "many . . . were believing in Jesus."

The first readings for Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of Holy Week are from the suffering servant passages of Isaiah.

Reflection: Authorities condemn, Judas betrays, Mary anoints. In what ways might each of us play each of these roles?
Symbol for the Church: Cross or Crucifix?

Zita Maier

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The centrality of the cross as a fundamental symbol of Christianity can be seen in many forms: in gestures such as the sign of the cross, in devotions such as the Way of the Cross, in its use as a symbol in liturgical rites, and in the great variety of shapes and sizes of representation that have been fashioned throughout the history of Christianity. Even our language attests to this centrality. From the Latin word for cross, crux, we have formed the word, "crucial," meaning central; or we can say that something is the "crux of the matter," central to the matter as the cross is central to Christianity. Yet Romano Guardini, in his little book, Sacred Signs, does not include either cross or crucifix among the liturgical signs he explores. However he does include the gesture of the sign of the cross among the gestures, postures, and objects that have deeper meanings in the liturgy.

Cross or crucifix: Among the many forms the cross has taken during the course of history is that of the crucifix, with a figure of Christ on it; it too has taken a variety of forms. The crucifix is still very much a part of the Christian religious culture of today. Yet the liturgies of the veneration of the cross on Good Friday and the feast of the Triumph of the Cross (September 14), focus on the cross rather than on the crucifix. Thus the question arises whether the cross or the crucifix is the more appropriate symbol for the Church, particularly in liturgical contexts.

Outline: Here I will trace briefly the history of the cross, the gradual introduction of the crucifix and why this happened, what our renewed understanding of symbol in the liturgy suggests regarding the use of a cross or a crucifix, and what we can learn from the prayers of the Church and recent documents on liturgy regarding the use of this symbol.

Early History

The cross is one of the oldest symbols known in the world, appearing in cultures of all kinds. Sometimes the cross is associated with representations of

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1 Used in this instance to include a cross with any kind of figure on it.
3 Romano Guardini, Sacred Signs (St Louis MO: Pio Decimo Press 1956)
gods and goddesses, and sometimes it has associations with nature, such as the Swastika, still used by some Hindu sects.

**Almost sacramental:** Early Palestinian Christians freely used existing signs and symbols, gave them a Christian interpretation, and saw them as almost sacramental, an "effective passport to the presence of God." The sign *par excellence* for them was the cross, which could be detected everywhere. Justin Martyr said that nothing could exist or form a whole without the cross. As Overbeck puts it, the cross in the Christian era became a symbol rooted in the meaning of Jesus.

**Many forms:** Evidence of the cross hidden in other emblems is found, interestingly enough, not in liturgical or domestic settings, but in vessels that contained the remains of deceased Christians. For example, vessels containing bones of the departed have been found recently in a cemetery near the Mount of Olives; these are believed to date back to the first century. On the lids of these vessels there are a number of emblems that hint at the cross, namely the ship, the tree, the serpent, the lintel, the star, the plough, the axe, and the *Chi-Rho* (also used as a short-hand form of the name of Jesus).

**Two of these emblems** are of particular interest, the first because it has endured to our own time, most often with emphasis on the wood. This symbol is "the tree" or the "tree of life," depicted as a fern-frond, sometimes with the top bent across horizontally. The tree represented the Word of God, or the believer, but most of all the tree stood naturally for the cross. For Tertulian the tree stood for the tree of Christ's passion as opposed to the tree in Paradise, the tree which brought death. The identification between the cross of Christ and the tree of life (sometimes pictured in the form of a vine) is featured in medieval art work and also in some early Franciscan painting.

**The plough:** The second of the symbols of particular interest, the plough, has a broad gamut of meaning, and its various interpretations were summarized by Justin Martyr, who said, "Without the cross the earth is not tilled."

**Not in art:** However there is no evidence from the early period of the church that there were actually representations of the cross or of the crucifixion. The first Christians respected the Jewish prohibition against any representation of the divinity, in contrast to pagan practices. Death by crucifixion was still an experienced reality, since this horrible form of capital punishment was continued until abolished by Constantine. As well, sporadic persecutions before the Edict of Milan in 312 encouraged the Christians not to display this symbol openly.

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6 Overbeck, 304
7 Milburn, 3-6
8 Milburn, 3
10 Milburn, 5
Constantine claimed that he saw the cross in the heavens, and he went to battle with the cross inscribed on the shields of his soldiers:

**The true cross:** One event which had a great influence on the history and use of the cross was the tradition that the "true cross" of Jesus was found in Jerusalem by Helena, the mother of Constantine, in the fourth century. This cross soon became the object of veneration on Good Friday, and eventually pieces of the true cross spread across the Christian world, carrying with it the Good Friday ritual of veneration of the cross.

**Cross and resurrection:** Depictions of the suffering or dead Jesus on the cross are not known from the first four centuries of the Christian era. Any depiction of Christ crucified would have been seen as a kind of anachronism, since the emphasis in the early church was on the resurrection and glorification of Christ. It was the cross that best symbolized the victory of Christ over death; it was "the personal sign of Jesus Christ as saviour and the sign of the faith of the individual Christian in his promise." It was a source of life just as it was the means of Jesus' passing to divine glory.

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**From Cross to Crucifix**

The first evidence for the figure of Christ on the cross is from the early fifth century; two depictions have been found, one on a sarcophagus and the other on a door of the church of St. Sabina in Rome. These show Christ in a rather stylized form. The cross without any human form, however, continued to be the dominant form, and in the fifth and sixth centuries, a period described as "the high time of the glorified cross," crosses were sometimes made of gold and decorated with jewels; sometimes they were inscribed with other symbols such as the Greek letters alpha and omega. That kind of cross continued to be used for a long time, and an example exists that was made in the seventeenth century.

To combat heresy: In the sixth century, however, a new trend emerged. As a response to controversies regarding the nature of Christ, representations of the full human figure of Christ on the cross began to appear. The depiction of the crucifixion of the human person of Jesus was used to counteract heresies of the gnostics, docetists and monophysites, all of whom emphasized the divinity of Christ to the point that there could have been no real suffering on the part of the human Jesus. Jesus was represented, however, as the Christus Triumphans or the Christus Victor, the victorious God-man who triumphed over death. The figure of Christ was not as realistic as it later became. Christ was

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14 Cappadona, 27
15 Miller, 475
16 Pocknee, 39
17 Miller, 475
18 Pocknee, 40, 61

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vested in a long robe emphasizing his priesthood and kingship, and there was no crown of thorns but in some cases a royal diadem.\textsuperscript{19} Crucifixion and resurrection were united into one representation and the joy of the resurrection was clearly emphasized. These representations were a "visible acceptance of the teachings on the unity of the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection."\textsuperscript{20}

The humanity of Christ: A seventh-century council forbade symbolic representations of Christ, for example as a Lamb, and ordered that he was to be depicted in human form. Subsequently the figure of Christ changed to a figure which revealed more dramatically the humanity of Christ, expressing the union of the dual nature of a Christ who suffered but also was God enthroned. Depictions show Christ on the cross with his head slightly inclined and an expression of sadness on his face. This style was known as the \textit{Christus Patiens}.\textsuperscript{21}

Christ in agony: In the eleventh century, Byzantine art showed an anguished Christ; this style was known as \textit{Christus Dolor}. A fourth stage in representing Christ on the cross, called the \textit{Christus Mortus}, developed during the medieval period. Reasons for the development are many. The popularity of the passion plays, the influence of mystical literature, and the proximity with death afforded by the black plague were involved in bringing forth this artistic development. Theological influences motivating the development of the \textit{Christus Mortus} figure include the redemptive theology of Anselm, the monastic movement, and the mystical traditions embodied by Francis of Assisi and Birgitta of Sweden, among others. Meditation on and imitations of the sufferings and anguish of Jesus Christ during the passion experience led to a revival of the visual image of the repugnant suffering servant of Isaiah 53:2. This Christ-figure bears no resemblance to the regal image of the \textit{Christus Triumphans}; all aspects of divinity have been stripped away to expose the human Jesus at the moment of a painful and tortured death. Clearly the physical suffering of the victims of the black death played a critical role in the artistic depictions of the dying and dead Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{22}

This move to realism in the thirteenth century, with its depiction of Christ as bloodied and beaten, occurred about the same time as the Christmas crèche began to appear.\textsuperscript{23}

Shift to crucifix: Beginning in the fourteenth century, the crucifix gradually began to replace the cross. The shift in devotion from the cross to a realistic representation of the crucified Christ as the object of adoration came about at the same time that the symbolic universe of the Middle Ages broke down and the secular, humanistic thought of the Renaissance began to take over. The shift "also marks a low point in sacramental life and the emergence of a piety and spirituality which have no foundation in doctrine."\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{19} Pocknee, 41
\textsuperscript{20} Cappadona, 27
\textsuperscript{21} Cappadona, 27
\textsuperscript{22} Cappadona, 28
\textsuperscript{24} Patrick Regan, "Veneration of the Cross," \textit{Worship} 52 (January 1978) 8
Liturgical Use of the Cross

Processional crosses: There is some indication that at the end of the fourth century Christians were encouraged by John Chrysostom to carry a silver cross in processions, to counteract the hymn-singing processions of the Arians. In 800 Charlemagne gave the pope a processional cross; in Rome it was common at the time to use such a cross in the stational processions. At first these crosses were placed beside the altar, but by the twelfth century it became customary to place them on the altar. In the thirteenth century Pope Innocent III prescribed that the cross must be placed on the altar, and the ancient custom of having nothing on the altar except what was needed for the eucharist was lost.

Cross and crucifix: Many of the crosses used in processions and on the altar up to and including the Renaissance did not have a figure of Christ on them. In the fourteenth century crucifixes replaced the crosses more and more, but only in the middle of the eighteenth century did the requirement come into force that the altar cross must have a figure of Christ on it.

The cross was venerated: The cross was the object of liturgical veneration in a variety of medieval rites. For example, the tenth-century Romano-Germanic pontifical describes a Palm Sunday procession that includes a processional cross as its focus; it was honoured with lights and incense, liturgical gestures of reverence. These same gestures of reverence might also be given to relics or to the gospel book. By the eleventh century, however, they were beginning to be used primarily to show reverence to the reserved eucharistic bread; at this time processions began to include only the eucharistic bread, thus relegating the cross to the background.

Also in the earlier middle ages the cross or crucifix was incensed as a sign of veneration during the eucharist, after the gifts were incensed. In one ritual of the eleventh century a crucifix, a gospel book, and relics were set out in front of the altar for intercessory prayers following the Lord's Prayer; the clergy (except the presiding priest) prostrated themselves as they recited psalm 73. At a later time this gesture too gave way to kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament.

Crosses and crucifixes in church buildings also became commonplace. A large cross or crucifix was placed on the beam at the top of the choir or the screen that often was built during the middle ages to separate the chancel from the nave; this screen was called the "rood screen," as "rood" meant "cross" in Middle English. It was this crucifix rather than the altar that caught the eye of

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25 Overbeck, 305
26 Miller, 475
27 Pocknee, 72, 75
28 Pocknee, 72
29 Mitchell, 131
31 Pocknee, 76, 68
anyone who entered the building, and it was this crucifix (and other figures which might have been placed near it) that was shrouded with a veil in Lent. The custom of painting twelve “consecration crosses” on the walls when a church was dedicated also arose. In fact the church building itself became cruciform in its structure.

Veneration of the Cross on Good Friday

Sign of Christ’s victory: It was natural that the cross, the instrument of salvation, should become the object of special respect and veneration; the focus, however, was on its saving role in God’s plan and not on the physical suffering and death of Jesus. The cross was seen as a tool of Christ’s victory, a victory which overcame evil and opened all humanity to the action of God's grace.

The veneration of the cross that has been a part of the Roman Good Friday liturgy since the seventh century had its beginning in the discovery by St. Helena of what was considered to be the cross on which Jesus died. It was this true cross that soon became an object of devotion, and the Good Friday ritual of the veneration of the cross in Jerusalem described in the late fourth century by the pilgrim Egeria involved the wood of this cross. In the papal liturgy a relic of the true cross was carried in solemn procession to the church of the Holy Cross, while psalm 118 was sung and the antiphon, “Behold the wood of the cross on which hung the salvation of the world,” was most likely used. In Roman titular churches a relic of the true cross was also venerated, although there was no procession to the church with the relic.

These rituals became models throughout the churches of the Roman rite. In the ninth century, deacons carried a veiled cross, stopping three times on the way to the altar to sing Hagios O Theos (“Holy God, holy mighty One, holy mortal One, have mercy on us”) followed by the choir answering with the same text in Latin. The bishop then unveiled the cross and sang, “Behold the wood of the cross.” This rite was rearranged in the twelfth century so that the cross was unveiled in three stages, with “Behold the wood of the cross” sung after each stage. The Trisagion was then sung. In each case, veneration of the cross followed, first by the clergy and then by the people.

The modern liturgy: It is easy to see that the present ritual for the veneration of the cross on Good Friday is true to its ancient roots. This rite is the high point of the liturgy, expressing “the Church’s faith in and gratitude to Christ

Miller, 474
Miller, 479
Louis Van Tongeren, “A Sign of Resurrection on Good Friday. The Role of the People in the Good Friday Liturgy until c. 1000 A.D. and Meaning of the Cross,” Omnes Circumadstantes (Kampen: J. K. Kok 1990) 117
Regan, “Veneration,” 8
Van Tongeren, 108
Patrick Regan, “Restoring the Cross to Good Friday,” Liturgy (Washington DC) 1 (1980) 58
who turned the wood of an instrument of torture into the means of redemption and the sign of God's infinite love." The procession with the cross and offering it for veneration involves the whole community in gesture and movement; not many words are used and most belong to the community.

**Two options:** The rite gives two options for showing the cross to the assembly. The first, with a three-stage unveiling, obviously reflects ancient practice and conveys a sense of awe. The second form involves showing the uncovered cross three times, the first in the rear of the church, the second in the middle and the third at the altar area, each time singing, "This is the wood of the cross . . . ." This imitates the pattern that will be used the following night during the procession with the Easter candle, thus making a connection between the cross and the resurrection.

The "Circular Letter" issued in 1988 by the Congregation of Divine Worship suggests that the rite "should be carried out with a splendour in keeping with this great mystery of our salvation . . . ." The document emphasizes that the invitation and the assembly's response are to be sung, and that periods of reverent silence during each time of kneeling are not to be omitted.

**One cross only:** For the veneration itself, there is an open-ended instruction to make "a gesture of reverence," this allows individuals freedom to express their devotion as they feel moved. The Canadian edition of the Sacramentary states explicitly that only one cross should be used for the veneration. The "Circular Letter" states that this is required for the authenticity of this sign (no. 69), thus making sure that the unity of the symbol is maintained. The Sacramentary also says that if the number of people makes it impossible to have everyone come to the cross for veneration, the priest may take the cross, after some of the faithful have venerated it, and hold it up briefly for all to worship in silence. However, efficiency is not a priority in this liturgy, and as Gabe Huck says, people are not in a rush on this day. Offering the cross to some of those present and not to others could be seen as being discriminatory.

If the veneration of the cross is indeed the high point of the Good Friday liturgy, no excuse should prompt a community to cut short this part of the rite. Everything should be done to make this a reverent and prayerful experience.

**Cross or crucifix:** A question often raised regarding the veneration of the cross is whether to use a cross or a crucifix. Patrick Regan's comments on the significance of the cross are helpful in this regard. The cross is first of all, he says, the instrument of redemption. Salvation heals creation at its very root, using the very element that brought about the world's downfall: the wood of the tree brought about sin and death through Adam's disobedience, and the wood of the cross brought forgiveness through Christ's obedience. "To kiss

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38 *Days of the Lord: The Liturgical Year* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press 1993) III: 34
40 *Days of the Lord,* III:46
42 Huck, 82
43 Regan, "Restoring," 58
44 Regan, "Veneration," 9

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the cross, then, is to thankfully and humbly embrace the gift of creation now made whole by the sacrifice of him whose body was raised upon the wood."45

**Cross as throne:** The cross is also understood as a royal throne where God’s glory is revealed and from which he reigns, like the lid of the wooden ark. Christ’s sacrifice has obtained forgiveness; he is now King. This is why the Trisagion is sung as part of the ritual of the veneration.

**Presence of Christ:** Finally, the cross is “the sign of the Lord’s eschatological presence.”46 In the words of Cyril of Jerusalem: “The true sign, Christ’s own, is the cross. A sign of a luminous cross precedes the King, showing him who was formerly crucified.”47 This eschatological presence of Christ, revealed in the cross, was the reason for prostrating before the cross while praying to the one who hung on it.

A wooden cross is more appropriate than the crucifix because the church is not looking at a picture. The crucifix focuses on a moment in history; the cross embraces the whole of the paschal mystery, Christ’s death, his resurrection, and his coming again.48

**Cross in texts:** All of the instructions for the rite use the word, “cross.” All the texts used in the rite also use the word, “cross”: “This is the wood of the cross” in the showing of the cross, and during the veneration itself, “We worship you, Lord, we venerate your cross, we praise your resurrection. Through the cross you brought joy to the world.” The hymn texts during the veneration are to be in honour of the cross as a symbol of hope or of Christ crucified through whom we have gained salvation.49

**Wood of the cross:** These texts were used with the presence of relics of the true cross in mind. When such a relic is not present, the wood of a large cross will do, as Amalarius of Metz said in the ninth century: “the power of the holy cross is not lacking in those crosses which are made in the likeness of the Lord’s cross.”50 Having a figure of the dying or dead Christ, or even of the glorified Christ, would draw the focus away from the wood of the cross.

Besides enabling the texts and gestures of the liturgy to regain their authenticity, veneration of the cross rather than a crucifix on Good Friday would restore a truly universal, catholic tradition. It would bring Christians of today into living contact with the one undivided Church of past centuries; with the ancient Jerusalem church; and ultimately with Calvary itself.51

**Parish cross:** The cross that is used should be the parish’s principal cross – the one that is present in the assembly all year, preferably as the processional cross. It should be significant, a symbol worthy of what it signifies:

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45 Regan, “Veneration,” 10
46 Regan, “Veneration,” 11
47 Regan, “Veneration,” 11, 12
48 Huck, 79
49 *Days of the Lord,* III:50
50 Regan, “Veneration,” 12
51 Regan, “Veneration,” 13
... its dimensions, shape, and ornamentation must be so powerful and majestic, regal, and luminous, awesome and glorious as to bring us to our knees. It is after all the trophy of Christ's victory, the tree of life, the throne of mercy, the sign of the Son of Man.  

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Feast of the Triumph of the Cross

The feast of the Triumph of the Cross celebrated on September 14 is currently designated a solemnity, thus respecting the importance this feast had in past centuries and still has in the Eastern churches. This feast began to be celebrated in Rome some time in the seventh century, the same century in which the veneration of the cross on Good Friday began to make its appearance in the Roman liturgy. Since a piece of the true cross had been brought back to Rome by Helena and placed in a new basilica built by Constantine and dedicated to the holy cross, it seemed natural that eventually feast days would celebrate the discovery of the symbol held in such high regard. A feast day honouring the discovery of the cross was already celebrated on May 3 in Rome during the sixth century, but eventually it was suppressed by Pope John XXIII.

Cross in texts: The prayer texts in this liturgy, as do those on Good Friday, clearly refer to the cross. Thus the opening prayer speaks of "death on the cross" and "mystery of the cross," the prayer over the gifts includes "sacrifice, once offered on the cross," and the prayer after communion proclaims that "you have redeemed by the wood of the cross." In the preface for the feast the wood of the cross is the focus: the connection between the wood of the cross and the tree of life is clearly stated, as is the victory of the wood of the cross over the tree from which death came:

You decreed that man should be saved through the wood of the cross. The tree of man's defeat became his tree of victory; where life was lost, there life has been restored through Christ our Lord.

Entrance antiphon: One might take note also that the entrance antiphon suggested for the feast, "We should glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he is our salvation, our life and our resurrection; through him we are saved and made free," is almost identical with the one suggested for Holy Thursday.

The glory of Christ: The focus on the passion of Christ usually depicted in a crucifix finds no expression in this feast. The crucifix, representing a moment of intense suffering in history, would not be able to carry all the meanings inferred in the feast. The cross here is seen as the glory of Christ, the glory of God, the glory of humanity. It is clearly the cross rather than the crucifix to which the following applies:

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52 Regan, "Restoring," 59
53 Days of the Lord, VII:224
54 Thomas Hopko, "The Cross is Exalted," Liturgy (Washington DC) 1 (1980) 15
55 Days of the Lord, VII:224
As the perfect symbol – the symbol most real, and the reality most symbolic – the cross gathers into unity every element of God’s gracious dispensation in creation and redemption for our celebration, contemplation, and praise. It does so not only by its form, but also by its substance.

It is the tree of the cross, the life-giving wood by which humanity is healed. By a tree the first Adam was cast out of paradise . . . the last Adam restores humanity to communion with the tree of life that is itself the most precious tree of the cross. The liturgy of the [Triumph] celebrates this central mystery of humankind’s being and life.56

One more thought could be added to suggest the fundamental mystery that is celebrated by this feast:

The place of death is the tree of life. Jesus Christ crucified is the unity of the universe, the place of refuge, the fruit, the anointing, the flowing of life. The cross is exalted.57

Symbolism and the Cross

It gives one pause for reflection to note that at one time the gestures of homage and adoration now given the eucharistic elements were once given to the relic of the true cross.58 With this in mind we can with profit explore a few of Nathan Mitchell’s reflections on symbolism to see what these might suggest regarding cross and crucifix.

Actions not objects: One characteristic of symbols that Mitchell spells out is that they are actions, not objects.59 Each symbol, he says, involves the human person in a transaction with the other, and the result is revelation of the other. The symbol puts one in touch with reality by exposing us to the ambiguous richness of the one encountered, leading deeper and deeper into the complexity of that reality; the method is ambiguous; symbols do not explain.

Multivalent: Symbols cannot be reduced to a single meaning to the exclusion of all others; symbols by nature are ambiguous, capable of multiple layers of significance. Also, symbols are like metaphors in language; they bring us to a movement from the primary meaning to a latent meaning that cannot be explained intellectually, and in this sense they have an outward to inward movement. Symbols can also acquire new meanings and can appropriate meanings of other symbols, a characteristic Mitchell describes as “iconoclastic.” Symbols that evolve in this way become more dense and ambiguous, and absorb sometimes conflicting meanings that cannot be reconciled. Therefore symbols can point simultaneously to what is there and what is not there; a symbol has no fixed center of meaning.60

56 Hopko, 19
57 Gordon Lathrop, “Tree of Death, Tree of Life,” Liturgy (Washington DC) 1 (1980) 8
58 As mentioned in Mitchell, 225
59 Mitchell 51-52
60 Mitchell, 246, 394-399
Cross as action: The two liturgies that focus on the cross demonstrate the characteristics of symbol just described. The symbol of the cross as action, taking one deeper and deeper into who Christ is and what his redemptive act means can be seen in the ancient formula used for the veneration of the cross on Good Friday: “This is the wood of the cross . . . Come let us worship.” The many levels of meaning of the cross are obvious: obedience, victory, forgiveness, salvation, kingship, presence, absence, and others. Meanings which are in conflict are present: death and life, Christ losing his life and thus becoming the victor, tree of life conquering the tree that brought death, to name a few.

Many meanings: One characteristic of a symbol named by Mitchell, that it cannot be reduced to one meaning to the exclusion of all others, seems particularly helpful in discerning whether the cross or the crucifix is the better symbol of the paschal mystery. The depiction on the crucifix of the agony of Jesus limits the meaning to the moment of Jesus’ death in history. There is then the tendency to diminish or lose a multitude of other meanings associated with the cross: resurrection, the wood as the tree of life, victory, and many more. A figure of the glorious Christ on a crucifix opens up the symbol somewhat; the welcome ambiguity of the simple cross as the Christian symbol is not as obvious. Some of Mitchell’s thoughts about symbol are reflected in this passage by Gary Marcinowski:

The cross as a symbol is for the community and for individuals within the community. It has the capability of carrying the full truth of human experience. When a person or community is in struggle, the cross can reflect that suffering and the promise that brings hope; when joyous, the cross reflects victory. Full allowance is made for the individual’s or family’s or community’s reaction to the confrontation of their life experience with the Christ event. 61

A new dimension is touched on here, the cross as a symbol to which both the community and individuals can relate.

Pastoral implications: Marcinowski draws some pastoral implications regarding the rich symbolism of the cross. We are not always ready, he says, to face the richness, the full power behind identifying with the cross and are afraid to use the symbol of the cross with full force. 62 It is sometimes difficult to “own” the redemptive mission of Jesus as ours, the mission we can be called to face by an appropriate symbol of the paschal mystery.

Cross and paschal mystery: The symbol that is inclusive of the entire paschal mystery is the cross. The crucifix, according to Marchita Mauck, “is something different, one artist's representation of one moment in the unfolding of that paschal mystery.” 63 It is the totality of the life, death, resurrection and presence throughout history that constitutes Christ's redemptive work, and the crucifix does not give the same sense of this totality as does the cross. “The cross suggests more than that afternoon on Calvary.” 64

62 Marcinowski, 15
63 Marchita Mauck, Shaping a House for the Church (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications 1990) 94
A processional cross can facilitate or discourage identity with the cross, Marcinowski says, and when such a cross is made, four considerations are to be kept in mind. He suggests that the corpus can get in the way; it can be a subliminal message that the cross belongs to Jesus and to no one else. Individuals or communities can then avoid responsibility and identification with the cross. Secondly, to facilitate full identity with the Christ event, the cross should be an uninterrupted unit, and be a processional cross rather than a stationary one. Thirdly, artistic representation of the wounds, even with jewels as was done in the past, can bear the full range of human experience, from “tremendous suffering to Easter.” Finally, the cross should be simple and straightforward in order not to crowd out the symbol. “The cross is ours; resurrection is ours. Our symbols need to say that with impact and full graciousness.”

Recent Liturgical Documents

References to the cross in Vatican documents regarding the liturgical reform launched by the Second Vatican council are few. The first mention is in the “Instruction” Inter Oecumenici, issued in 1964 to implement the reform. It suggests that the cross and candlesticks required may be placed next to the altar instead of on it – at the discretion of the Ordinary.

General Instruction: The next document to deal with the cross is the 1975 “General Instruction of the Roman Missal.” Regarding placement, it states that if the cross has been carried in procession, “it is placed near the altar or at some other convenient place.” It also states that a cross, “clearly visible to the congregation,” be placed on the altar or near it. The cross may be carried in the procession of the entrance rite by an acolyte between two servers with candles. Another article describes the procedure for incensing the cross, and this instruction is fairly detailed. It is interesting to see that various placements of the cross are taken into account: on or beside the altar (in which case the cross is incensed before the altar), or behind the altar. It takes for granted that the cross is in the altar area.

One other passage that mentions the cross states that at the altar “the sacrifice of the cross is made present under sacramental signs.” The implication is that it is necessary to have the symbol of the cross present for the celebration of the eucharist.

65 Marcinowski, 15
67 General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), DOL 465-533
68 GIRM, no. 84
69 GIRM, no. 270
70 GIRM, no. 143
71 GIRM, no. 236
72 GIRM, no. 259
Environment and Art: Another document that has something to say about the cross is *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship*, a document in which the United States Bishops' Committee on Liturgy developed some of the suggestions set out in the Roman documents. The U.S. document describes the cross as a basic symbol in liturgical celebrations. A “processional cross with a floor standard" is preferable to one fixed on a wall in order to have flexibility as to where it can be placed. The principle stated earlier in the document that the duplication of signs and objects, and particularly the multiplication of crosses, is to be avoided in order that the symbol is not diminished, is at work in this directive. It is permitted, the document says, that the cross rest on the altar, but the preference is that it be elsewhere so that only the bread, the wine, and the book required for the eucharist are placed on the altar, thus returning to the custom of the ancient church. There is one other mention of the cross in the document, that the reconciliation chapel have “nothing superfluous in evidence beyond the simple cross.”

Emphasis on cross: All the documents discussed so far use only the word, cross, and do not mention the crucifix. It is likely that “cross" means the cross without a corpus, since the word does not seem to be used in any generic sense. Yet in another document there is what could be seen as a conflicting statement in the sense that the word cross does include a crucifix.

Book of Blessing: In the introduction to the “Order for the Blessing of a New Cross for Public Veneration," one finds the following:

> The image of the cross should preferably be a crucifix, that is, have the corpus attached, especially in the case of a cross that is erected in a place of honour inside a church.  

Inconsistency? It is to be noted that the word used is “preferably," certainly not indicating prescription. The text of the ritual itself, especially in the blessing, uses many of the images that are traditionally associated with the cross:

> “The tree, once the source of shame and death for humankind, has become the cross of our redemption;” “the Lord Jesus, our King, our Priest, and our Teacher, freely mounted the scaffold of the cross and made it his royal throne;” “On the cross, lifted about the earth, he triumphed over our age-old enemy” and others. These images show the variety used in connection with the symbol of the cross, and as a symbol it is the cross that can bear these images rather than the crucifix.

**Conclusion**

Cross rather than crucifix: It is clear from the historical perspective, from the liturgical texts used in the veneration of the cross, and from the nature of sym-

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74 EACW, nos. 85-86
75 EACW, no. 88
76 EACW, no. 81
77 *A Book of Blessings* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press 1989) 455
78 *Book of Blessings*, 460
bolts that the cross and not the crucifix is the most appropriate symbol of the paschal mystery. The celebration of the liturgy today requires a symbol that authentically expresses the whole of that paschal mystery, the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus — and the presence of Christ in the community here and now where his work of salvation is to continue. That symbol is the cross, significant in size and in relationship to the assembly, and capable of the many dimensions of the mystery.

**Emotional attachment:** But one still cannot say definitely that only the cross and not the crucifix is to be seen — it is not quite a "black and white" issue. There still are many who are emotionally attached to the crucifix as a personal symbol of what Christ has done for them, for the forgiveness they have received. It is an expression of a piety and spirituality which, as Regan goes so far as to say, has no foundation in doctrine and has not been entirely remedied by the modern liturgical renewal.79

At the pastoral level there is a way in which devotional needs and the needs of the liturgy can both be respected, and that is by keeping them separate. The processional cross, which is not an object of devotion, moves through the assembly and has its place in the assembly. An empty cross "invites people to pass through that open center to be transformed."80 It is important for the community that the multilayered meaning of the cross not be limited.

**Devotional use:** For the devotional life of those who want it, a crucifix can be "enshrined" in its own spot; away from the focal points of the assembly during the liturgy. It can even be in an area outside the worship space itself, such as in a gathering area, provided it will not detract from the primary purpose of that area. Mauck suggests that such a crucifix, which should be large, even "monumental," could be placed on a base that allows it to be moved.81 This would make it possible to place it beside a coffin during a funeral vigil service, for example, or in an area where people can literally gather at the foot of the crucifix (or the cross, for that matter) during a celebration of reconciliation. Gathering at the foot of the cross has a far greater impact on people than keeping the crucifix, or the cross, up there on the wall.

**Limited vision?** There are those who see a need to have a crucifix with a realistic corpus clearly visible in the sanctuary because they think that the sanctuary is "another Calvary," and that "the passion is the central mystery memorialized in the eucharistic liturgy."82 Such a theology would require a crucifix. But here again the focus is on one aspect of the paschal mystery rather than on the mystery as a whole. Would it not be better to look for the suffering Christ in his Body, the Church, in the suffering of the oppressed, in the victims of violence and war, in the havoc of sin in our own lives and of those around us? What kind of image of God will children have who repeatedly look at such graphic depictions of Christ's dying? Are we perhaps tempted to focus on the human suffering of Christ because we can capture it in our imaginations and

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79 Regan, "Veneration," 8
80 Buscemi, 52-53
81 Marchita Mauck, "Bearing the Weight of the Mystery," *Environment and Art Newsletter* 4 (September 1991) 51
82 This example is found in Robert McNamara, "A Cross, Easily Seen," *America* 162 (March 31, 1990) 309
give it a "picture," while the mystery of the resurrection is so much beyond our imagination—that it simply cannot be pictured? Do we seek to focus on what we can control rather than simply let a symbol, the empty cross, speak of the whole mystery?

The paradox, the scandal, of the cross is well summed up in the following comment:

It is not the nails that held Christ to the cross, a mystic says, but his love for humankind. Perhaps Christians needed no corpus in the early centuries because that realization was still fresh in their minds and hearts. Perhaps the middle ages were not so golden after all. Did Christians finally need to nail Christ to the cross to be sure to keep him there? Had they somehow lost touch with the true power and pain of that love?83

Sacramental? One final comment can be made regarding the question whether the cross or the crucifix is the better symbol of who Christ is. Those who have an attachment to the crucifix have likely found this object to be almost sacramental for them, and hence the emotion surrounding "their" crucifix. One can learn from this; the power of cross as almost sacramental needs to be restored in the community, and this can happen only if the symbol is significant and is treated as something significant. Then the cross can again be the symbol of the victory of Christ as it was for the early Christians.

Standing at Eucharist
A Posture of Reverence

Zita Maier

**Body language:** If we believe in the incarnation, and if we believe that Christianity has to do with God relating to the whole person, that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, then what we do with our bodies when we worship is important. Not only is our "body language" in our worship affected by our beliefs and attitudes, but we must ask what this body language says to others about our beliefs. This question applies also to the community as a whole: "The 'body language' of the Church will speak as loudly as the words we use in worship of what the Church really believes and really has to say."

**Unity of body and soul:** The liturgy of the Church is a source of surprise for anyone who thinks the liturgy is pure mental prayer; rather, the liturgy is prayer that is expressed orally and takes shape in bodily postures and gestures. These are not the spontaneous creation of individuals but determined by laws. This is so because of the unity of body and soul as created by God.²

The material and the spiritual are not juxtaposed in the human person but are made one, and the union is not a binding of two distinct entities but the intrinsic correlation of two components of one and the same being; the union is in the proper sense a unity, and a substantial unity at that. This is why a purely spiritual worship would not only be inhuman and have to be rejected, but is even impossible.³

**Body of Christ:** Besides being made a temple of the Holy Spirit through baptism and fed at the Eucharist, an individual body is a member of the corporate body, the Church, which is the Body of Christ. The human language of nonverbal signs as well as the verbal elements become the language of the Body of Christ, and thus become an encounter through Christ with God. They are the medium through which the mystery of this encounter is expressed. In this context posture is not insignificant.

Posture as Ritual

**Gesture and movement:** The current practice of using the word, "order," such as the *Order of Christian Funerals*, rather than using the word, ritual, in titling liturgi-

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3 Martimort, 179
cal books indicates first of all that a series of rites is included, not just a single ritual. But the practice also gives the sense that ritual means something more than the text printed in a book. Liturgy is more and more being seen as action, not just the repetition of verbal forms but also having nonverbal forms that make up the ritual structure. Elements such as gestures and movement are a part of ritual and contribute to both the expression and the understanding of the sacramental moment. The deepest levels of faith and belief are thus expressed.

Ritual: One function of ritual, in a broad use of the word, is to give, according to Leonel Mitchell, a sense of identity and community. Ritual belongs to a community; the ritual of that community is never private nor individualistic, nor is it random behaviour. It is the behaviour of and within a community. When it is connected with that community's deepest reality it has also a sort of life-giving element: "Ritual, by nature, is a whole-woven constellation of patterned repetitive behaviours which review and renew a group's meaning and identity."

Experience of God: Ritual has as a purpose to make possible contact with an event or person which called the ritual community into being. For the Christian community participating in a ritual means that this community can experience a proximity with God and bring its life experience to that experience of God, above all the experience of Christ's saving acts being present to them again. The community can also discern where it may have not lived up to its call; through the ritual participants can be nourished by the ritual's deepest meaning and thus continue with their Christian life with new enthusiasm.

Communication: Ritual is also communication, and every aspect of it tells something of the event remembered. In order to keep that communication authentic and alive it must be allowed to change to suit the changing forms of expression from time to time and from place to place. The ritual must fit the time and the place.

We are our bodies: The significance of the nonverbal elements in a ritual is underlined by Anselm Gruen and Michael Reepen in their discussion on gestures of prayer: Our bodies are not just a physical representation of ourselves; we are our bodies. When our faith has moved from our intellect to our bodies, we believe with our innermost being. As Gruen and Reepen put it:

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\text{Faith must move from the intellect to the body; only then will it be embraced by the whole person; only then can we also say that we believe with our heart, with the innermost part of our being.} \]

Gestures of prayer help the human person to experience God and at the same time the gestures are an expression of that experience; even when

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8 Worgul, 1101
9 Mitchell, 161-162
11 Gruen and Reepen, 7
words fail, the body can give an adequate expression to that experience. If one participates in gestures of prayer simply because a group does them or because they are prescribed in a liturgy rather than the gestures coming from an expression of one's experience at that moment, this participation can trigger an experience of God's presence. 12

Celebration: Finally, human beings have a need to celebrate, and, as Mitchell says, celebration is the primary reason for participating in a ritual:

... ultimately the meaning of ritual is festivity, the celebration of redeemed creation and ourselves as a part of it. It is a participation in the Divine life, and a sharing in its love. For Christians this means union and communion with Jesus Christ in the paschal mystery of his death and rising again, with its promise of abundant life and fullness of joy. If ritual worship offers us less than that, we have been cheated. 13

Expression of attitudes: What is specific to human gestures is that they convey attitudes rather than express feelings. 14 Thus the gestures put us into the relationship with others and with God, and ultimately shape who we are as part of the Christian community. Gestures which are included in the nonverbal elements of ritual are the use of the body as an instrument of communication, and contained in this complex of these gestures is the bearing of one's body in a particular position, standing, sitting, kneeling, prostration, or remaining in a extended bow. 15 Postures in religious ritual can express various attitudes; these can be symbolic and can express relationships within the community as well as being simply functional. 16 There is no thought or feeling that cannot be embodied in some way in a posture or a gesture, and these can in turn intensify what is expressed. 17 It is ritual that brings about the relatedness between God and the human person. 18

The Meaning of the Common Postures

Sitting, kneeling, standing: The common postures used in Christian liturgical assembly are sitting, kneeling, and standing. Less common are prostration and the extended bow. These postures have meaning in worship not apart from but akin to the meanings they have accumulated as human beings interact with each other and with the world around them. (The discussion here concerns the postures of the Roman Rite, and the human significance of the gestures is that found in a European-based culture.) Reflecting on the natural, external meaning leads one to "discover the soul from the body, the hidden

12 Gruen and Reepen, 9-10
13 Mitchell, 136-137
15 Krosnicki 494, 498
17 Martimort 179
and spiritual from the external and the natural." In the liturgy the human meaning invested in the postures become part of the symbolic action of the liturgical assembly. The ordinary aspect is not swept aside; it is at the root of the significance, the meaning, of the community's expression of a spiritual relationship.

Sitting

Many meanings: Sitting may be simply practical, that is, to place ourselves in a restful position. Being seated, however, often has much more associated with it. Persons in authority or who are about to teach often sit for what they are about to do. From this practice come expressions such as "chairing a meeting," implying the activity of leading a gathering. This is the background of the bishop having a chair from which he presides or preaches. On the other hand, sitting down while listening to someone means giving our full attention to the person and letting go of one's own agenda. Listening in a seated position is a hallmark of a good listener. A liturgical assembly seated during the proclamation of the Word has adopted a posture of listening attentively, reverently, and actively; this assembly will also sit for reflecting and meditating.

Kneeling

Humility: Kneeling is the posture that has come to signify one's defenseless, being at the mercy of one who has power over us. The experience of being a captive or a slave, however, is not an acceptable situation for anyone in our culture, and there is not an ordinary, everyday kind of experience of this posture. Kneeling means abasing oneself, bringing home one's own littleness and unworthiness before the all-powerful and all-holy God.

We kneel to discover who we are. We kneel to be delivered from our illusions of independence. We kneel to find out that we are creatures before our Creator, sinners before the one who loves us. Kneeling, we are clearly dependent upon the one who gives us life and sustains, who may take away our breath and return us to the dust from which we came.

Adoration: Kneeling can signify supplication on the part of the one who is entreating obviously on a different level than the one being entreated. It can signify adoration: the sense of awe before God can bring individuals to their knees. In this sense kneeling came to be the posture adopted during the Middle Ages during the canon for adoration of the eucharistic elements. On the other hand, kneeling became the common posture during the Eucharist for the lay people but not the bishop or presbyter presiding, thus inviting some uncomfortable questions regarding the sign value of this distinction and the relationship between the clergy and the laity.

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19 Romano Guardini, Sacred Signs (St. Louis: Pio Decimo Press 1956) 9
20 Searle, 55
21 Guardini, 20
22 Searle, 55
23 Vereecke, 506-507


**Penitence:** Kneeling also has a penitential aspect: "... prayer on one's knees is specifically penitential, characteristic of days of fasting, a sign of mourning, humility, and repentance."\(^{24}\) It was in this sense that it was encouraged by the early Church Fathers such as St. Basil.

The early Church Fathers such as St. Basil.

**Private prayer:** Kneeling as a posture of prayer is considered most appropriate for private prayer and devotion, for example, to meditate silently on a reading, as did the monks of the desert\(^{25}\) and is still preferred by many for prayer before the reserved sacrament.

**Standing**

**Many meanings:** Standing is a posture used in our society to express respect between persons. One usually stands, and a group of people often stand, when a respected person enters the room, for example, while a dignitary makes an official entrance. The citizens of a nation stand during the national anthem, denoting a common identity and a sense of "owning" a nationality, a sense of being a part of the nation. Standing can define a relationship, such as standing in the presence of someone in authority; standing can also symbolize one's readiness to act at the request of such a person. Standing can mean being prepared to serve when called on, as does someone waiting on tables in a restaurant. Standing is also a position of a prisoner being sentenced, the soldier receiving orders, or of one bringing gifts.\(^{26}\) There are idiomatic expressions that reflect what standing means: to stand up for what we believe or for what is right, that we won't stand for nonsense, or we expect something to be laid at our feet.\(^ {27}\)

**Standing is the original gesture of prayer,** the Urgebaerde, used by people of all cultures, according to Gruen and Reepen.\(^{28}\) It is a position in which we can direct ourselves to God rather than turning inward, opening up to his presence, and allowing ourselves to be filled with his Spirit. This posture also leaves one more free to use the hands in gestures of prayer.

**Readiness and reverence:** Standing means we are in possession of ourselves, at attention and ready for action, ready to do whatever is required of us. It is also an expression of reverence: it is "the other side of reverence toward God ..., the other side of vigilance and action. It is the respect of the servant in attendance ...."\(^ {29}\)

**A long tradition:** Because of its primary meaning as a posture expressing respect, standing has been the principal prayer posture in the Judeo-Christian tradition.\(^ {30}\) In the Old Testament the prophets stood to hear God's word (Ezek 2:1, Dan 10:11); the people stood as Moses approached God (Exod 20:21)

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\(^ {24}\) Martimort, 181
\(^ {25}\) Martimort, 182
\(^ {26}\) Searle, 55
\(^ {27}\) "Gestures and Symbols," *National Bulletin on Liturgy*, vol. 17, no. 94 (May-June 1984) 152
\(^ {28}\) Gruen and Reepen, "Das stehen ist die Urgebaerde des menschlichen Betens, in allen Voelkern vergrietet," 24
\(^ {29}\) Guardini, 22
\(^ {30}\) Vereecke, 504
and the Israelites ate the Passover meal standing ready to go when the Lord called (Exod 12:11). For Christians standing is the “characteristic paschal posture” and the proper posture for those who await the parousia. As a paschal people made worthy to stand in the presence of God through their share in the resurrection of Christ, Christians stand ready to greet him when he comes again.

Postures in the Early and Medieval Church

**Standing around the altar:** In the early Church participation by the people assembled for the eucharist was supported by suitable bodily posture, and that posture, at least after the early period of the meal celebration, has always been standing, according to Joseph Jungmann. Those who surrounded the altar, the circumstances, stood in “reverential readiness” before God as did the priest at the altar, and it was considered the norm for all people to adopt the same posture and gestures as the bishop or the priest leading their prayer. As well as standing being their chosen posture, the whole assembly, the people and the presiding priest or bishop, turned east and prayed with uplifted hands, turning east because they saw in the sun an image of the risen Christ. As has often been noted, this position for prayer, the *orans* position, was depicted in art work of the early Church found in the catacombs. (It was still customary in 1500 in Switzerland for the whole assembly to pray with arms outstretched from the institution narrative to communion during a sung Mass.) The only difference in posture between the presider and assembly in the early Church was at the blessing at the end: the people stood with their heads bowed while the bishop or priest stood erect.

**Expectation:** Although Christians simply continued the Jewish practice of standing when at prayer, they saw new meaning in the posture, namely, their experience of the resurrection; their new-found freedom from slavery (Gal 5:1), and the expectation of Christ’s second coming (Rev 7:9).

**Resurrection:** The writings of the Fathers of the Church reinforce the meaning of standing during the eucharist on Sundays and at Easter as a sign of celebrating the resurrection. Justin Martyr, in describing in chapter 67 of his “First Apology” the eucharist as he knew it, writes:

On the day which is called Sunday we have a common assembly of all who live in the cities or in the outlying districts, and the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the Prophets are read, . . . Then we all stand up together and offer up our prayers, . . . Sunday, indeed, is the day on which we all hold our common assembly because it is the first day on which God, transforming the darkness and matter, created the world; and our Saviour Jesus Christ arose from the dead on the same day.

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31 Martimort, 181
32 Vereecke, 505
Freedom: Lucien Deiss comments regarding the passage: "In the early Church the normal posture for prayer was standing. This was more than an attitude of respect for God. . . . It was, before all else, an expression of the holy freedom the Lord had given his followers by his resurrection."35

Joy and victory: Tertullian, in his treatise on prayer, reminds his readers that on the day when Our Lord's resurrection is commemorated we should refrain not only from kneeling at prayer but also from "every sign that bespeaks solicitude" (such as fasting), also during the season of Pentecost, a season marked by the same joy as the Sunday celebration.36 Jerome also speaks of the meaning of standing: It "is a time of joy and victory when we do not kneel or bow to the earth, but risen with Christ, we are raised to the heavens."37 Basil the Great too affirms the meaning of standing to pray on the first day of the week, that we do so "because we are risen with Christ and must seek the things that are above."38

For communion: Standing appeared to have been the universal tradition during these early centuries in the Church also for communion. Even when the eucharist as a meal was still the practice at the beginning, it seemed to have been the custom to receive the cup standing, since the Jews stood at the end of the meal to recite the prayer of thanksgiving (the "berakah") and receive the cup of blessing.39 Reverence while receiving was recommended by the early Church Fathers, such as Cyril of Jerusalem (fourth century), who gave a detailed catechesis on how to receive in a reverent manner.40 The body's posture was in standing position.

Council of Nicea: One more document will be worth noting. The Council of Nicea (325), a council which has exercised a great influence on the Church's development in the following centuries, included the following canon:

Since there are some persons who kneel on the Lord's Day and in the days of Pentecost; in order that all things may be observed in like manner in every parish, the holy synod has decreed that all should at those times offer up their prayers to God standing (Canon 20).41

Feasts: Jungmann points out that this restriction was soon applied also to feasts and saints' feasts because every eucharist seemed to "bear an Easter character."42

People and priest: During the Middle Ages the posture of the assembly gradually began to differ from that of the presiding priest. At first the bow of the head, now seen as a sign of the people's humility in the sight of God, came

35 Lucien Deiss, Springtime of the Liturgy (Collegeville: Liturgical Press 1979) 93
37 Vereecke, 505
38 Deiss, 93
39 Gregory Dix, The Shape of the Liturgy (New York: Seabury Press 1945) 81
40 Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechesis Mystagogiae, as quoted in Jungmann, II, 378
42 Jungmann I, 368
into use also for the orations and the canon." Kneeling for a period for reflective prayer was done at first before the oration at the deacon's invitation, *flectamus genua*. Then kneeling was transferred to the oration itself (the deacon no longer invited the assembly to rise for the presider's prayer). Kneeling during the prayers was the case only during the non-festive days and was limited to the "fore-Mass" during the first 1,000 years. The posture of standing with bowed heads during the canon was also gradually replaced by kneeling, but again standing was still prescribed for feast days and Sundays, when "in honour of Christ's Resurrection one prayed standing." Only in the thirteenth century did this prescription fall by the way.

**However, as late as 1502,** in the *Ordo Missae* by John Burchard, the participants at a Mass at which there was singing were to use the posture of standing as a general rule. The only exceptions were kneeling at the *Confiteor* in the prayers at the foot of the altar and at the consecration.

**Honouring the eucharistic elements:** The thirteenth century saw a change in thinking regarding the Eucharist. Since the people no longer received communion regularly and partaking from the chalice was falling into disuse totally, the introduction of the elevation of the eucharistic elements spread quickly by popular demand. They could now see and adore the sacred bread, and in time all that was needed was to see the host at the consecration. It soon became evident that honour was to be paid to the eucharistic elements when they were raised, and the first decrees concerned about this admonished both the clergy and the assembly to kneel during the elevation. (This custom was reinforced by the controversies raging at the time about the fact and the mode of "real presence" in the eucharistic bread and wine.)

**At the elevation:** The longtime practice of bowing did not entirely die out; at Chartres this "conservative" practice continued until the eighteenth century, a practice which was said to keep in mind that from "time immemorial the act of kneeling accompanied only prayer of petition and penance." For the most part, however, kneeling at the elevation on the part of the people became the general practice, and eventually the people knelt not just at the elevation but from the *Sanctus* to communion. The desire to honor the sacrament by kneeling (often with heads bowed) had taken priority over the desire to see.44

**The priest:** For the presiding priest kneeling at the elevation was impractical, and for several centuries a slight bow, out of reverence, was made just before the elevation. Only in the fifteenth century did the genuflection as we know it gradually replace the bow.45

**Lord's prayer:** The posture taken at the Lord's Prayer was also considered to be significant. To express the petitionary aspect of the prayer, and of prayers of petition sometimes added after or before the embolism, prostration was expected of the people in some cases.46 It was natural then that kneeling, once it was extended around the elevation would have continued through the Lord's Prayer.

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43 Jungmann I, 240
44 Jungmann II, 211-212
45 Jungmann II, 212-213
46 Jungmann II, 292
At communion: Going to communion has always meant approaching the Lord's table, even when the people knelt at a communion rail to receive. Receiving from the chalice continued until the twelfth century, and standing was the rule, for obvious reasons. Only when the use of the cup dropped, did the custom of kneeling for communion slowly become general, between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries, in the West only. Kneeling as a gesture of reverence at communion, for those who did receive, would have been quite in accord with the general spirit of adoration toward the eucharistic species at the elevation at that time.

Low Mass: Towards the end of the Middle Ages the non-festive "low Mass" became more and more important, and eventually for any Mass of less solemnity the rules for the low Mass became the norm. These rules included kneeling for the Confiteor during the prayers at the foot of the altar, the orations, and during the canon. Then, in order to avoid the disturbance of constant posture changes in the short space of a low Mass, standing was required only for the Gospel, and kneeling for the rest was the rule. This regulation, contained in the Ordo Missae of John Burchard, was part of the regulations taken "almost bodily" into the Roman Missal of 1570, put together and made official after the Council of Trent (1545-63).

Sitting: Regarding sitting as a posture for the liturgical assembly, Jungmann indicates that there was seating only for the clergy in the early Church but none for the people in general. This was still the case in the Middle Ages, but toward the end of that period provision for sitting was becoming common. In John Burchard's Ordo Missae (1502) the people were to sit for various parts, if seats were available. In light of the increasing importance at this time of the low Mass and its rules for posture, provision was also made for kneeling when pews were used.

After Trent: Since the liturgical reform of the Council of Trent was aimed first of all at curbing abuses in the celebration of the liturgy rather than in initiating new directions, the changes made from what was current practice were "very few indeed." What was achieved was the promulgation of the first "official" Roman Missal as the universal book for the celebration of the Roman rite liturgy, but the ritual as such was the core of what had developed through the Middle Ages with the spirit of that ritual.

Detailed rubrics: Regarding postures, the regulation in place for a low Mass, to kneel for all of it except the Gospel, remained. It was, however, not always observed, as one can see in the rather complicated set of instructions given by J.B. O'Connell just before the reform of the Second Vatican Council. His book, The Celebration of Mass: A Study of the Rubrics of the Roman Missal, is intended for clergy, but he adds two appendices that concern the participation of the people. The second of these is a detailed explanation of the appropriate postures as well as other ways the people can participate. There are often various sets of instructions for a particular rite, depending on whether the

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assembly was singing or not, and the changes of posture for the people are frequent: stand as the ministers come in, then kneel; stand when the ministers approach the altar, sit during the incensing of the altar, stand for the Kyrie and Gloria, and if the ministers sit so do they; when the ministers rise, so do they; sit for the Epistle and the following chants; stand for the Gospel—and so it continues for the “Solemn Mass.”

All kneel: One final point of interest can be mentioned here. When Pope Leo XIII, in 1884 and 1886, ordered that special prayers for the needs of the Church were to be said after every private Mass, the posture for the presiding priest, who led the prayers from the foot of the altar, was kneeling, the same as that of the people.

The Second Vatican Council and Its Reform

New root metaphor: The first thing to note about the Second Vatican Council is the change from the Tridentine “root-metaphor,” in how the Church viewed the world, God, Christ and herself, and how this affected the Church’s liturgical expression. It can be expected then that some new principles would come into play. Aidan Kavanagh says that in the Church fidelity to Christ is unchangeable but the liturgy has changed at least in some way from earliest time, since it is in the very nature of ritual to change as does any other mode of communication. Yet the liturgy is not anybody’s plaything; it is “the fundamental way a church stands before the Father in Christ,” in the Holy Spirit, and that stance is one of “diakonia.” It is possible for the liturgy to be taken over by the “whims of an epoch,” but it is then not an expression of the eternal Church. For this reason knowing how the Church worshipped in the past must shed light on how it should worship now.

Focus on the assembly: The spirit of the new approach to the liturgy, says Robert Gabie, “manifests itself very specially in the constant and primordial preoccupation with the assembly as a whole, which it regards as the primary agent.” In order to become that agent, the main actor in the liturgy, the people should, according to the Constitution on the Liturgy, “be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons and songs, as well as by actions, gestures, and bearing” (No. 30).

Spiritual attitudes: The General Instruction to the Roman Missal (GIRM) gives a specific dimension to the meaning of participating by postures: “The


53 Aidan Kavanagh, Elements of Rite (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co. 1982) 7

uniformity in standing, kneeling, or sitting to be observed by all taking part is a sign of the community and the unity of the assembly; it both expresses and fosters the spiritual attitude of those taking part" (GIRM no. 20). The document then continues to give specific instruction to stand for the entrance rites, the Gospel and its acclamation, the profession of the faith and the intercessions, and from the prayer over the gifts to the end (with one exception); to sit during the proclamation of the scriptures before the gospel, during the homily, during the presentation of the gifts, and if desired, during the silence after communion; and to kneel during the consecration unless prevented by a good reason. This exception, which has a condition attached that makes it less significant, is the only time the posture of the presider and the assembly differs and does not give the unity of the people called for in the previous paragraph priority. It seems to reflect the practice of the immediate past rather than the belief that the eucharistic celebration is a celebration of the resurrection.

**Multiple modes of Christ's presence:** There are some other statements in the General Instruction to keep in mind when one reflects on appropriate postures for the eucharist. There are the multiple modes of Christ's presence: he is really present in the assembly gathered in his name, in the person of the minister, and in his own word as well as in the eucharistic elements (GIRM, no. 7). The presence of Christ in these various modes calls for reverence with various focuses, including a reverence toward each member of the assembly, the Body of Christ. For example, to stand during the entrance rites is a sign of reverence toward the assembly becoming one, the Church entering into its worship to the Father through Christ who is in our midst. Regarding the office and function of the people of God, the instruction says that the faithful are a holy people, a royal priesthood, and as such "they give thanks to the Father and offer the victim not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him and learn to offer themselves" (GIRM, no. 62). There is to be no appearance of individualism or division; all should become one body when hearing God's word, when praying and singing together, and "above all by offering the sacrifice together and sharing together in the Lord's table" (GIRM, no. 62).

**Unity and participation:** The unity of posture called for here is in place when during the proclamation of the readings before the Gospel, all, including the presider, sit to listen with reverence. When the presider prays the presidential prayers, the opening prayer, the prayer over the gifts, and the prayer after communion, all stand, as does the whole assembly during the Gospel. The principle of the early Church, unity of posture for the faithful and the presiding bishop or presbyter, has again been put into place here. The sense of "ownership," of the whole assembly giving thanks, is strengthened when the posture is the same for the assembly and that of the one presiding.

**Eucharistic prayer:** Since the question raised by the directive to kneel at the consecration has to do with the eucharistic prayer itself, a few reflections on these prayers are in order. The prayer that has the most obvious text to consider is Eucharistic Prayer II, which has the following during the anamnesis: "We thank you for counting us worthy to stand [emphasis added] in your presence and serve you." The image of the people of God in a standing posture before God to offer thanks could hardly be more specific. In the Roman canon, Eucharistic Prayer I, the prayer stresses the unity of the community: "We offer [these gifts] for your holy Church," "Remember all of us gathered here before
you," "we celebrate the memory of Christ, your Son," and so on. It is the presider and the community together that "make memorial."55

Posture of pilgrims: This same "making memorial" on the part of the whole community is expressed also in Eucharistic Prayer III: "we offer you in thank-giving this holy and living sacrifice." This prayer also says: "Strengthen in faith and love your pilgrim Church on earth;" the posture of the pilgrim would most likely be standing, ready to proceed on with life's journey. Eucharistic Prayer IV likewise has the anamnensis expressed in the plural: "Father, we now celebrate this memorial of our redemption." There is also the element here of celebration; a posture of standing has connotations of celebration which kneeling does not.

Good Friday: In passing it can be mentioned that in the present Good Friday Celebration of the Lord's Passion kneeling, as a gesture of penitence, is suggested as an option to the ministers' prostrating themselves for silent prayer at the beginning. It is the custom in most places for the whole assembly to kneel here also.

Conclusions

Proclamation of the gospel: Some insight into the posture of standing as a gesture of reverence can be gained by reflection on the custom of standing for the proclamation of the Gospel, a requirement that has been maintained throughout the whole of the history of the Roman rite. The Church sees the gospel as Christ himself speaking to his people (GIRM no. 9). The words are, as Balthasar Fischer says, Christ's living and life-giving words spoken now to our hearts through the mouth of his minister:

There is almost no gospel in which it is stated at least once: Jesus said. Then one hears his living and life-giving words ring through the assembly, not just to report what was said at that time but rather to address us gathered here today and to stir us in the depths of our hearts.56

Gospel book: The reverence given to the proclamation of the Gospel is expressed also in the honor given to the Gospel book; it is carried in solemn procession with lights and incense used. Honouring the book has always meant honouring Christ himself.57

We are ready to listen: Standing at the proclamation of the Gospel has meant not only reverence for Christ present in his word but has also meant that those hearing it are saying: Speak, Lord, we are ready to listen and to carry out your message.58 The word becomes "Word" not only in its being pro-

56 Balthasar Fischer, Volk Gottes um den Altar (Trier: Paulinus-Verlag 1960) 54
57 Jungmann I, 227
58 Fischer 55: "Rede, Herr; wir sind bereit zum Hoeren und zum Verwirklichen deiner Botschaft."
claimed, but in its being heard: the recipient is as integral to sacramental action as the one who ministers.\textsuperscript{59}

\textbf{Reverence:} Standing at the eucharistic prayer then can be a posture of reverence in the same sense. Since word and sacrament are one act of worship, and it is the same Christ who in the Gospel speaks to the Church and then in the eucharist offers himself with the Church to the Father, the same gesture of reverence would be in order.

\textbf{A single prayer:} Standing throughout the whole of the prayer also respects the form of the prayer, which begins with the dialogue in which the people are invited to lift up their hearts and at the end affirm the prayer with their “Amen.” The prayer is seen as a unit, as one prayer of praise and thanksgiving, and the whole of it is being seen as consecratory.\textsuperscript{60}

\textbf{Prayer of the whole church:} The eucharistic prayer is also the prayer of the whole Church, the prayer of the Body of Christ; because it belongs to the whole community it is a presidential prayer, the presider praying not in place of the community but with the community. Standing has now again become the accepted posture for the other presidential prayers; for the eucharistic prayer, the most important of the presidential prayers, the community would want to be united in posture with the one praying with them, symbolizing through the posture of standing that it “owns” the prayer proclaimed by the presider. (It has not been seen as irreverent on the part of the presider to be standing for this prayer.)

\textbf{Fostering participation:} Participation on the part of the people in the present eucharistic prayers needs to be fostered through the ways available, listening and singing the acclamations. Both of these modes of participation can be done better in a standing position. In fact, standing while singing is taken for granted; note the regulation in 1502 that recommended standing rather than kneeling when there was singing at Mass.

\textbf{Standing out of reverence} for the person of Christ present in the liturgy is an experience with how respect is shown in our society today. A personal anecdote will give evidence of this.

\textbf{Standing versus kneeling:} During a workshop in a small rural parish for all the special liturgical ministers at the eucharist, an explanation was requested regarding the diocesan policy of standing throughout the eucharistic prayer rather than kneeling for any part of it, and an explanation was given. One participant objected that kneeling at the consecration and at communion is what one must do. This point was made after he had given an emotional diatribe that he had been taught that only the consecration was important, that once he had seen the host he had seen Christ, and that nothing else in the Mass mattered; this was still the truth as far as he was concerned, and to kneel was also what he had been taught. Noticing that the presenter did not accept his viewpoint, he turned to the other 40 or so participants around him and asked: “Now, if Christ came walking down those stairs” (he pointed to the stairs leading to the church basement where the group was gathered) “wouldn’t you fall

\textsuperscript{59} Searle, 51

\textsuperscript{60} Dallen, 329
down on your knees?" With one voice several of those around him said, "No, we wouldn't. We'd stand." The point was made.

**Shaped by the liturgy:** There is one more angle to consider. We do not merely shape the liturgy; the liturgy shapes us. It shapes our attitudes toward God and to one another.  

"... We must ask then what do our postures say to us, whether what our body is doing says what is expressed, or whether it contradicts it. Our posture does not just show reverence to Christ in the eucharistic elements; our posture shows reverence to what the liturgy is about, the celebration of praise and thanks to God through Christ by the whole assembly. Our posture shows reverence ultimately to the paschal mystery; it celebrates the resurrection, Christ's presence among us, and the parousia that was so uppermost in the minds of the early Christians. We stand for the great moments of our lives as we experience them in the everyday world; we stand also for the great moments of our lives in Christ. "Worship is a body-conscious activity."  

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61 Searle, 58
62 Inman, 15
New Director of the National Liturgical Office

Sister Donna Kelly, C.N.D., has been appointed Director of the National Liturgical Office, and will take up this position on February 1, 1995.

Born and raised in Kentucky, she has a Master’s degree in education from the University of Louisville and a Master’s in liturgy from the University of Notre Dame. She has taught music in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, served as Pastoral Assistant in a parish in Sydney, N.S., and most recently has been the Resource Person in Music and Liturgy for the Diocese of Antigonish.

Sister Kelly started serving the church as a musician when she was in grammar school, and continued as church organist and choir director during high school and university. She is equally at home with guitar and organ, and has a special sensitivity to the needs of rural parishes with respect to liturgical music. She hopes to continue the liturgical renewal of Vatican Council II.

The Reverend John Hibbard, having completed his term as Director, has returned to the Archdiocese of Kingston, where he serves as pastor of St. John Bosco Parish in Brockville, ON. He deserves many thanks for numerous accomplishments while he was Director.
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Homilies Within the Liturgy: A Broader Definition

Leo Sands

Leo Sands is a presbyter and member of the Congregation of St. Basil. He received his doctorate from Pennsylvania State University, and has taught at St. John Fisher College, Rochester, New York, at St. Michael's University College, Toronto, and at St. Augustine's Seminary in Toronto. He now lives and writes in Huntsville, Ontario.

What is the purpose of a homily or sermon within the liturgy? Although this is not the first time that the question has been posed, it is important to continue asking it, of ourselves and others; and of the Lord, for it is of the Word come forth from the Father that we speak. One of the most consoling thoughts in ministry is to say with St. Paul, "We too give thanks to God unceasingly, that in receiving the word of God from hearing us, you received it not as a human word, but what it really is, the word of God, which is now at work in you who believe."

What then is the goal of a homily? Let us recall at the outset its similarity to all forms of preaching. Preachers always intend, wherever they are, whomever they address, to lead their listeners to eternal salvation and to advance the glory of the Lord God. St. Dominic prayed that his Dominican sons, the Order of Preachers, "have no other thought than God's honour, and the salvation of souls, through the light of wisdom." John Henry Newman describes it thus: "St. Paul began to preach to the Gentiles that they might obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with heavenly glory."

At the same time, the homilies we speak of have always had their peculiar characteristics. Since they take place within the liturgy, be it at baptism, confirmation, eucharist, ordination, a communal celebration of reconciliation or anointing, or at the liturgy of the hours, they inevitably follow readings from scripture. This indicates their first attribute. Although all preaching ought to be nourished by the biblical books, in the liturgy this interdependence is heightened, not only in a general sense, but because of the juxtaposition of the readings and preaching.

1 Thessalonians 2.13

Augustine Rock, Unless They Be Sent (Dubuque: W. Brown 1953) 29. For reviews of the literature on homiletics, see Homiletic, a semiannual periodical published at Lutheran Theological Seminary, Gettysburg, PA. See also J. A. Melloch, "Publish or Perish: A Review of Preaching Literature 1981-1986," Worship 62 (1988) 497-514


53
In the debates and documents of the Second Vatican Council, one finds an awareness that the expanded lectionary with its three-year cycle needs homiletic support. In turn, the lectionary can be an immense asset to preaching. The bishops knew that scripture needed to be not only read but preached. Thus the Council stated that the homily had as a major purpose to explain the scriptures.

Two principal texts describing the homily are in the Constitution on the Liturgy.

The ministry of preaching is to be fulfilled with exactitude and fidelity. The sermon . . . should draw its content mainly from biblical and liturgical sources and its character should be that of a proclamation of God’s wonderful works in the history of salvation, that is the mystery of Christ ever made present and active within us, especially in the celebration of the liturgy. (n. 35:2)

By means of the homily, the mysteries of faith and the guiding principles of the Christian life are expounded from the sacred text, during the course of the liturgical year; the homily, therefore, is to be highly esteemed as part of the liturgy itself. (n. 52)

Both passages speak of scripture as a source for the homily. Even more so do several postconciliar documents, for instance, “the purpose of the homily is to explain the readings and make them relevant to the present day.”

These documents, however, do not limit the main sources of material to scripture. Liturgical texts are given, if not equal, at least secondary importance. “The homily draws its content from biblical and liturgical sources.” And when asked for an interpretation of the term “sacred text” (in the Liturgy Constitution, n. 52), the Concilium replied that it refers to scripture and other texts from the ordinary and proper of the Mass, including the psalms, antiphons, gloria, creed, and eucharistic prayers. Later instructions are consistent with this.

In the openness of the homily to liturgical texts, we discover its second characteristic. Since by its very nature it is an integral part of the liturgy, it may draw from the whole of the liturgy and ought to contribute to the liturgy as a whole. Vatican Council II, in fact, seems to have been the first council in history to emphasize the liturgical nature of the homily.

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Dei Verbum, n. 21

Third Instruction on the Correct Implementation of the Constitution on the Liturgy, n. 2

Much has been written since the Council about the unity of scripture and liturgy: "the two constitute a single act of worship." Because scripture is an act of sacred memory giving voice to the mysteries which the liturgy actualizes and celebrates. "The eucharist requires the Word, the proclamation of the wonderful works of God, the preaching of Christ, the announcement of his passion and resurrection." The word's presence and strength are assurance that the sacrament is not empty ritual, that "one has a real commitment to love one's brothers and sisters in intention and concrete action." This is the result when, together, liturgy of the word and sacrament are having their intended graced effects upon human hearts, and when the homily is "the link connecting God's word proclaimed in the readings with the eucharistic celebration."

Explaining the Liturgy

The unity existing between scripture, preaching, and liturgy leads to various ways of describing their relationship. One is that the role of the homily is to shed light on the meaning of liturgy (in order that the community might participate more fully). Pope Paul VI, on more than one occasion, spoke of the need to see that "liturgical ceremonies hold no secrets from the people, that they clearly understand their meaning, the form they take, and the actions they entail... for the patterns and words of religious rites must help Christians in their daily lives, teach them (for worship has the power to do that) to build up their moral and spiritual powers and make them long for union with God. Christians must be able to learn the meaning of the sacred signs and experience their effects."

This practice has honourable precedents. Some of the most beautiful sermons of the early bishops, for example, are from the Easter Vigil where they are continuing the preparation of their catechumens for the sacraments of initiation. A good deal more of such inspirational teaching ought to have been done after Vatican II; it is still needed.

Disposing the Community to Worship

A second means by which the unity of scripture and liturgy is exemplified by preachers, is when they set out to dispose the community to participate whole-heartedly. The rites of baptism and penance explicitly call for this. In baptism,
for instance, the word is to be directed towards "stirring up the faith of the parents, godparents and congregation towards praying in common for the fruits of baptism."  

As regards the eucharist, Cardinal Bea once gave the following account of the rite’s progression: we call on "the divine clemency in the Kyrie, recite prayers full of dignified emotion . . . thus the seed of the word of God falls on ground carefully worked, ready to receive it. After the sacred readings and the homily follows the eucharistic sacrifice, in which the faithful communi-
cant takes part with that happy disposition of soul which has been created during the sacred reading and the exhortation. The word of God has revived the faith in him, raised his mind to filial hope; and above all a remembrance of the
great favours granted to poor humanity."

Contrasting catechetics and homily, Domenico Grasso, in a work perhaps unsurpassed in this century on the theology of preaching, writes, "the homily is the means by which the liturgy realizes its final goal, the union of the faithful with Christ. Because catechesis is aimed at the intellect, it is systematic . . . [but] the homily tends to see the affective element, more the heart than the mind of God." Considerable weight ought to be given to the purpose of the homily as expressed in these quotations. They emerge from a strong pastoral desire to unite word and sacrament so that the church may be deeply renewed.

**Proclamation and Praise**

A further specification of this view is found in other writers. From the Mass, they single out the aspect of praise and thanksgiving. The purpose of the homily, therefore, is to prepare the worshipping community for thanksgiving. This it does by proclaiming the *magnalia Dei*, above all the paschal mystery. As Reginald Fuller, the Episcopalian scholar, puts it in his seminal work, *What is Liturgical Preaching?*, "the purpose of the sermon is to extract from the Scripture readings the essential core and content of the gospel, to penetrate behind the day’s pericopes to the proclamation of the central act of God in Christ which it contains, in order that this act can be made material for recital in the prayer of thanksgiving."

Fuller gives as an example, preaching on the lost sheep or the lost coin (Luke 15:1-10). What is to be proclaimed here is that God is seeking and rejoicing over the recovery of the lost. God descends to the depths to find us. "This is the redemptive act of God to be preached in the homily and then made a pre-
sent reality in the Lord’s Supper."

In a similar vein John Burke writes, "the basic purpose of the eucharistic homi-
ly is not to explain the lectionary cycle, but to awaken anew for each eucharis-
tic celebration the sentiments of praise, worship, and thanksgiving, which is
done by Christians calling to mind Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension.

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13 General Introduction, 17
15 Grasso, 231
17 Ibid., 38-39
into glory." The U. S. bishops capture the point well: "the homily is not so much on the Scriptures as from them and through them."

The Mass as Sacrifice and Mystery

There is much merit to the view we have just described. It brings together elements that need to be: the readings, the evangelical content they explicitly or indirectly contain, and the Mass as thanksgiving. The only drawback to all this would be if it were presented as exclusive. We may not limit the homily to performing these functions alone. If this were so, preaching would be predictable and repetitious, like the homilist who is always hammering away at the evils of our time. Not that they don't need hammering, but there comes a point of diminishing returns. Besides, there is much more that ought to be said.

With respect to Mass, characteristics besides thanksgiving should not be overlooked. It is also a sacrifice, the church's offering. "The paschal mystery of Christ proclaimed in the readings and the homily, is accomplished in the sacrifice of the Mass." This is not an outmoded attribute. The community is called to know what the sacrifice of Christ requires of it.

People also need to know that the liturgy is a mystery. As Odo Casel and others have pointed out, liturgy, in its original sense of "the people's work," must be complemented by the notion of mystery, "the heart of the action, the redeeming work of the Risen Lord . . . for when the church performs her exterior rites, Christ is inwardly at work in them; thus what the church does is truly mystery." It is necessary to recall this often, because one does not come to the sacraments in order to be "engrossed in the liturgy, but to abide in God." As regards the Mass' every facet, thanksgiving, sacrifice, mystery, unity, etc., the community needs to be educated by the liturgy of the word, particularly in the homily.

Conclusion

Let us return to our original question: the purpose of the homily. There remains the fundamental goal of all preaching – the salvation of the world and the glory of God. From it arises the two primary aims of the liturgical sermon. The first is the appeal for commitment, for inner renewal that "will fire people to go out and announce by their words and life the good news of salvation to all [humanity]." This is sometimes called address. It is closely related to the second aim, called mystagogy, whereby the homilist illumines the meaning of liturgy and renders it appealing, so that the community is genuinely thankful, offers itself through Jesus to the Father, accepts God's love, and enters into communion with God and one another.

18 John Burke, Gospel Power (New York: Alba House 1978) 80
20 General Introduction of the Roman Lectionary, 1st edition, 24
22 Aidan Kavanaugh, "Liturgical Business Unfinished and Unbegun" Worship 50 (1976) 362
Address and mystagory are inseparable and together give a homily its purpose. This, however, cannot be achieved without preaching the paschal mystery – proclamation, and the scriptures – teaching. These need to be proclaimed and explained as background to achievement of the overall goal. These four elements: address, mystagory, proclamation and teaching, have been singled out in two important articles by Joseph Gelineau and J. D. Crichton. To what these authors say I would only like to add that the four be related as just described. The first two emphasize purpose, the third and fourth content.

At the same time it must be observed that not all four can be adequately attended to in one homily, but may be in the course of one’s preaching over a period of time. Every sermon must be coherent and unified. “Nothing is so fatal to the effect of a sermon as the habit of preaching on three or four subjects at once. [Rather], as a marksman aims at the target and its bulls-eye and at nothing else, so the preacher must have a definite point before him, which he has to hit.” Although all four features may be included in a homily, the needs of one’s congregation and unity of purpose are over-riding considerations.

It is these demands which lead a homilist again and again to approach the source of all wisdom, the discerner of all purposes. “Since there are many things to be said concerning each thing to be treated according to faith and love and many ways in which they may be said . . . who knows better how we should say them or how they should be heard through us at the present time than God who sees the hearts of all . . . in whose hands are both we and our words.” To preach or hear the word of God is to enter into mystery. It is thus a prayer, requiring the prayer of the preaching.

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24 Crichton, 27-44; and Joseph Gelineau, “L’Homélie, Forme Plénière de la Prédication” La Maison Dieu 82 (1965) 29-42
26 Augustine, On Christian Doctrine, IV, 32
The following background information on the status of the Sunday and Weekday Lectionaries of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) was issued November 18, 1994, by the Most Reverend James M. Hayes, Chair of the CCCB Episcopal Commission for Liturgy.

The press has, over the last few weeks, carried stories about the status of the Lectionary recently published by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB). Since this matter affects the public prayer of the Church, it is of great concern to all. Hence, it is important that everyone in the Church be fully informed about the situation.

In the mid-1980s the Canadian Lectionary, based on the Jerusalem Bible, was out of print. The bishops had to decide what to use as the basis of any new edition. By this time, the Jerusalem Bible itself had been replaced by the New Jerusalem Bible. The bishops were aware that almost all translations of the Scriptures were undergoing revision in light of recent discoveries about the Bible. They were aware also of the changing usages in the English language which had occurred since the older biblical versions had been prepared in the 1950s.

After consideration of all available texts, and a formal consultation of the Canadian bishops, the CCCB gave its imprimatur to the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Scriptures and approved it for use in the liturgy. This translation was seen to be very scholarly, faithful to the Greek and Hebrew, easily proclaimed, and the text most likely to gain the support of other English-speaking countries and other Christian Churches. It was a literal translation of the original biblical texts, which in terms of usage translated words in the original that clearly referred to both men and women by English words that did the same. The NRSV was a revision of the Revised Standard Version (RSV), which had already been approved for use in the liturgy in the English-speaking world.

The Code of Canon Law clearly recognizes the competence of the Episcopal Conference to approve translations of the Sacred Scriptures for use in the preparation of liturgical books. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) was approved not only by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, but also by the Episcopal Conferences of the United States, England and Wales, Scotland, Australia, and New Zealand. Early in 1992, in a letter to the President of the U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments confirmed the NRSV for liturgical use.


A new chapter began with the translation into English, of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. The Scripture text originally used throughout the first draft of the English translation of the Catechism was the NRSV. The final decision of
the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was to use mainly the older RSV in the Catechism, with the NRSV being used in part. During the course of the Catechism's translation, the Congregation felt that there could be both theological and philological problems with certain texts of the NRSV. For example, is the word "mortals" an exact synonym for "humans"? Is "humankind" too abstract for use in particular instances? Is there a question of a possible loss of the Christological connection in certain passages? It was in this context that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith signalled its concern to the Congregation for Divine Worship, which, in turn, informed the Episcopal Conferences. It should also be noted that not all passages of concern to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith about the NRSV are used in the Lectionary, which by its nature is a selection of biblical texts.

The President and the Vice-President of the CCCB discussed this matter with the Roman authorities in a series of meetings on November 7 and 8, 1994. At the meetings, there was agreement on the need to have the Sacred Scriptures translated in ways that are sensitive to the culture and language of a particular country or region. The Congregation for Divine Worship, for example, has just published a major document on the meaning and necessity of inculturation. It was also agreed that culturally sensitive translations are a daunting challenge, both from a theological and a philological perspective, and that biblical scholarship has to be considered in these issues. The Roman authorities and Conference officials agreed to continue to discuss this matter, and are committed to cooperate fully to meet this challenge.

In the meantime, while studies and discussion continue, and as has already been noted in the Conference's November 9 statement, the present CCCB Sunday and Weekday Lectionaries will continue to be used in Canadian parishes.
Washing the Feet of the Poor

In the medieval church the washing of feet on Holy Thursday (the mandatum or, in Middle English, "maundy") took several forms. Bishops, abbots and abbesses washed the feet of members of their communities following the evening eucharistic liturgy, somewhat as we experience the mandatum today.

Earlier on Holy Thursday, however, the feet of poor people were washed, and this was an occasion to give gifts to poor folks. In the monastery at Durham, England, each monk washed and kissed the feet of a poor man, and then gave him 30 pence in coins, seven red herrings, something to drink, three loaves of bread, and some special "wafercakes". This was a liturgical service, with prayers, readings and antiphons sung during the washing. In a separate liturgy the monks each washed and kissed the feet of a child – probably the boys who were students at the monastery school. In the women's community of Barking Abbey, each nun washed the feet of a poor woman, and then gave her gifts.

It was also the custom for the King and Queen of England to wash the feet of poor folks on Holy Thursday, and to give them gifts. This is called the Royal Maundy. We have a description of this liturgy as it was celebrated just after the Reformation by Queen Elizabeth I. She washed the feet of thirty-nine poor women, and was assisted by the same number of women of the court. The only difference between this rite and that of earlier years was that the queen did not give one of the poor women her gown, but instead gave all the women money.

Her majesty [Queen Elizabeth I] came into the hall, and, after some singing and prayers made, and the gospel of Christ's washing his disciples feet read, thirty-nine ladies and gentlewomen, for so many were the poor folks (according to the number of the years complete of her majesty's age), addressed themselves with aprons and towels to wait upon her majesty; and she kneeling down upon the cushions and carpets under the feet of the poor women, first washed one foot of every one of them in several basins of warm water and sweet flowers, brought to her severally by the said ladies and gentlewomen, then wiped, crossed, and kissed them . . . .

1 Rites of Durham, being a Description or Brief Declaration of all the Ancient Monuments, Rites, & Customs belonging or being with the Monastical Church of Durham before the Suppression, written 1593, Surtees Society 107, 1903 (Reprint: Durham: Andrews and London: Bernard Quaritch 1964) 77-78
When her majesty had thus gone through the whole number of thirty nine . . . she resorted to the first again, and gave to each one certain yards of broad-cloth to make a gown. Thirdly, she began at the first, and gave to each of them a pair of shoes. Fourthly, to each of them a wooden platter, wherein was half a side of salmon, as much ling, six red herrings, and two loaves of bread. Fifthly, she began with the first again, and gave to each of them a white wooden dish with claret wine. Sixthly, she received of each waiting lady and gentlewoman their towel and apron, and gave to each poor woman one of the same. Then the treasurer came to her majesty with thirty-nine small white purses, wherein were also thirty-nine pence after the number of the years of her majesty's age; and she received and distributed them severally. Which done, she received of him so many several red leather purses, each containing twenty shillings, for the redemption of her majesty's gown, which by ancient order she ought to give to some one of them at her pleasure . . . and those she also delivered particularly to each one of the whole company.

And so taking her ease upon the cushion of state, and hearing the choir a little while, her majesty withdrew herself, and the company departed, for it was by that time the sun-setting.

Four hundred years later, the Royal Maundy is still celebrated by Queen Elizabeth II. The washing of feet was discontinued in the 18th century, and gifts of clothing and food have been replaced by special Maundy coins, presented in two purses. The rest of the liturgy includes an opening processional hymn and a homily based on John 13.34 – A new commandment have I given unto you that ye love one another as I have loved you. The first reading is the story of Christ washing the feet of the apostles (John 13) and the second is the account of the last judgment from Matthew 25. There are two hymns and a psalm, and a number of anthems are sung during the distribution of gifts. The Maundy Prayer is as follows, using the language of the Book of Common Prayer.

Lord Jesus Christ,
who when about to institute the Holy Sacrament at thy last Supper,
washed the feet of thine Apostles,
teach us, by thine example, the grace of humility:
Cleanse us, we beseech thee, from all stain of sin,
that we may be worthy partakers of thy holy mysteries;
Who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, world without end.
Amen.


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