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Fear and Liturgical Celebration
National Bulletin on Liturgy
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Editorial commentary in the Bulletin is the responsibility of the editor.

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Fear and Liturgical Celebration
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During the June 1996 meeting of the Episcopal Commission for Liturgy it was announced that Dr. J. Frank Henderson had been named recipient of the *Berakah Award* by the North American Academy of Liturgy (NAAL). The award will be presented at the Academy's annual meeting in Chicago in January 1997. Dr. Henderson is the first Canadian to be given this award in its 21-year history.

The Academy is an ecumenical and interreligious association of liturgical scholars who collaborate in research, and is open to those who are engaged in and who contribute to such research. Its 428 members are specialists in liturgical studies, theologians, artists, musicians, and persons in related disciplines whose work affects liturgical expression and furthers liturgical understanding.

The *Berakah Award* is named after the opening words of the Jewish prayer form, "Blessed are you, Lord God" and is presented by the Academy each year to a member who has made an outstanding contribution to liturgical scholarship or progress.

J. Frank Henderson has edited the *National Bulletin on Liturgy* since Bulletin 112 appeared in 1988. The issues prepared under his guidance have brown covers. Before taking on responsibility for the Bulletin, he served as a member and as chair of the National Council for Liturgy, and contributed many articles to Canada's national Bulletin.

He earned his doctorate in oncology at the University of Wisconsin in 1959. Until he retired in 1989, he was a professor of bio-chemistry at the University of Alberta. He has continued to teach on a semiretired basis.

Frank was an active member of the Consultation on Common Texts, which studies and prepares ecumenical texts. He edited ecumenical liturgies of marriage and baptism. He was also a member of the Advisory Committee of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) from 1978 to 1987 and continued on the subcommittee on translation until 1995. He was active in promoting inclusive language in liturgical texts.

His interests have included social justice, and cultural adaptation of the liturgy, especially by members of the first nations in Canada and other parts of the world.
With his wife Ruth, a member of the United Church of Canada, Frank has worked on many local, regional, and national committees to promote ecumenism, social justice, liturgy, and other positive causes.

On learning of his nomination for the Berakah Award, Frank said: “It is an enormous honour and I was very surprised.”

Among his publications relating to the life of the Church are:

- *Ministries of the Laity* [CANADIAN STUDIES IN LITURGY, no. 2, CCCB, 1986]
- His research on what is happening in the world on Sunday Celebrations of the Word by Lay People
- *The Catholic Priesthood: A Liturgically Based Theology of the Presbyteral Office* [CANADIAN STUDIES IN LITURGY, no. 4, CCCB, 1990]
- *Liturgies of Lament* [published by LTP in 1994]

Most Rev. John S. Knight, Auxiliary Bishop of Toronto and chair of the Episcopal Commission for Liturgy, expressed congratulations to Frank in these words:

> For many years now Frank Henderson's work in the field of liturgy has planted seeds not only in Alberta and western Canada but across this country and beyond. The North American Academy of Liturgy's presentation of the Berakah Award to Dr. Henderson is recognition of this fact as well as recognition of his scholarship.

> Frank's work since 1988 as editor of the National Bulletin on Liturgy has also been noteworthy. As a layman he has taken his talent and used it to the benefit of our Church in Canada and in the the English-speaking world.

> Well done, Frank!

Since learning of the above award, we have received word of Dr. Henderson being awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from St. Stephen's College in Edmonton. At the 72nd Convocation held on September 25, 1996, he was cited as scholar, teacher, and friend of justice. Congratulations, Frank.
Fear and Liturgical Celebration

This issue of the Bulletin considers the unusual topic of "fear and liturgical celebration," a subject rarely taken into account by liturgists and pastoral ministers. This is not a definitive treatment of this complex and challenging subject, of course, but merely an initial discussion. It attempts to name several dimensions of the topic, raise questions that liturgists and pastors may wish to consider, and invite others to pursue the matter further.

We begin, as many liturgical conversations do, with the fundamental principle that full, conscious, active and fruitful participation in liturgical celebrations is required by the very nature of the liturgy itself, by the very nature of the church, and by the nature of the baptismal life.

To participate in worship fully is, among other things, to worship with one's whole self: body, soul and spirit; head and heart; intellect, imagination, actions — and emotions. Today we are trying to understand the nature of the whole human being and make it possible to express one's whole humanity in the liturgy. For example, the importance of the physical body is being recognized more than before when posture, gesture, movement and dance are included and encouraged in the liturgy.

Over the centuries the role and involvement of the emotions in liturgical celebration has aroused considerable suspicion, and the expression of emotions at worship has sometimes been disapproved of and severely limited. We may recall that Augustine was ambivalent about music in the liturgy because he felt that the emotional dimension of music might be more influential than its intellectual and rational dimensions. To express emotions is to venture into unknown and unpredictable territory; it raises the possibility of losing control over the worshippers and the liturgy. Those whose worship experiences has mainly been in the "liturgical churches" may look askance at others who worship with greater exuberance and outward display of emotions; they may also at least unconsciously envy them.

Some emotions are more acceptable than others in our liturgical assemblies. The expression of joy, for example, is often considered a value — though within limits, of course. The expression of grief is also expected and ministered to in liturgies for the sick and dying, and in the funeral rites; again, culture and tradition may place limits on the way grief is expressed.

Other emotions, especially those on the "dark side" of our lives, usually are not recognized or encouraged: these include anger, depression, and fear.

Fear

What do we mean by fear? Here is one dictionary definition, together with a consideration of related terms.¹

¹ From Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (Markham ON: Thomas Allen & Sons 1989)
Fear: an unpleasant often strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger; anxious concern; reason for alarm. FEAR, DREAD, FRIGHT, ALARM, PANIC, TERROR, TREPIDATION mean painful agitation in the presence of anticipation of danger. FEAR is the most general term and implies anxiety and usually loss of courage; DREAD usually adds the idea of intense reluctance to face or meet a person or situation and suggests aversion as well as anxiety; FRIGHT implies the shock of sudden, startling fear; ALARM suggests a sudden and intense awareness of immediate danger; PANIC implies unreasoning and over-mastering fear causing hysterical activity; TERROR implies the most extreme degree of fear; TREPIDATION adds to DREAD the implications of timidity, trembling, and hesitation.

Fear as considered here may be thought to have two sides. One is more “rational,” as when everyone would agree that there is serious danger, for example, when a major fire breaks out in one’s house. The other is more “irrational,” as when someone expresses fear when other reasonable persons do not, or when someone experiences a greater degree of fear than others, or when someone experiences fear for a longer period of time than others. “Irrational” fears are no less real to the persons who experience them than “rational” fears, of course. However, they may have different bases, which may not be immediately apparent.

Fear and the Liturgy

The subject of fear and liturgical celebration has several dimensions, including the following.

• The fears we bring to liturgical celebration may hinder or diminish our full participation or the full participation of others.

• Liturgical celebrations may alleviate or diminish fears that persons experience, or help them deal with or bear with these fears.

• Scripture readings, preaching, songs, liturgical prayers (for example the general intercessions) may name, directly or indirectly, various human feelings, including fear. The liturgy may therefore be an arena in which fear may be named and considered. Depending on how this is done, people’s fears may be alleviated or made worse.

• Inasmuch as the death and resurrection of Jesus – the paschal mystery – reminds us of Jesus’ own fears and anxieties, we may identify with Jesus and know that death is followed by resurrection. Thus we celebrate victory over fear in every liturgy. This also applies to the liturgical year, in which we recall the lives of the saints – all of whom experienced fear in some way in their lives – and their victory by living in Christ and the Spirit.

We begin with a broad and sensitive introduction to the subject of liturgy and fear. Three aspects of fear and liturgical celebration are then considered in great depth: fear of disease, fear of intimacy, and liturgical ministry to those in fear of death and dying.

The dictionary also adds, “profound reverence and awe, especially toward God,” but this is outside the scope of the present discussion.
Liturgy and Fear

Don E. Saliers

Don Saliers is an ordained minister of the United Methodist Church and professor of liturgy and of sacred music at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, in Atlanta, Georgia. His books include Worship Come to Its Senses (1996), Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine (1994), Worship and Spirituality (1984), and The Soul in Paraphrase: Prayer and the Religious Affections (1980).

A climate of fear pervades much contemporary life: fear of crime, of the stranger, of disease and death, of financial loss. We are quite accustomed to the evening's litany of woe on our television screens. Less frequently discussed is the relationship of our fearfulness to matters of participation in Christian worship, and to the Sunday assembly in particular. But it is precisely the range of our fears which may cause resistance to our full, conscious, and active participation in the liturgy.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy refocused our attention on the character and quality of liturgical participation. If the rites were simply and only "objectively" performed by the clergy for those assembled, questions about how we are prepared for and receptive to what is said and done would never arise. But how persons are disposed toward the enacted mystery of the eucharist pertains to the integrity of the rite as well as to faith formation. How fully we can receive the Word in all of its modes is crucial to our sense of hearing and prayer, and to our experience of the presence of Christ. In this way the call for full, conscious and active participation itself raises questions about what prevents us from involving our whole being, intentionally and actively, in the worship of God.

What are the fears we bring to worship that may affect our wholeheartedness in the church's liturgical celebrations? Seven kinds of fear come to mind: fear of change, of intimacy, of commitment, of disease, of death, of loss of identity, and fear of embarrassment. Each of these is part of our lives in one form or another. In any given parish assembly, these are linked to tendencies to resist or avoid particular aspects of the liturgy. After a brief examination of each, I will propose some ways in which the church's liturgical life has the power to address and, perhaps, to transform these fears.

For many persons the fact of rapid and extensive social change has made liturgical reform and renewal especially difficult. "If there is one place in life," as a long-time member of a parish I know observed recently, "where things should stay the same, it is in church. I don't believe that God changes, so why should how I worship be changed by the experts?" He expressed what many Roman Catholics and Anglicans have felt during the recent liturgical changes. While he and many have specific theological objections, the primary resistance often stems from being asked to alter habits and customary behaviors which are deeply formed. Beneath his irritation I detected that changes in the liturgy signalled uncomfortable shifts in his conception of God and the church. And, of course, in some sense he is right to make this connection. Wanting the church and our worship to be the way it always has been is a self-protective instinct. But
this may also prevent a deepening of faith and vision of the church for the life of the world.

Fear of change is often connected with something quite specific. The reforms have asked more personal interaction of worshippers than previous generations have practiced. Where we fear more intimacy, such actions as exchanging the sign of peace or sharing a common cup at communion are resisted. Avoiding close contact with others is sometimes a matter of strong cultural patterns. To be asked to give and receive the peace threatens our highly developed individualism. Bodily contact carries, for many, too much ambiguity. Yet it is the discovery (or perhaps recovery) of the relation between the sacramental character of physical signs and a sense of belonging to one another which is a hallmark of post-conciliar theology of Christian liturgy and life.

A third range of fears have to do with disease, and especially in our time with communicable diseases. Here the liturgy calls for human touching of the bread in the fraction rite, for receiving communion from lay ministers, and the practice of a common cup. I have heard many discussions about the AIDS epidemic and such practices. It is fascinating to recall that the long practice of receiving the wafer directly on the tongue from the priest's hands seemed unexceptionable. But we are far more aware of germs and health fears than ever before, due in part to popular ideas. However unfounded some of these ideas may be, the fear is still real for many. Yet rarely is this addressed directly. Often the fear is exaggerated because matters such as the common cup hide unconscious reactions to the servers.

At a different level of our consciousness lies the fear of commitment. Specifically I have in mind the resistance to full liturgical participation because one senses that, if he or she were to truly engage in what the texts and songs and prayers and actions proclaim and symbolize, a deeper conversion would be required. Unlike the fear of catching something from fellow worshippers, this fear is related to our loss of control, or of deep personal change which would bring disorientation and pain. As I overheard someone say in a radio talk-show recently, "Why should I give myself to an institution that can't live up to its own beliefs?" Our contemporary culture tends to form us in self-protective distance and even cynicism. To hear the readings in the Sunday liturgy, and the homilies, and to enter into the praying of the eucharistic prayer, and the non-verbal actions - all this does challenge the unnamed, distancing attitudes we bring. But deep in the psyche there lurks a fearful ambivalence: we want to control our commitments, yet we also yearn for God.

At the heart of Christian liturgy is the reality of suffering, death and resurrection. A primal fear is, of course, of death itself. Because the liturgy, if well celebrated, confronts us with our mortality, with the brokenness of the world, and with the paradox of dying and rising, we may well fear coming too close to such truth. Many popular religious developments have appealed to "contemporary worship" patterns which affirm life, and which rarely confront the difficult aspects of the Christian Gospel and the Paschal mystery. Having spoken with some church leaders who favor such developments, I have the sense that they know about our inveterate fear of death and of our death-denying "eternal youth" consumer images. Unfortunately we have often stressed only the suffering side of the Christian message which is so easily construed as life-denying. The fear of death may be denied or ignored, but it finally must be confronted. To this we will return.
Having spoken of fear of commitment and of change, we might now think of these as converging in our fear of loss of identity. For example, the struggles to recognize a more inclusive spirit in language and in music have created much resistance. Awakening to the fact that the church is comprised of many voices, many cultures, many diverse patterns, is both threatening and promising. This marvelous unfolding of the global sense of church often produces a counter-reaction, summed up in the question: "If we do this, who are we? Who are we becoming?" The use of music from outside the local tradition or repertory of a particular assembly is a test case. Singing another culture's or people's music is a crossing over out of our own encoded identity. This touches upon a very difficult issue—the ethnocentricity of liturgical traditions. The broadening of the church's vision in and through our appropriate use of culturally diverse elements will generate inhibitions born of our suspicion and even fear of what is "other" to our self-identity. In this sense we must honestly name those fears and suspicions, but also look for the manner and quality of Christian liturgy which invites us always beyond ourselves into a true catholicity.

Finally, though by no means exhaustively, we must mention fear of embarrassment. It is a rare person who does not wish to avoid being embarrassed, whether by ignorance or inappropriate behavior. Many who come to liturgy draw back from wholehearted participation for fear of making a mistake. This is especially noticeable in singing, but it also is the case in the non-verbal languages of liturgical participation such as gesture and posture. Not knowing what to do in a particular rite or procession, or how best to join in a ritual action can be quite inhibiting. At the pastoral level of educating an assembly into the essentials, this may be one of the most important first steps in addressing our range of fearfulness. While all fear of potential embarrassment can never be removed, particularly if there are many visitors to our liturgies, good liturgical formation is absolutely crucial, combined with a gracious, inviting spirit. In this sense authentic Christian hospitality can banish such inhibiting fears.

How may the church's liturgy meet such fears? Joseph Gelineau reminded us some time ago that "only if we come to the liturgy without hopes or fears, without longings or hunger, will the rite symbolize nothing and remain an indifferent or curious 'object.'"2 Certainly the RCIA could provide one such context for new Christians to consider their fears. In the larger educational and catechetical pattern of parish life, other forums could be made available—in confirmation and adult classes, for example. We are to bring ourselves with all our hopes and fears to the assembly. This means the risk of vulnerability to one another, to the divine presence, and to hidden parts of ourselves. As the Letter to the Hebrews claims, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." But such awe and wonder and reverence is not nourished when the discussion of human fears is left out of our formation in faith. The "innocent" Christmas carol, "O Little Town of Bethlehem," may contain a profound truth in singing, "the hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight."

In recent conversations with a range of local parishes concerning changes in style and form of liturgical music, I have overheard it said, "if only we were invited and shown the value of these changes, rather than forced to do certain things, it would be so different." There is an important clue here for addressing resistance born of fear. Sometimes the way liturgical change in any of its specific dimensions

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is introduced breeds anger and irritation. To be invited and, at the same time, shown appropriate skills for participation is very different from a “take it or leave it or else” style. Many people would welcome learning how to welcome persons with disabilities, or “outsiders” to the parish. Fear of the other is characteristically related to not having any experience of “being with” the other. Here experiences of meeting outside the room of liturgical celebration are crucial to the sense of hospitality and unfearful freedom of welcoming and greeting such persons in the liturgical assembly.

Many who resist or wish to severely limit the ministry of women have not come to terms with their fear of ecclesial and personal shifts of images of leadership. Exposure to mature and competent women leaders is crucial, and can often be begun in ways that are non-threatening – as in leading the liturgy of the hours or liturgies with the sick and dying. The very presence of those who are ill or mentally or physically disabled in the liturgy can also, over time, shift a congregation’s self-image, and gradually remove the feelings of fear of association.

Addressing the range of fearfulness we bring to the liturgy might be put this way: the point is to create a maturity of perception and experience within the core of the worshipping community. Those of us called to exercise specific ministries in the assembly – from presider to lector, from cantor to acolyte to choir member – we must encourage such an ethos of hospitality and care for liturgical formation. Those of us who preach and preside have a particular responsibility to be aware of the fears we have touched upon. Honest biblical and pastorally informed homilies will assist. Liturgies graciously celebrated with integrity and transparency to the grace of God in Christ will, over time, cast out such fears.

We are told in the New Testament that perfect love casts out fear. The whole canon of Christian liturgy, and especially the Sunday assembly, can meet us exactly in our fearfulness. Faithful liturgy discloses God’s own life with us, and thus has the power to open up levels of human being we cannot by ourselves open. Our participation in the liturgy, even with our self-limitations, makes available to us the fact that God knows and accompanies us through all the changes of life, as the various rites of passage show. Even more, God is present to all the wide ranges of historical change. Our temporality is known and taken up into God – but it does ask of us that we acknowledge mortality, malleability of the will, and confusion in the midst of change.

The question of honest naming of our human fears, from fear of intimacy and loss of identity, through fear of suffering and death, is answered by the connection liturgy makes with real life. Attending to the psalms would be a revelation to many, for they speak with honesty to God about our human fears as well as release from fear to gratitude and praise. But this calls upon a communal willingness to become present to God at the font, in the Word, and at the table of the Lord. This takes time, patience, and living into the symbols presented and enacted in liturgy. A community that seeks justice and creates a maturity of honest, human love before the mystery of God’s grace can speak to our fearful hearts. The invitation and the preparation for such participation must share in the love of God the liturgy itself signifies and symbolizes. Love poured out lavishly in biblical story, song and sacrament has this power. To belong that deeply to one another as the Body of Christ means that the hopes and fears of all the years are indeed met in the incarnate gift of God who knows us as we are.
Fear of Disease

Human beings have a quite reasonable desire not to get sick, particularly with serious or long-term or life-threatening illnesses. Most take what are generally considered to be appropriate precautions to keep themselves and others healthy.

At the same time, however, most people realize that they really cannot avoid getting sick sometime during their lives – sickness is part of the human condition. They know that the common cold, for example, is part of the lives of most persons. In addition, many know that some infections are beneficial in that they stimulate the immune system. And many people are not consistent with respect to health and disease. They may express reasonable concern about certain diseases, but they may also neglect their health in other ways, for example, by smoking.

Some people, furthermore, exhibit what seems to be an unreasonable fear of disease. They may not know much about the disease they fear, the precautions they take may in fact be ineffective, and there may be no serious danger of their contracting the disease – and yet such fear may become such a large part of their lives that it interferes with family or social relationships or with work.

There are individual differences in susceptibility to various human diseases, in some cases based on the state of one's immune system. There may also be individual differences in what is considered reasonable and unreasonable with respect to concern about disease. The question of how to welcome persons with seriously impaired immune systems who are unusually susceptible to catching someone else's infection is a serious one but beyond the scope of the present discussion.

Sometimes, finally, fear of disease may be a kind of mask that conceals deeper and sometimes entirely unconscious issues. This point is considered further below.

To be more specific, fear of disease has been related to specific diseases as they have become important in the life and consciousness of individuals and of society. In the middle ages, plague was such a concern. In the twentieth century, people have reacted against tuberculosis, polio, influenza, the common cold, herpes simplex, and most recently AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome).

In earlier times, causes of diseases and mechanisms of transmission of infectious diseases were largely a mystery. In the course of this century, however, we have come to know a great deal about causation and transmission, though this has not always been communicated effectively to the general population. Though specialists know that some diseases are infectious and others are not, and that some infectious diseases are passed on through the air, by touch, by contaminated water supplies, by sexual contact, etc., the general public may not be clear regarding these matters.

Disease and the Liturgy

Fear of disease has the potential to diminish full participation in liturgical celebrations. As noted elsewhere in this issue, this may in part be related to fear of intimacy.

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However, fear of disease has its own specific characteristics, and one can imagine several types of situations.

Some members of the liturgical assembly may be afraid of catching one or another disease from other members of the assembly. This may lead the former to diminish their participation in the liturgy. This may take the form of not coming to church at all, or not sitting near other persons, or not touching others in the sign of peace, or not sharing in communion from the cup.1

Other members of the assembly may suffer from some disease — whether chronic or short-term, life-threatening or less serious. They may limit their own participation in the liturgy out of sensitivity to the feelings of others, or because others (the “healthy”) exert pressure on them to withdraw in one way or another. This situation too may lead some to abstain from communion from the cup, from touching others in the sign of peace, from sitting near others, or from coming to church at all.

Persons with diseases or conditions that interfere with the normal functioning of the immune system may be more susceptible than usual to infection. They may feel a need to protect themselves from pathogenic bacteria or viruses that might be transmitted through the air, by the hands, or through a common cup. Thus they may limit their participation in the ways already named.

Finally, fear of disease may lead pastoral ministers to withhold the cup from the assembly as a whole, or in extreme cases, to cancel all liturgical celebrations.

Hidden Issues

Apprehension about getting sick may, consciously or unconsciously, not be the real or primary cause of fear, but may mask some deeper or hidden fears.

In some cases, fear of getting sick conceals the fear of death and dying. Seeing someone who is sick, especially if the disease is likely to lead to death, reminds us that we are mortal and someday will die. This is not uncommon with respect to cancer, for example. In such cases it is, in the long run, best to name and come to grips with one’s appreciation of mortality and fear of dying.

Hidden fears may also focus on persons or groups of persons who are symbolized by particular diseases. In years past, tuberculosis was associated with poor people and hence might represent a threat to people who were better off economically and whose social status could be threatened by poverty. In more recent times, herpes was, for some, a symbol of sexual permissiveness. At the present time, AIDS is especially associated with homosexuality and homosexual persons, and this is threatening to some.

Another hidden fear may have to do with lay or female ministers of communion. Some seem to feel that such ministers are not as “pure” as an ordained male minister, and find it difficult to approach them for communion. Having lay ministers wash their hands in public, just before communion, is both a sign and a kind of remedy for this feeling.

Gordon Lathrop² and Frank Senn³ have reminded us of the threat of uncleanness and disorder – of “dirt” – that is particularly strong in the United States and Canada. Lathrop explains as follows:

But the fear of the cup may very well be not fear of disease but of “pollution.” That may be why the facts do not dispel the fear. Many people in our culture have grown up thinking that body fluids were “yukky,” not just because of what they learned about the unseen “germs” but because of the symbolic ways these fluids were avoided in the networks of little acts with which we all define society and ourselves. “Yuk! I don’t want your germs!” the child, hard at work on the sometimes territorial task of self-definition, says to playmate or sibling. And in a semiscientific culture the term “germs” can be an accepted way of talking about a symbolic interaction.

The anthropologist Mary Douglas (in Purity and Danger⁴) points to bodily fluids outside the body (or nail parings or other disconnected parts) as archaic symbols of pollution, not because of any scientific knowledge but because of the experience that they are outside their purpose. Body fluids, spat out, for example, are vestiges of the human being, now fallen into disorder. In this connection human “purity” is about order which is about meaning.

It may be because of this ancient symbolism that some families have never shared a glass, at the table or in the bathroom. The order and meaning of our culture has given greater priority to the individual, and that individual has sometimes felt constrained to work out the boundaries of individuality strongly: my property, my organized world, my glass, my food, myself. There have been great gains in that individualization, one of the hallmarks of the modern world. But left alone, unaddressed by contrary ways of seeing the world, it easily becomes a kind of illness, supported by unyielding ideas of private property, or by understandings of the nature of success, or, in this case, by a pseudo-science of “germs.”

The gospel speaks of the salvation of our whole selves, as they are ordered and as they are disordered. It speaks of our salvation in a community, or a communal identity, and of God’s identification with the ungodly and the outsiders. The gospel calls the over-individualized contemporary view into a wider world. The ancient Christian symbol of the shared cup can be one of the ways that contemporary North American social structure is gently but firmly addressed with another worldview.

² Lathrop, 162-163.
³ Senn, 24-26.
Responding to Fear of Disease

First, in the liturgy as in daily life, all should act with prudence, common sense, courtesy and sensitivity.

Second, with respect to the cup, we may exhibit the common precautions of turning the cup after each one drinks and of wiping the rim with a purificator. This has been demonstrated to reduce the chance of infection by certain microorganisms. In addition, it looks cleaner and so responds to our fear of dirt.

Third, we should become informed about scientific and medical knowledge relative to disease causation and transmission. One type of knowledge is epidemiological. This asks, what is the evidence for transmission of herpes, AIDS, etc., when one communicant has such a disease. Extensive studies of this subject have shown that such transmission is rare or nonexistent — at least so far.

The following article, regarding AIDS and the common cup, is an attempt to provide scientific and medical information that may be helpful to pastoral ministers.

To give another example, in 1985 the U.S. Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy asked the U.S. government’s Centers for Disease Control for its opinion regarding the safety of communion from the cup. The reply was typical of the scientific method: there was no evidence that AIDS was transmitted through the common cup, but they could not guarantee that such transmission could never occur.5

Finally, Frank Senn suggests that fear is sometimes best dealt with through the example of those who are not so fearful — or who wish to testify to greater values. In a Lutheran context, he suggests that the presider commune last, thereby being open to the maximum risk of infection through the cup, and through example stating the belief that communion from the cup is not a grave danger.6

Communion from the Cup

As already indicated, fear of disease often is expressed in relation to communion from the cup, even though the danger of catching disease through touch and through the air may be more serious dangers.

In addition to the points already considered, there are certain matters that are more particularly Roman Catholic issues. Sad to say, communion from the cup is not yet the normative practice in many parishes. This lack may have various bases, for example, a feeling of novelty or discomfort among people who are not used to it and have not been adequately prepared. Others may feel that it is too much trouble — that it is not possible or too much work to gather the required number of communion ministers on a regular basis, or that the size of the congregation or configuration of the church building make it too difficult.7

5 “Communion Under Both Kinds . . .”
6 Senn, 22.
There may also be a desire – surely unconscious – to maintain the cup as a clerical prerogative.

These may be real difficulties or they may simply be excuses. Likewise, fear of catching some disease through communion from the cup may really be an excuse for not offering the cup to the people.

A more serious issue is a failure to appreciate the liturgical, symbolic and theological significance of communion from the cup. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal says it well:

Holy communion has a more complete form as a sign when it is received under both kinds. For in this manner of reception a fuller light shines on the sign of the eucharistic banquet. Moreover there is a clearer expression of that will by which the new and everlasting covenant is ratified in the blood of the Lord and of the relationship of the eucharistic banquet to the eschatological banquet in the Father's kingdom. (no. 240)

Years ago this Bulletin reminded us that "communion under both forms is the way that Jesus gave us this sacrament: no amount of contrary practice or legislation in the past can change this unalterable gift of Jesus to his Church."

The May 1992 issue of Assembly, a publication of the Notre Dame Center for Pastoral Liturgy, has "The Cup of Blessing" as its theme. In a particularly fine article, Edward Foley considers the issue of sharing the cup in some depth. He explains:

The rich symbolism of the cup . . . does not simply mean accepting one more holy "thing," i.e., Christ's blood. Rather, drinking from the cup is accepting a way of being in the world, of sacrificial living. Drinking of the cup is an invitation to receive Christ's body on his terms, not on ours; it means, like Jesus, accepting death as the way to life.

We are not saved simply by eating special food marked with the name of Christ. Rather, our salvation comes from entering the covenant forged in his death – drinking from the same cup of self-surrender and so becoming his self-giving presence [body] in the world. Sharing the eucharistized cup symbolizes, as strongly as any other ritual action, our willingness to be in the world the way Jesus was – as love, self-surrender, mercy and justice. There is no substitute. To the extent that we deny the faithful the cup, so do we deny them the power and poetry of this critical action that makes us one in the saving death of Christ.

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AIDS
and the Common Cup*

Matthew Johnson, Ronald K.B. Pearce and Richard Mathias

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The facts about AIDS infection are clear. The Human Immuno-deficiency Virus (HIV) is spread by the exchange of infected bodily fluids. This happens most often in the setting of unprotected sexual intercourse, the transfusion of blood and blood products, the sharing of hypodermic needles, and transmission from mother to child in utero or during birth.\(^2\)

In spite of clear statements about the modes of infection, many experience lingering concern that infection may occur through more casual contact. This is not surprising; after all, if anything in our era instills fear and misunderstanding it is AIDS, a presently incurable disease of recent origin.

As the AIDS crisis deepens, the plain answer "no" may not prove adequate in allaying this fear. As we seek to offer an informed response to this pastoral question, lay leaders and clergy may find they need more detailed information. The primary question in respect to the common cup is whether HIV infection can occur through contact with infected saliva. The following digest of recent research on HIV in saliva may help in responding to this question.\(^3\)

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* Presented August 1993, to the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation Conference, held at Untermarchtal in Germany. This article discusses the Human Immuno-deficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). The information here presented reflects an understanding of those subjects current at time of presentation. This article should be interpreted in light of any subsequent information about these health risks: Readers are advised to consult their local public health or communicable diseases authorities about these risks.

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Thanks to Carmel Anderson, MD (Dermatologist), Ted McLean MD (Communicable Diseases Medical Consultant), Phil Sestak, MD (AIDS care specialist), The Anglican Diocese of New Westminster, The Ven. Dennis Pople and Mr. Barry Foord.

2 Sexual intercourse here indicates vaginal and anal penetrative sex, and perhaps oral sex under rare circumstance. Rarely, infection also has occurred through transplant of an infected organ, artificial insemination with infected semen, the breast milk of an infected mother, and open cuts or sores which contact infected blood or body fluids. Instruments used in dentistry and subcutaneous procedures such as acupuncture and tattooing might cause infection if not properly sterilized.

3 Much of what follows is derived from articles published between 1988 and early 1993.
Epidemiology

At present there is substantial epidemiological evidence that infection with HIV has not occurred through oral contact with the saliva of HIV-positive individuals – whether contact is direct or mediated by an exposed surface or liquid.

Examples of this kind of non-infectious casual contact include saliva transferred in a kiss, on the rim of a chalice, or in a liquid such as wine. This is reassuring, for these modes of contact correspond to our liturgical use of a common cup. Given the comprehensive and meticulous attention to the epidemiology of AIDS in the last decade – particularly to the vectors and modes of HIV transmission, these data are highly reliable.

Furthermore to our point, two 1988 studies focus specifically on the question of HIV transmission via the common cup. Under the usual circumstances of communion, there was no evidence of possible infection through contact with saliva. In asserting that the saliva of HIV-infected persons has not caused infection, explanations as to why this is so must be as accurate as possible. Thus, in the interest of thoroughness, some additional facts should be noted.

**Number One: HIV is present in saliva in very low concentrations and then only in some HIV-infected persons.**

It is significant that HIV is only infrequently recovered from the saliva of infected persons. Two recent studies (1993 & 1992) detected infectious HIV in twenty-one percent and in one percent of HIV+ individuals respectively.

If and when the virus can be isolated in the saliva of an HIV+ person, viral loads are very low. Low HIV concentrations are the norm, not only in saliva, but also in perspiration and tears, none of which have been implicated in HIV infection. By way of contrast, the known vectors of HIV – blood, semen and vaginal fluids – characteristically contain much higher viral concentrations.

When the virus is present in saliva, an inhibitory action of saliva itself upon HIV may play a further role in reducing the already low potential of infectivity.

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Number Two: Mucosa within the mouth, nose and oesophagus are not receptive to HIV.

For HIV infection to occur, the virus must bind with a receptor (or combination of receptors) on the surface of a host cell, fuse with the cell membrane, and then penetrate that cell. What is known of the capacities and characteristics of HIV suggests that infection is not possible through contact of the virus with intact mucosa of the mouth, nose, and oesophagus, inasmuch as the mucosa which constitute the surface membranes in these regions have cell surfaces to which HIV does not bind. (In contrast to the oral and nasal mucosa, HIV will bind with the mucosa which constitute the epithelium of the cervix, rectum and urethra – all of which are susceptible avenues of infection.)

This explanation is supported by the observation that coughing, sneezing, kissing, and the sharing of utensils regularly expose oral and nasal mucosa to a variety of viruses and organisms. In the case of certain viruses, e.g. influenza or the common cold, which can bind with oral and nasal mucosa, this type of contact affords a viable route of infection. This kind of casual exposure is not, however, a viable route of infection when contacting the saliva of HIV+ persons. And this is borne out in studies of subjects not otherwise at risk for infection, who nonetheless were located in household or in clinical settings that placed them in prolonged or repeated contact with HIV+ persons. Although these individuals were exposed repeatedly to infected saliva, e.g. via contaminated eating utensils or dental instruments, they did not become infected with HIV.

Accuracy

A number of popular pseudo-explanations are advanced as to why HIV is not spread through use of the common cup. For instance, it sometimes is suggested that HIV in saliva is killed by contact with air, with the alcohol of the wine, or as it drops to room temperature. It also is suggested that use of the purificator helps to prevent the spread of the virus. Mechanisms such as these may well play a role in limiting the spread of other viruses and infectious bacteria. Yet, with respect to HIV, none of these contingent mechanisms are decisive in preventing infection.


12 S. King, "Memorandum: Risk of HIV infection and the communion cup," Toronto Hospital for Sick Children, 1991. King provides a bibliography of "studies of the risk of HIV infection among household contacts of patients with AIDS." This includes the following studies, among others:


For when HIV is present in saliva, viral concentrations are very low, and, in any event, neither oral contact nor ingestion of saliva afford viable routes of infection.

It is crucial that pseudo-explanations be abolished. When tendered, they obscure the real grounds we have for confidence in the safety of the common cup. Far from allaying concerns, these non-explanations invite criticism and may engender unnecessary fear. The purported effects of air, alcohol, room temperature or the purificator are based in contingency. They presuppose, for example, that in circumstances of communion, saliva always is exposed to air, always dilutes readily in wine, always drops to room temperature, always is removed by the purificator. Obviously, there is no guarantee that these mechanisms would function unfailingly in every situation.

In respect to the common cup, lack of infectivity is based, not on destruction of the virus, but on the lack of a viable vector and mode of infection.

In spite of the compelling and massive epidemiologic data, the theoretical possibility of HIV infection remains the subject of conjectural discussion in the medical literature. As methods of research develop, and as further epidemiologic data are gathered and analyzed, the status question is also develops. As resource persons to dioceses and provinces in which they serve, liturgists may find it useful to follow ongoing developments in HIV research so that they can continue to offer an informed and reasoned response to clergy and laypersons who inquire about the possibility of HIV infection through participation in the common cup.

Conclusion

Given the data currently available, the common cup, primary modality of communion under the species of wine, poses no known threat of HIV infection.
Fear of Intimacy

Leo Klug

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To appreciate how fear of intimacy might be an impediment to full participation in liturgical celebrations, we need first to consider the primary celebrant of the liturgy, the assembly. Though a unity, the liturgical assembly is made up of many individual persons, who, in the liturgical setting, are bound together by special kinds of relationships. We may therefore consider the quality of the relationships that exist among those making up a given assembly. We may also consider actual or potential obstacles that make achieving the optimal experience of assembly difficult. We therefore need to consider both intimacy and the fear of intimacy.

One can ask: Is it reasonable to suggest that the relationships among worshippers should be intimate relationships, e.g., close, familiar, mutual, trusting and loving? Inter-personal intimacy of any kind calls for an openness to mutuality, a willingness to know and be known. To be intimate is to be consistently authentic in one’s relationships with others. For most of us this is a risky venture because it leaves us vulnerable to rejection and pain. Even in relationships sanctioned by formal commitment, such as marriage or religious life, most people struggle to realize a deeper intimacy.

Hence, is the experience of some type of inter-personal intimacy among several hundred people gathered for worship (many of whom typically are strangers to one another) even possible? Alternatively, is it valid to suggest that a group of people gathered for worship may not really be an assembly at all unless the relationships among them are appropriately intimate? Can a worshipping assembly lacking tangible inter-personal intimacy really be and do what the liturgy is intended to be and do? These are the kinds of questions we wish to consider here.

Intimacy in Personal Relationships

Writers who discuss intimacy make distinctions among intra-personal, inter-personal and human-divine intimacy. However, the major focus with respect to the liturgical assembly is inter-personal intimacy. In addition, most presentations
tend to focus on the intimacy of man/woman relationships, especially within marriage. The gist of these discussions seems to be that all humans have a deep and abiding thirst for deeper intimacy with other humans, and at the same time express a fear of further intimacy.²

The fundamental variable in D. R. Ollen's discussion of intimacy is sharing. Without sharing, at several levels, inter-personal intimacy is simply not possible, despite the strong drive toward intimacy which weaves its way through every dynamic of life. The thirst for intimacy, according to Ollen, is a fundamental human energy. The process of sharing is how intimacy happens. Mutuality is the other important factor; the sharing must be mutual.³

Building on Martin Buber, D. Barnard describes inter-personal intimacy in these words:

... the "I" of the "I and thou" is different from the "I" of "I and it." The "I" of "I and it" lives within the roles, tasks, and preoccupations that define us as separate individuals. These markers of individuality often function defensively, protecting us from a full awareness of our dependencies and interdependencies as human beings.⁴

The titles of some best-selling books on intimacy suggest the kinds of concerns that are being explored by the authors: Called to Intimacy;⁵ The Dance of Intimacy;⁶ The Adventure of Intimacy;⁷ Intimacy and Emotional Living;⁸ Urgent Longings;⁹ Struggle for Intimacy;¹⁰ The Death of Intimacy;¹¹ The Escape from Intimacy;¹² The Recovery of Intimacy;¹³ Intimate Strangers;¹⁴ Overcoming Roadblocks to Intimacy;¹⁵ and Redemptive Intimacy.¹⁶

It is clear from these titles that the topic of intimacy evokes great ambivalence: we are deeply drawn to it, and at the same time reluctant to experience it more deeply.¹⁷ In healthy intimacy these contrasting needs are balanced out and, as

⁵ G. A. Maloney, Called to Intimacy (New York: Alba House 1983).
⁹ T. J. Tyrrell, Urgent Longings (Mystic CT: Twenty-Third Publications 1994).
¹⁰ J. G. Wolitz, Struggle for Intimacy (Pompany Beach FL: Health Communications 1985).
¹² A. Schaef, Escape from Intimacy.
¹³ S. Muto, Late Have I Loved Thee: The Recovery of Intimacy (New York: Crossroad 1995).
¹⁷ Brown, The Death of Intimacy.
T. J. Tyrrell notes, intimacy involves closeness with others, while retaining the freedom to be separate.\textsuperscript{18} Subsumed in many of the above titles, and discussed in most of the works mentioned, is the topic of fear of intimacy. Many different components of the fear of intimacy are dealt with by these authors, including fears of failure, domination, closeness, boundary violation, self-revelation, privacy, competition, openness, sexuality, loneliness, sharing feelings, losing control, commitment, and rejection. In a book on this topic Tyrrell suggests that the most important of all the components making up fear of intimacy is the fear of infatuation, e.g., the fear of being overwhelmed by the allure of intimacy.\textsuperscript{19}

Social scientists have even developed a formal measurement tool called the \textit{Fear of Intimacy Scale}, which has been used in a number of research projects as well as in therapy.\textsuperscript{20} Measuring levels of the fear of intimacy among various groups of people provides insight into the impact such fears can have on significant relationships, in one to one and in group settings.

\section*{"Liturgical Intimacy"}

It is rare to find the actual term "liturgical intimacy" used, but it is surprising how many authors at least implicitly support this concept. Often such authors are decrying the lockstep unity found in so many liturgical celebrations, where the assembly is "unified" primarily in the words spoken and the postures assumed. Such celebrations are often supported by a presider/star, who "conducts" what is basically "audience liturgy,"\textsuperscript{21} based on an "entertainment model."\textsuperscript{22} Most of these authors argue that Christian worship demands much more, suggesting that intimacy during liturgical celebrations is both a gospel and a human imperative.\textsuperscript{23}

The following notes suggest how widely the subject of intimacy comes up in the contemporary liturgical literature.

- In a recent article on liturgical renewal, C. Folson concludes that the \textit{Catechism of the Catholic Church}'s section on liturgy has been heavily influenced by the writings of Jean Corbon. The main thrust of Corbon's theology is that the liturgy is essentially Trinitarian in nature. This Trinitarian theme seems to be highly compatible with the notion of liturgical intimacy.\textsuperscript{24} His position is

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{18}Tyrrell, \textit{The Adventure of Intimacy}, 58.
\bibitem{19}Tyrrell, \textit{Urgent Longings}.
\bibitem{20}C. J. Descutner and M. H. Thelen, "Development and Validation of a Fear of Intimacy Scale," \textit{Psychological Assessment} 3 (June 1991) 218-225.
\bibitem{24}Westley, \textit{Redemptive Intimacy}, 105.
\end{thebibliography}
supported by Karl Rahner's well-known lament that despite our professions of faith in the Trinity, we function largely as monotheists. In his book entitled *Intimacy*, Henri Nouwen raises and addresses the question: How can one experience intimacy during times of worship and prayer? Part of his response is a critique of our liturgy, including its failure to develop the intimacy and sense of community found in Pentecostal services.

• An American Jesuit shares some personal reflections on his struggle to experience intimacy in Sunday worship.

• An Irish writer shares a similar experience, focusing on her deep thirst for greater intimacy at Sunday celebrations.

• In a recent column Ron Rolheiser discusses the role of ritual silence in enhancing community and intimacy during worship.

• H. Doohan argues that the liturgies of the Corinthian Christians were highly intimate experiences.

• Ron Lewinski interviewed hundreds of American Catholics and found a deeply felt need for more intimate worship among them.

• M. King points out how often we subvert liturgical reform and speaks of the "great gasps of longing for ingredients often missing," implying that intimacy is one of them.

• In her book on the recovery of intimacy, Susan Muto refers to intimacy as a grace, "a sense of oneness, of union and communion, with the divine mystery we call God."

Many similar explicit and implicit references to liturgical intimacy are found in recent issues of pastoral periodicals.

29 E. Cunney, "Re-imaging the Sunday liturgy," The Furrow (March 1996) 144-147.
33 Muto, *Late Have I Loved Thee*.
34 L.M. Ventline, "Five Ways to Put Out the Welcome Mat," Pastoral Life (July/August 1996) 16-19.
38 R. McGlory, "God Grant Us the Grace to be One," U.S. Catholic (November 1995) 38-38.
In his exciting book entitled *Redemptive Intimacy*, D. Westley argues that the Christian good news is a clear call to intimacy with God and with one another, whether at work or at prayer. He is unequivocal in arguing that the experience of intimacy is really an experience of redemption. One reflection of his position is the following passage:

Jesus of Nazareth incarnated that truth. His dream, of the Coming Kingdom or Reign of God, is the continuing incarnation of that truth in all of humankind. Taste and see how good intimacy is! That tasting is not a taste upon the tongue. It is a tasting of something humanly good, of something which is wondrous honey on the tongue and sweet song in the heart. That something is God – as experienced in and through the intimacy of persons. That something is redemption, for only intimate encounter can deliver us from our loneliness, isolation and alienation. Only intimacy heals us by assuaging our doubts about God's forgiveness and empowering us to forgive one another. Only in intimacy do we “encounter” the one who makes intimacy possible — the Great Self in whom all being is rooted and finds redemption. If intimacy is not redemptive, then nothing in this life can be.35

While the term “liturgical intimacy” strikes us as strange, the notion that there should be inter-personal intimacy among the members of a worshipping assembly is not new. Many liturgists explicitly and implicitly contend that the experience of intimacy among worshippers is one of the more important teachings of Vatican II.

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**Fear of Intimacy in Liturgical Celebration**

In a book dedicated to a discussion of infatuation as an invitation to human and divine intimacy, Tyrrell poses an important question:

> When we speak of intimacy with each other and with God, we generally mean radically different things. But, is the experience of human intimacy so unrelated to the call to intimacy with God issued by our brother, Jesus Christ?36

We could ask similar questions about our fears of human intimacy on the one hand, and our fears of liturgical intimacy on the other. Are they distinct, different fears, or are they similar, related experiences? Is it possible that we carry some of our fears of human intimacy over into our liturgical celebrations? For example:

- Can our ambivalence about deeper intimacy during family meals be carried over to liturgical meals?
- Can our fear of meeting new neighbours become a fear of meeting strangers at church?
- Can our fear of I-thou relationships in marriage surface in liturgical settings?
- Is it reasonable to expect gender-based fears of intimacy, commonly experienced in work and social settings, to be evident in worshipping assemblies?

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36 Tyrrell, *Urgent Longings*, 11.
Why would our common defenses against deeper intimacy not also be operational during liturgical gatherings, e.g., addictions, fear of silence, the myth that togetherness equals intimacy, our culture of voyeurism, etc.?

As was noted earlier, our basic fear of intimacy manifests itself in a wide variety of ways. However, at its root it is a fear of vulnerability and rejection which comes with closeness, sharing and self-revelation. Perhaps it would be helpful to reflect on some of the typical moments during Sunday worship when fear of intimacy may be evident.

It is not uncommon for many Catholics to arrive at church early and sit quietly in their pews, waiting for things to begin. On the other hand, it is just as common for people to make a last-second entrance. Do these practices perhaps reflect some fear of intimacy? Are they ways of avoiding contact, however unconscious that may be?

Verbal "small talk" is an essential first step in the experience of intimacy for most humans, whatever the setting may be. Why don't more church-goers chat and share stories of their lives before Mass begins? Why don't they do that in the parking lot, because that's where hospitality and intimacy really begin? Such experiences can't be delegated to specific ministries, but are characteristics of a worshipping assembly. Is it possible that the reluctance many have to verbally connect with one another before the entrance procession reflects the "avoidance component" identified in research on the fear of intimacy?

The physical layout of most of our church buildings is not conducive to intimate relationships. Typically, there are rows of pews allowing for little eye contact among worshippers. Gabe Huck reminds us of Aidan Kavanagh's powerful observation that doing liturgy with pews in the room is like playing basketball with the bleachers on the court. It's extremely difficult to be inter-personally intimate without eye contact. People are unlikely to risk sharing with fellow worshippers when all they can see is the backs of people in front of them. In too many parishes too many people enter the church as strangers and leave the same way. "Intimacy" and "strangers" are incompatible.

Catholics probably complain more about the preaching they hear in church than almost anything else. Could a latent fear of intimacy help explain why so much of our preaching is so analytical and exegetical, and the language often non-inclusive and lacking what Norris would likely call "intimate English." Why are the proclaimed scriptures not related more directly and more intimately to the everyday struggles and fears of the assembly? Why, in this day of lay preachers, do so many of them follow the old models of remote lecturing instead of intimate sharing?

Why don't we use more personal language, and more personal content, in the prayers of the faithful? Why are the petitions often "canned," instead of reflecting the assembly's joys and sorrows? Are we afraid of being intimate, afraid to share the pain in our hearts, afraid to really pray for the help we need? To use Rahner's famous phrase, we must bring the liturgy of the world to the liturgy of the word.

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Andrew Greeley argues that, of all people, Catholics ought to be especially good at doing this. Cunney names the issue well when he states that few people leave church talking about the homily, but there are always discussions about real events such as deaths. Is fear of intimacy an issue here?

Why, after so many years, do so many worshippers still struggle to find meaning in the greeting of peace? We've long since done away with using the more intimate term, the kiss of peace! Even when a good rationale has been provided for this practice, why does it remain a perfunctory and even furtive gesture for so many? McClory argues that the greeting of peace is a great and intimate symbol of our oneness in Christ. "It's a chance to look another person in the eye and acknowledge that we are more than fellow church-goers, more than kinsfolk. We are each a unique, mutually supportive part of one body." On the other hand, many of us have had the experience of even a token greeting of peace transforming an assembly and creating a tangible sense of intimacy that seemed to be absent moments before. Are we perhaps frightened, consciously or not, by the "intimacy potential" of this great moment in the liturgy?

Many experiences of intimacy have a strong physical component, involving the "swapping of germs," among other things. Do many of us bring a certain squeamishness about physical dimensions of intimacy to the sharing of the cup and the breaking of the bread at communion? Drinking from the same cup and eating from the same broken loaf are highly intimate actions, literally and figuratively. It seems evident that many worshippers find it almost impossible to bridge the gap between what they believe and what they feel about these practices.

The lack of intimate eye contact between those ministering the bread and wine and the recipients of same may not be unrelated to fear of intimacy. One author suggests that, theologically and humanly speaking, such eye contact is perhaps the most intimate moment in the entire liturgy.

It is widely accepted that real intimacy in human relationships is not possible unless there is equality among those concerned. Relationships that display little authentic equality are often characterized by fear of intimacy among those involved. Such issues can easily be carried forward into liturgical celebrations. Do the members of a typical worship service really believe that the assembly is the celebrant? If so, why the inequality within the assembly? Allowing for the special role of the priest-presenter, why so often is such undue deference given to that role if there is to be equality among all forming the assembly? Perhaps it is simply a lack of appreciation of liturgical theology that undergirds such inequality. However, another possibility is that a fear of the intimacy that flows out of equality is a salient issue. Like it or not, human persons are the primary symbols in our liturgical celebrations.

To symbolize and to make real equality among the members of the liturgical assembly more real, Norris suggests that we re-think the current practice of the

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42 Cunney, "Re-imaging the Sunday Liturgy," 144-147.
43 McClory, "God Grant Us the Grace to be One," 38.
44 Stempneiwski, "Eye Contact," 10.
45 Norris, "The Body Language of Liturgy" 5.
47 Seasoltz, "What Sort of Community Celebrates," 459.
priest-presider facing the congregation during the canon, and go back to an earlier tradition where everyone faced the same way. As was noted earlier, mutual sharing based on radical equality is at the heart of both human and liturgical intimacy. McClory reminds us that the Old Testament notion of "blessing" means the full development of our potential; however, the New Testament notion of "grace" means the recognition that we already are all one.

Conclusion

It seems reasonable to expect that Christian worship, which celebrates the incredible incamational intimacy between God and all people, should itself be an intimate experience. The worshipping assembly is a human reality, pulsating with the Divine Presence. What we know of human intimacy, especially the widespread fear of intimacy, can be helpful in our quest to realize the potential of the liturgy. Primacy must continue to be given to the sacred assembly, not to sacred things. Belief in the "real presence" and belief in the "ecclesial presence" are both fundamental beliefs; in many ways the latter belief presents greater challenges.

49 McClory, "God Grant Us the Grace to be One," 36.
50 Westley, Redemptive Intimacy, 104.

New Editor

Sister Zita Maier O.S.U. will become editor of the National Bulletin on Liturgy, beginning with the next issue. Sr. Maier has a M.A. in liturgy from St. John's University, and has most recently served as director of the office of liturgy for the Archdiocese of Regina. She was a member of the committee that prepared Sunday Celebrations of the Word and Hours (1995), has written for the National Bulletin as well as for the Prairie Messenger, and is an experienced pastoral musician. Sr. Maier will be based in Ottawa, and will also be serving as editorial assistant in the National Liturgical Office.

The present editor, J. Frank Henderson, completes nine years of service — thirty-six issues — with the present issue of the Bulletin. It has been a privilege to serve the church in this way.
Fear of Death and Dying

It is common — indeed natural — for persons who are dying to experience fear. Jennifer Glen speaks of the fear of death in this way:

[The dying person] recognizes ... the echo of the truth that he is a being who lives within the boundaries of finite possibility, the final, inevitable boundary being death. This, then, is the mystery which confronts human beings at the heart of every illness: the universal and yet most intimately personal mystery of death as the ultimate question put to the meaning of life.¹

Individuals will of course differ in their appreciation of this fear, and in the extent or degree to which they experience it. In this regard, Christian faith makes a considerable difference. Glen speaks of different understandings of death in this way:

If indeed [death] represents the definite closure of future possibility . . . then it renders the negotiation of all the barriers an exercise in absurdity. There is no point to making one's way through the passage of sickness because in reality, like life itself, it is no passage at all; it has no exit.

If, on the other hand, death represents the definitive opening out of time into the absolute future, the eschaton of the Christian vision, then every intervening limit is subject to transcendence. The passage of sickness, integral to the passage of life, assumes meaning in the light of the goal to which it leads.²

Kinds of Fears

The nature and kinds of fears commonly experienced by dying persons are named somewhat differently by individual writers. Here is one way of identifying them; there is some overlap among categories.

• Fear of death.
• Fear of not being able to talk about death and one's fears.
• Fear of being treated as an object.
• Fear of losing control over one's life and one's person.
• Fear of dying in pain.
• Fear of dying alone.
• Fear of treatments that are burdensome and ultimately futile.

² Glen, 402-403.
• Fear of being kept alive, though barely, through the use of extraordinary technological means.

• Fear of being too much of a burden for family, caregivers, and/or society.

Society at large is becoming increasingly aware of these fears, while at the same time continuing to deny death in various ways; many find it difficult to discuss this dimension of human existence. There are diverse responses to these fears, and a considerable lack of consistency. Almost everyone values good medical care, including adequate relief of physical pain and less use of abusive technological means of prolonging life. At the same time, governments are decreasing funding for health care and some physicians are afraid of being sued if they do not provide artificial life support.

Some elements of our society are responding to people's fear of death and dying by promoting euthanasia, suicide, and physician assisted suicide. This subject is much discussed in the news media, courts and legislatures, as well as within the Christian community. The actual practice of these means of hastening death appears to be increasing, and those who promote euthanasia, suicide and physician assisted suicide try to improve their image by the use of the phrase "death with dignity."

The Roman Catholic Church — together with many other Christians — responds in other ways. It too fosters good medical and nursing care in many ways, and provides chaplains in health care institutions. It attempts to counter the euthanasia movement with statements of moral and theological principles and efforts to influence legislation and courts. An excellent resource is Richard Gula’s easy to read book on euthanasia.

The liturgies of viaticum — the sacrament of the dying — and of the commendation of the dying are important responses of the Roman Catholic Church to the needs of persons who are dying. It is disappointing, however, that only rarely do theologians and church spokespersons on this subject mention these liturgies. (Gula is better than most. However, though he mentions prayer and ritual briefly, viaticum and commendation are never explicitly named.)

As with other fears considered in this issue of the Bulletin, the fear of death and dying has the potential to diminish full participation in liturgical celebrations. Jennifer Glen gives this analysis:

The sick person . . . may also feel himself distanced from God. . . . quite commonly, the physical and emotional limitations imposed by sickness, the distractions built into the environment, and the loss of the ordinary life context for personal and communal prayer, make it impossible for the sick person to maintain in a meaningful way the usual content and structure of his communication with God. Consequently, because he can no longer pray in his accustomed fashion, he is inclined to feel that he can no longer pray at all. Indeed, he may not wish to. Furthermore, as he begins to doubt himself, his value in relation to others, perhaps the very meaning of his life, he may also come to doubt the existence or at least the goodness of the ultimate foundation upon which it rests.

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4 Gula, 64.
5 Glen, 402.
At the same time, the church offers special liturgies to its members—sisters and brothers—who are dying, and earnestly invites them to enter into their celebration; these have the potential to meet some of their fears. From this perspective, then, we might say that fear of dying may encourage liturgical participation.

We will consider the church's liturgies for the dying below. First, however, it seems appropriate to try to appreciate dying persons' fears in greater depth. Though space does not permit a thorough review of the pertinent literature, two different but converging perspectives are summarized here.

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### Conditions of Hopelessness

Richard Gula names three conditions of hopelessness: loss of control, loss of meaning, and loss of human connection.

**The Loss of Control:** A sense of hopelessness can easily overcome us when we have no say in determining the course of our lives or in shaping the events in which we participate. Losing control easily follows upon the physical and emotional constraints that accompany illness or old age. When we become preoccupied with trying to achieve physical comfort or emotional balance, we can easily lose our sense of being able to take charge of our lives.

Physically we lie open to being an object of invasion and manipulation. Emotionally we are discouraged when we are not able to satisfy any of our goals. We ask in desperation, "If I can't see how I am ever going to better the condition I am now in, why live? If I am more a victim of others' invasive and manipulative procedures rather than an agent seeking my own desires, why survive?"

**The Loss of Meaning in Suffering:** Another sense of hopelessness can overcome us when we no longer feel we are of value or have any meaningful goals to achieve. If our days are filled with a boring routine, and we play no significant part in shaping the day, then our strength to live weakens. If our suffering does not fit into any larger scheme of meaning, and if it serves no purpose for us or anyone else, then it feels like living itself has lost its purpose. It seems pointless to go on, and no one can go on without purpose.

Religious faith is often a significant resource for coping with suffering, since it is one of the major influences shaping the attitudes we bring to the experience. Anyone who feels disconnected with the transcendent source of meaning experiences what the psalmist and, later, Jesus put more bluntly, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Suffering almost inevitably calls us to reappraise our faith. But can a new and stronger faith be built?

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See also Glen, "Sickness and Symbol," pages 398-401 (note 1).
The Loss of Human Connection: When we are "fully alive," does our reason for living lie in some conceptual certainty of what life is about? Or, does it not lie rather in being included in a network of supportive relationships, in being touched by another, in being valued as a person? Hopelessness can readily overcome us when we are cut off from those relationships which help us to appreciate life as a gift sustained by the love of another.

The isolation may be self-inflicted, such as when our pride denies a need for others in the name of being self-sufficient. Or, it may come from the inattention of family, friends, and caregivers who are preoccupied by their own interests and obligations. In either case, when we no longer experience a mutual interdependence with work companions, social groups, and family which once sustained a meaningful life, and when living becomes only a task carried out as a duty, why try to live any longer?

In response to these conditions, Gula advocates the culturing of the virtues of humility, courage and hope throughout one's life.\(^\text{7}\)

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Physical Pain and Spiritual Pain

Medical experts in pain control, and the experience of hospices and palliative care institutions, assure us that almost all physical pain can now be controlled. However, studies have also shown that adequate pain control is not being achieved in many dying persons. The gap between theory and practice obviously needs to be closed.

Writers sometimes also speak of "spiritual pain," which include some of the fears of dying listed above, but also includes other factors. William Cole writes:

[Spiritual pain] is a complex of fear of dying, guilt and regret about one's life, and sadness about the imminent separation from wife or husband or children or friends. Such distress comes from the awareness that life is nearly over and death is near.

When men and women approach death, the task of finding a key of one's meaning and fulfillment is even more difficult. . . . This searching can be a source of struggle, confusion, discomfort and anguish that is experienced not only by the individual himself but by those around him, such as family and staff. Suffering, anguish and confusion – that is what [is meant] by spiritual pain.\(^\text{8}\)

He holds up the type of palliative care practiced in many modern hospices.

James Bresnahan continues this train of thought:

The suffering involved in dying is always more than just the experience of physical pain. Anticipation of loss and of an unknown beyond this loss

\(^{7}\) Gula, 48-49.

\(^{8}\) Gula, 49-57.

engenders a crisis in which grief and love, guilt and longing also play their part. Besides fear of neglected pain, there is fear of abandonment by those one needs most. Our faith gives us a hope that we can sometimes share with the dying. Practically, we can always respond to these fears by the hospice way of meeting this crisis of approaching death. By compassionate companionship and effective pain relief we enable communication, a precious solace for both the dying and the living they will leave behind.10

He advocates “a new corporal work of mercy: To visit and support those whose dying is prolonged, and to help those who care for them.”11

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**Human Dignity: A Christian Perspective**

The church affirms the concepts of human dignity and of death with dignity, but sees these quite differently from those who equate them with euthanasia and suicide.

One definition of dignity is “the quality or state of being worthy, honored or esteemed.” It includes being recognized and acknowledged as a person and being accepted and affirmed.

The concept of dignity has liturgical roots, being based in part on baptism. The General Introduction on Christian Initiation states:

- Baptism incorporates us into Christ and forms us into God’s people. This first sacrament pardons all our sins, rescues us from the power of darkness, and brings us to the dignity of adopted children, a new creation through water and the Holy Spirit. Hence we are called and are indeed the children of God. (no. 2)

In the 1988 post-synodal document *Christifideles Laici*, Pope John Paul II treats human dignity at some length, again relating it in part to baptism.

John Paul II states that the first dimension of human dignity is having been created “as the living image of God.” (CL 1) This leads to a recognition that “the person is not at all a ‘thing’ or an ‘object’ to be used, but primarily a responsible ‘subject,’ one endowed with conscience and freedom, called to live responsibly in society and history, and oriented toward spiritual and religious values.” (CL 5)

The second dimension is “the grace and dignity coming from baptism . . . .” This implies the “priestly, prophetic and kingly dignity of the entire People of God . . . .” (CL 14)

The pope then moves from baptism to mission, beginning with a quote from Vatican II’s Constitution on the Church, n. 32: “As members, [lay people] share a common dignity from their rebirth in Christ, they have the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection. They possess in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity.” He continues, “Because of the one dignity flowing from baptism, each member of the lay faithful, together with ordained

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11 Bresnahan, 12.
ministers and men and women religious, share a responsibility for the church’s mission.” (CL 15)

Another dimension of the dignity of baptized persons is our call to holiness:

We come to a full sense of the dignity of the lay faithful if we consider the prime and fundamental vocation that the Father assigns to each of them in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit: the vocation to holiness, that is, the perfection of charity. Holiness is the greatest testimony of the dignity conferred on a disciple of Christ. (CL 16)

The vocation to holiness must be recognized and lived by the lay faithful, first of all as an undeniable and demanding obligation and as a shining example of the infinite love of the Father that has regenerated them in his own life of holiness. Such a vocation, then, ought to be called an essential and inseparable element of the new life of Baptism, and therefore an element which determines their dignity. (CL 17)

Finally, John Paul II speaks again of the dignity of being called to mission.

The dignity as a Christian, the source of equality for all members of the Church, guarantees and fosters the spirit of communion and fellowship, and, at the same time, becomes the hidden dynamic force in the lay faithful’s apostolate and mission. It is a dignity, however, which brings demands, the dignity of labourers called by the Lord to work in his vineyard: ‘Upon all the lay faithful, then, rests the exalted duty of working to assure that each day the divine plan of salvation is further extended to every person, of every era, in every part of the earth.’ (CL 17, quoting the Constitution on the Church, 33)

To die with dignity, then, is to die affirmed as one created in the very image of God and, through baptism, sharing in the very life of the Triune God. It is to die within the embrace of the community of baptized sisters and brothers, who regularly have celebrated together the mystery of the dying and rising of Jesus Christ. It is to know God’s love and care, as mediated through the love and care of the ecclesial Body of God’s own Word and Spirit. It is to know that one has shared in the mission and holiness of Jesus Christ. It is to hold a firm hope that one will soon dine and celebrate at God’s own table with many sisters and brothers.

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**Liturgical Ministry to Dying Persons**

The church’s liturgical ministry related to death and dying begins with our baptism into the death as well as the resurrection of Jesus Christ. All the liturgies we celebrate during our lives celebrate this same paschal mystery.

More specifically, we should all pray regularly for the sick and the dying in the general intercessions of the Sunday eucharist. We also pray for the dead during the eucharistic prayer, and perhaps also in the general intercessions. Many will also visit sick persons with prayer (explicit or implicit, aloud or silently); most will participate in the liturgies of Christian burial from time to time.

We should be aware that some members of our parish community take communion to the sick on a regular basis, and that the sacrament of anointing is celebrated with
sick members of the community. Hopefully, anointing is a communal and often, public, liturgy, in which a number of members of the community participate. To keep this dimension of the community's ministry in the consciousness of parishioners, it would be well to report to the parish when it is celebrated, for example, through the bulletin or noticeboard.

Liturgies for the Dying

The liturgical book, *Pastoral Care of the Sick*, contains the rites for the sick and the dying, from visiting the sick to prayers after death. It should be noted that the English-language edition of this ritual book contains extensive sections dealing with sick and dying children. Except for anointing and penance, all the liturgies in *Pastoral Care* can be led by lay persons (always assuming appropriate education, training and authorization).

The section of the ritual book entitled Pastoral Care of the Dying includes the celebration of viaticum (chapter 5), commendation of the dying (chapter 6), prayers for the dead (chapter 7), and rites for exceptional circumstances (chapter 8). Here we will consider only viaticum and commendation.

Viaticum: The Sacrament of the Dying

Viaticum outside Mass follows a typical outline: introductory rites, liturgy of the word, sacramental action – here the liturgy of viaticum, and concluding rites. The introductory rites include a greeting, sprinkling with holy water (a reminder of baptism), an introduction and a brief penitential rite. The liturgy of the word includes brief readings and homily, the baptismal profession of faith, and a litany. The liturgy of viaticum includes the Lord's Prayer, communion as viaticum, silent prayer and a prayer after communion. The concluding rites includes the blessing and the sign of peace. The entire liturgy is simple and brief, and may be adapted to specific circumstances.

Introductory and explanatory material in various sections of *Pastoral Care* tell us about the meaning and celebration of the sacrament of viaticum. First, its relationship to sickness and to the sacrament of anointing is stated briefly.

The ministry to the dying places emphasis on trust in the Lord's promise of eternal life rather than on the struggle against illness which is characteristic of the pastoral care of the sick. (*Pastoral Care*, no. 161)

The sacrament of the anointing of the sick should be celebrated at the beginning of a serious illness. Viaticum, celebrated when death is close, will then be better understood as the last sacrament of Christian life. (PC 175)

A few general principles follow:

The celebration of the eucharist as viaticum, food for the passage through death to eternal life, is the sacrament proper to the dying Christian. It is the

12 *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum* (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops 1983).

completion and crown of the Christian life on this earth, signifying that the Christian follows the Lord to eternal glory and the banquet of the heavenly kingdom. (PC 175)

When in their passage from this life Christians are strengthened by the body and blood of Christ in viaticum, they have the pledge of the resurrection that the Lord promised: "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day" (John 6.54). (PC 26)

Communion received as viaticum should be considered a special sign of participation in the mystery which is celebrated in the eucharist: the mystery of the death of the Lord and his passage to the Father. (PC 26)

The ministers of viaticum are identified:

The Christian community has a continuing responsibility to pray for and with the person who is dying. Through its sacramental ministry to the dying the community helps Christians to embrace death in mysterious union with the crucified and risen Lord, who awaits them in the fullness of life. (PC 163)

If no priest is available, viaticum may be brought to the sick by a deacon or by another member of the faithful, either a man or a woman, who . . . has been duly appointed by the bishop to give the eucharist to the faithful. (PC 29)

Remarks are made regarding the liturgical celebration of viaticum:

Priests and other ministers entrusted with the spiritual care of the sick should do everything they can to ensure that those in proximate danger of death receive the body and blood of Christ as viaticum. At the earliest opportunity, the necessary preparation should be given to the dying person, family, and others who may take part. (PC 176)

Whenever it is possible, the dying Christian should be able to receive viaticum within Mass . . . However, circumstances . . . may frequently make the complete eucharistic celebration impossible. In this case the rite for viaticum outside Mass is appropriate. (PC 177)

Depending on the condition of the dying person, every effort should be made to involve him or her, the family, friends, and other members of the local community in the planning and celebration. Appropriate readings, prayers, and songs will help to foster the full participation of all. Because of this concern for participation, the minister should ensure that viaticum is celebrated while the dying person is still able to take part and respond. (PC 178)

Specific elements of the celebration are referred to:

A distinctive feature of the celebration of viaticum . . . is the renewal of the baptismal profession of faith by the dying person. This occurs after the homily and replaces the usual form of the profession of faith. Through the baptismal profession at the end of earthly life, the one who is dying uses the language of his or her initial commitment, which is renewed each Easter and on other occasions in the Christian life. In the context of viaticum, it is a renewal and fulfillment of initiation into the Christian mysteries, baptism leading to the eucharist. (PC 179)

The rites of viaticum . . . may include the sign of peace. The minister and all who are present embrace the dying Christian. In this and in other parts of the celebration the sense of leave-taking need not be concealed or denied,
but the joy of Christian hope, which is the comfort and strength of the one near death, should also be evident. (PC 180)

As an indication that the reception of the eucharist by the dying Christian is a pledge of resurrection and food for the passage through death, the special words proper to viaticum are added: "May the Lord Jesus Christ protect you and lead you to eternal life." The dying person and all who are present may receive communion under both kinds. The sign of communion is more complete when received in this manner because it expresses more fully and clearly the nature of the eucharist as a meal, one which prepares all who take part in it for the heavenly banquet. (PC 181)

The question of repetition of the celebration is considered:

It often happens that a person who has received the eucharist as viaticum lingers in a grave condition or at the point of death for a period of days or longer. In these circumstances he or she should be given the opportunity to receive the eucharist as viaticum on successive days, frequently if not daily. This may take place during or outside Mass as particular conditions permit. (PC 183)

Finally, a remark about the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation or penance:

If the dying person wishes to celebrate the sacrament of penance, it is preferable that the priest make himself available for this during a previous visit. If this is not possible, the sacrament of penance may be celebrated before Mass begins. (PC 185)

Commendation of the Dying

The liturgy of commendation is basically the presence with the dying person of ministers of the church together with family, friends and caregivers, leading him or her in prayer, and praying for the dying person. There are special prayers at the moment of death, and subsequently for the family and friends. In addition to the prayers of the Roman ritual, there is an appendix entitled Prayers for Use in Canada. 14

The introduction of the chapter on commendation tells us the meaning of this liturgy and how to celebrate it.

In viaticum the dying person is united with Christ in his passage out of this world to the Father. Through the prayers for the commendation of the dying . . . , the Church helps to sustain this union until it is brought to fulfillment after death. (PC 212)

Christians have the responsibility of expressing their union in Christ by joining the dying person in prayer for God's mercy and for confidence in Christ. In particular, the presence of a priest or deacon shows more clearly that the Christian dies in the communion of the Church. He should assist the dying person and those present in the recitation of the prayers of

14 Pastoral Care, pages 337-372.
commendation and, following death, he should lead those present in the
prayer after death. If the priest or deacon is unable to be present because of
other serious pastoral obligations, other members of the community should
be prepared to assist with these prayers and should have the texts readily
available to them. (PC 213)

The minister may choose texts from among the prayers, litanies,
aspirations, psalms, and readings provided in this chapter, or others may be
added. In the selection of these texts the minister should keep in mind the
condition and piety of both the dying person and the members of the family
who are present. The prayers are best said in a slow, quiet voice, alternating
with periods of silence. If possible, the minister says one or more of the brief
prayer formulas with the dying person. These may be softly repeated two or
three times. (PC 214)

These texts are intended to help the dying person, if still conscious, to face
the natural human anxiety about death by imitating Christ in his patient
suffering and dying. The Christian will be helped to surmount his or her fear
in the hope of heavenly life and resurrection through the power of Christ,
who destroyed the power of death by his own dying. (PC 215)

Even if the dying person is not conscious, those who are present will draw
consolation from these prayers and come to a better understanding of the
paschal character of Christian death. This may be visibly expressed by
making the sign of the cross on the forehead of the dying person, who was
first signed with the cross at baptism. (PC 216)

Addressing the Fear of Death and Dying

The liturgies of viaticum and commendation express God's presence during the
last stages of the dying person's life. They assure the dying person of God's love
and care through the love and care of the church community. They affirm the
goodness of the dying person, proclaim that Jesus has traveled the same road
and now journeys with the dying person. The dying person's fears that he or she
will die alone, neglected and forgotten, are tended to through the presence of the
ministers of these liturgies. They express trust in God, support and encourage the
dying person, and proclaim a message of hope.

Ministry to Dying Persons

With decreasing numbers of presbyters (and their increasing age), the church
needs to be vigilant lest its liturgical ministry to sick persons (visits, communion,
anointing, penance) and to dying persons (viaticum, commendation, penance)
suffer or be neglected. Lay ministers need to assume their proper responsibilities
with respect to the liturgical care of the sick and dying, just as they are doing with
respect to Sunday celebrations of the word and other liturgies. Of course, they will
do so in collaboration with ordained ministers.

The situation is further complicated by the way that pastoral care in health care
institutions sometimes has become divorced from that of parish communities.
The provision in many institutions of their own highly qualified chaplains may seem to lessen the responsibility of parish ministers — but this should not be the case. In addition, the fact that institutional chaplains usually are highly educated and have had considerable specialized training, may intimidate parish ministers.

Institutional chaplains who are not Roman Catholics of course cannot provide the church's liturgical ministry to the sick and the dying. They usually are most willing and anxious to see that Catholic ministers are informed of patients' needs, but they need to be told whom to call and what the church's liturgies are. Catholics who do not themselves fully appreciate viaticum and commendation cannot provide adequate guidance.

It is so important that liturgical ministry to the sick and dying — indeed, all ministry — be of high quality. Hasty visits, truncated or perfunctory prayers and liturgies, insensitivity to the needs of individual patients, reluctance or inability to adapt prayers and rites to meet specific circumstances — all these diminish the liturgical care to which sick and dying persons are entitled.

Those who minister to dying persons need to deal with their own fear of death and dying, be at ease in the sometimes difficult circumstances of health care institutions and of dying persons, and develop a deep and healthy spirituality that provides support in their ministry. They also need the continued support of other persons.

Conclusions
The Roman Catholic Church has a rich liturgical ministry to celebrate with its members who are dying, and these liturgies have the potential to respond to many of the fears that dying persons experience. The church needs to demonstrate its beliefs regarding death and dying through its liturgical practice as well as through statements of moral and theological principles. Unless our liturgical ministry to dying persons is serious and of high quality, our statements of principles will be unconvincing to church members and the wider society as well.

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Preaching in the New Order of Funerals

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Mary Catherine Hilkert asserts that every homily has a theology of preaching—even if it remains implicit.¹ She identifies two approaches to homily preparation that indicate the homilist's implicit theology of preaching and disclose the homilist's operative belief about the locus of revelation. Specifically, the two approaches reveal one's understanding of the relationship between the Scriptures and human experience which emerges in the preparation of a homily.

The first approach is characterized by positive responses to the following questions: Do I believe that the word of God is really to be discovered in the biblical passage, in my prayer, and in study of the commentaries? Do I view the process of writing the homily as trying somehow to apply this word of God to people's concrete human lives? Is it at the point when I think about communication skills that I attend to congregational awareness and connections with culture and the world situation, so that the word of God will touch a chord in “secular” human experience?

David Buttrick, for instance, warns of just this approach and speaks of the danger of splitting the basic structure of a homily into a lengthy talk about a biblical passage and then a tedious drawing out of contemporary “application.”²

The second approach identified by Hilkert is characterized by positive responses to these questions. Do I really believe that God's word (a word of salvation, hope, healing, liberation) is being spoken in new ways today in people's concrete and daily lives? Is the same creative Spirit of God who was active in the history of Israel, in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, in the church of the past, in the lives of the saints, still active among us today? If this is part of one's theology of revelation, then reflection on culture, people's lives, and human experience is necessary not merely to make a homily relevant but to hear the word of God today.


² David Buttrick, *Homiletics: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1987), 312 and 366. The author suggests that rather than breaking a “text” into a sermon, the homilist is involved in replotting a “field of understanding” or a “structure of contemporary understanding” from the text into a sermon—a contemporary sermon.

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In this second approach the preacher listens with attentiveness to human experience because he or she is convinced that revelation is located in human history, in the depth of human experience. One recognizes here the theology of Karl Rahner, for his theology of revelation and his theological anthropology are inseparable. Both contribute to his conviction that the Word announces the grace that is already present in the depths of the person and in the midst of human history and creation. In his article, "Priest and Poet," Rahner states: "Grace is here. It is present wherever we are. It can always be seen by the eye of faith and be expressed by the word of the message."³

These two approaches are evident in the United States bishops’ document on preaching, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing.*⁴ In no. 64, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* bemoans the three-part pattern that many homilies fall into: “In today’s reading . . . . This reminds us of . . . . Therefore let us . . . .” This very structure gives the impression that the preacher’s principal purpose is to interpret scriptural texts rather than communicate with real people, and that the preacher interprets the texts primarily to extract ethical demands to impose upon a congregation. In addition to distancing himself or herself from the congregation, the advice, while often good in itself, frequently is not heard as good news!

*Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, no. 65, provides an alternative way to structure the homily: one which begins with a different sense of the locus of revelation.

Another way of structuring the homily, and one that is more in keeping with its function of enabling people to celebrate the liturgy with deepened faith, is to begin with a description of a contemporary human situation which is evoked by the scriptural texts, rather than with an interpretation or reiteration of the text. After the human situation has been addressed, the homilist can turn to the Scriptures to interpret this situation, showing how the God described therein is also present and active in our lives today. The conclusion of the homily can then be an invitation to praise this God who wills to be lovingly and powerfully present in the lives of his people.

The same approach is expressed in no. 12, which states that the community of faith has gathered for liturgy, believing that God has acted in human history and more particularly in their own history. The community gathers to respond to this living and active God. Often, however, the community wonders how this God whom the Scriptures present as so powerful and so present, can be experienced in lives that seem so broken and meaningless. It is the preacher’s role to help the community recognize how this same God is still present and active today.

Hilkert cautions us to remember that if we are to approach preaching by beginning with the contemporary human experience, it is important to recall three things.

- We are talking about human experience in its depth dimension. One of the primary tasks of the preacher, then, is to be a contemplative who reflects on human experience at its depths in order to identify in faith the ultimate foundation of the mystery of human life.
- For most people in our world, the experience of God may well be a “contrast experience.” Edward Schillebeeckx suggests that the immediate experience of

two-thirds of humanity is that of suffering and the apparent absence of God. However, a deep mystery is revealed in their responses to that suffering - responses of protest, hope and sheer endurance. It is important to name this experience as the experience of being sustained by the Spirit of God. Even in our own more familiar urban and suburban congregations, the preacher receives far more attention if she or he begins with the absence rather than the presence of God in the lives of people. The preacher, therefore, must be attentive to this common experience or risk becoming irrelevant to the lives of people.

• Human experience is interpreted experience. The preacher, as person of faith, can alert people to a deeper dimension in their experience and can give a congregation a language to name that experience. (For example, in the sacrament of marriage, a couple and congregation can be assisted in naming the experience which is celebrated: God loves you; the married partners become the primary means or channel of God's love through each other, etc.) In this way we listen to the human story with an ear for an echo of the gospel which we believe is the key to understanding reality and to living a fully human life.

Liturgical Preaching

The Second Vatican Council in its Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 52, clearly states that the homily "is part of the liturgy itself." This is repeated in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, no. 41, with the added note that the homily is "necessary for the nurturing of the Christian life."

But how is the homily part of the liturgy? What is its function or contribution in the context of the whole liturgy? The Lectionary for Mass: Introduction, no. 24, describes the homily as a "living explanation" of the word of God and provides a direction to explore when it states:

Whether the homily explains the biblical word of God proclaimed in the readings or some other texts of the liturgy, it must always lead the community of the faithful to celebrate the eucharist wholeheartedly, 'so that they may hold fast in their lives to what they have grasped by their faith.'

Again, as we saw earlier, this "living explanation" of Scripture is not meant to be an exegetical exposition of the biblical text, but rather it should concentrate on what the text means for the community gathered for worship. The homily, for example, may attempt to identify the woundedness of people and their individual and collective fears and anxieties in order to address a healing word which points to the presence and action of God in the midst of life's ambiguity. It may also name and celebrate that faith already present in the experience of the people who have just heard God's word proclaimed. Having done so, the homily should give the assembly a vital motive to celebrate the mirabilia Dei in their own lives and to respond with praise and thanks in the liturgy of the eucharist.

One may therefore conclude that the purpose of the liturgical homily is:

• To help the assembly gathered in Jesus' name to discover that God has been active in human history and is still active and present in its life today; and
To respond to this re-discovery with praise and thanks in the liturgy of the eucharist.  

Having experienced the day-to-day lives of the people to whom he or she is preaching, having shared their joys and sorrows, their doubts and faith, the preacher is in a position to help those gathered for worship to see the power and presence of God in their lives and then lead them in the sacramental celebration of that presence. Thus, the liturgical homily is to name, nourish, and celebrate the faith of the assembly through the proclamation of the Word in order for the assembly to give thanks and praise.

William Skudlarek, in his study, *The Word in Worship: Preaching in a Liturgical Context*, maintains that the goal or purpose of the liturgical homily is not restrictive but encompassing when he says:

To say this is not to deny that preaching is to bring people to faith, or that it is to have an influence on their behaviour. Rather, it is to affirm that faith and obedience are both to go one step further and be transformed into praise and thanksgiving. Unless this step is taken, faith can all too easily degenerate into doctrinal rigidity, and obedience into legalistic conformity. Authentic praise and thanksgiving flowing out of a recognition of the graciousness of God (faith) and propelling us to actions of love and justice (obedience) is ultimately the mark of effective proclamation of the word of God.  

This goal of the liturgical homily as expressed by Skudlarek is summarized in the Lectionary for Mass: Introduction, no. 41.

The one presiding exercises his proper office and the ministry of the word of God also as he preaches the homily. In this way he leads his brothers and sisters to an affective knowledge of the holy Scriptures. He opens their souls to gratitude for the wonderful works of God. He strengthens their faith in the word that in the celebration becomes a sacrament through the Holy Spirit. Finally, he prepares them for a fruitful reception of communion and moves them to embrace the demands of the Christian life.

One finds this same understanding of a liturgical homily and its purpose in *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*.

Especially in the Eucharistic celebration, the sign of God's saving presence in the lives of his people, the preacher is called to point to the signs of God's presence in the lives of his people so that, in joyous recognition of that presence, they may join the angels and saints to proclaim God's glory and sing with them their unending hymn of praise. (no. 15)

... the homily is preached in order that a community of believers who have gathered to celebrate the liturgy may do so more deeply and more fully – more faithfully – and thus be formed for Christian witness in the world. (no. 42)

When one hears and accepts this vision of the world, this way of interpreting reality, a response is required. That response can take many forms ... However, the response that is most general and appropriate "at

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all times and in every place” is the response of praise and thanksgiving (Eucharist). (no. 47)

When we accept the good news that the ultimate root and source of our being is not some faceless Prime Mover, not a merciless judge, but a prodigally loving Father who calls us to share in his love and to spread it to others, we sense that it is indeed right to give him thanks and praise. (no. 48)

To be even more precise, the preacher’s purpose will be to turn to these Scriptures to interpret peoples’ lives in such a way that they will be able to celebrate eucharist – or be reconciled with God and one another, or be baptized into the Body of Christ, depending on the particular liturgy that is being celebrated.

Preaching in the Order of Christian Funerals

An attempt will now be made to apply what has been said about preaching in general and liturgical preaching in particular to the task of preaching at a specific liturgy: the celebration of the eucharist within the Order of Christian Funerals. How does the preacher assist members of this particular faith assembly to recognize God’s loving presence and action in their lives in the face of death in a way that invites them to give praise and thanks to God in the eucharist and in lives renewed?

To accomplish such a task in the funeral liturgy presents a challenge to any presider and preacher. The preacher wades into such a challenge aware of:

• our contemporary death-denying culture;
• the limit situation of death itself; and
• the range of emotions that death produces: anger, numbness, guilt, sorrow, fear, hope.

In addition, from a more ecclesial viewpoint the preacher:

• may or may not know the deceased and/or the family of the deceased;
• may be faced with an assembly quite different from the regular Sunday gathering, for baptized and non-baptized, Catholic and non-Catholic, at home parishioners and alienated believers or non-believers gather on the occasion of death; and
• may be unable to anticipate how a particular assembly might hear a word of Scripture or a liturgical prayer.7

Finally, from a more liturgical viewpoint the preacher must wrestle with:

• brief preparation time;
• multiple services for the family and friends of the deceased;

7 I once ministered in a parish which included a care facility for severely physically and mentally challenged children. On the occasion of one child’s death, many of the care workers were offended by a line in one of the readings (Revelation 21.1-7) which proclaims that “Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more.” They interpreted the last phrase as an indictment of their care of the children.
multiple and interchangeable scriptural texts which should be chosen to reflect the particular circumstances of death and the needs of the mourners; and

the various options that the funeral rite provides that if chosen with care could enhance the proclaimed word for this assembled group.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 81, urges that "the rite of funerals should express more clearly the paschal character of Christian death." The appendix to the General Instruction of the Roman Missal for the dioceses of the United States, no. 340, commenting more specifically on the homily states that:

The homily may properly include an expression of praise and gratitude to God for his gifts, particularly the gift of a Christian life, to the deceased person. The homily should relate Christian death to the paschal mystery of the Lord's victorious death and resurrection and to the hope of eternal life.

The *Order of Christian Funerals* attaches great importance to the reading of the word of God which will:

- proclaim to the assembly the paschal mystery;
- teach remembrance of the dead;
- convey the hope of being gathered together again in God's kingdom;
- encourage the witness of Christian life;
- above all, tell of God's designs for a world in which suffering and death will relinquish their hold on all whom God has called God's own;
- provide the family and the community with an opportunity to hear God speak to them in their needs, sorrows, fears and hopes.

When the *Order of Christian Funerals* talks specifically about the funeral homily, the purpose is more focused:

Attentive to the grief of those present, the homilist should dwell on God's compassionate love and on the paschal mystery of the Lord, as proclaimed in the Scripture readings. The homilist should also help the members of the assembly to understand that the mystery of God's love and the mystery of Jesus' victorious death and resurrection were present in the life and death of the deceased and that these mysteries are active in their own lives as well. Through the homily members of the family and community should receive consolation and strength to face the death of one of their members with a hope nourished by the saving word of God.

With respect to this paragraph, it is my conviction that there is a primary and a secondary purpose pertaining to the homily and that if the primary purpose of the homily is realized, then members of the family and community will receive consolation and strength to face the death of the deceased with hope. In addition, that consolation and strength to face the death of the deceased with hope does not rest solely upon the homily. The *Order of Christian Funerals* clearly expects that there will be many opportunities to console the family and friends of the deceased. One way is through the planning and carrying out of the funeral rites (the Related Rites and Prayers, the Vigil for the Deceased, and the Funeral Liturgy itself). Another is through the action of the believing community, which has "responsibility for the ministry of consolation". This is carried out "with words of faith and support and with acts of kindness" (no. 10), but "the community's
principal involvement in the ministry of consolation is expressed in its active participation in the funeral rites" (no. 11).

In addition, the sentence order in the paragraph quoted does not necessarily dictate how the primary purpose of the homily is to be realized. At first glance the text seems to suggest that after the homilist dwells on God’s compassionate love and on the paschal mystery of the Lord as proclaimed in the Scripture readings, he or she should then “also” help the members of the assembly to understand that the mystery of God’s love and the mystery of Jesus’ victorious death and resurrection were present in the life and death of the deceased (and that these mysteries are active in their own lives as well).

In light of what was presented earlier, it seems that one could best proclaim the compassionate love of God and the paschal mystery of Christ by first turning to the situation at hand – the death of a family and community member and the grief, fear, sorrow, and hope of the gathered community – and then turn to the Scriptures to interpret this situation in light of God’s love and the paschal mystery.

This method avoids the structure criticized in Fulfilled in Your Hearing, no. 64, “In today’s readings . . . . This reminds us . . . . Let us therefore . . . .” This approach also recognizes that the life of the deceased and the gathered community is a locus of God’s revelation that the Scriptures can help to interpret.

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Other Challenges

What about the deceased who is so unknown that it is difficult to look at their lives for the manifestation of God’s presence and action? Or what about the death that is so tragic that one cannot think of a movement toward praise and thanks? The first situation, all too common, is characteristic of our society and times and the funeral homily will have a difficult time bearing the weight of all our ecclesial and social ills. One does one’s best under the circumstances.

In the second case – that of the tragic death – Fulfilled in Your Hearing, nos. 74 and 75, asks if it is always possible to say to people, “Look at the way in which God is present in your lives and turn to him with praise and thanksgiving.” This is obviously not always easy to do, especially in the case of tragic death. The writers of this document make two suggestions:

- the preacher needs to recognize the active presence of God in his or her own life, as shattered and broken as it may be, and out of that brokenness affirm that it is still good to praise God and to give God thanks; and
- the preacher needs to remember in situations like this that our celebration of the eucharist is done in the memory of Jesus Christ who, on the night before he died, turned to God and praised and thanked God out of the depths of his distress.

Praise and thanksgiving do not automatically imply the presence of euphoria. In addition, the movement to praise and thanksgiving may not (and perhaps at most funerals, will not) necessarily occur in the ten minutes between the homily and the eucharistic prayer. However, the homily as an important element within the whole funeral liturgy begins a process or movement that may only be initiated at the liturgy, but which will bear fruit later.
A Model Funeral Homily and Its Evaluation

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A recent article considered the ministry of preaching at Roman Catholic funerals from a theoretical point of view. A second article proposed that a model of funeral preaching put forth by Robert A. Krieg was of particular usefulness. Krieg's model was the standard by which preaching at a number of parish funerals was then evaluated in a research project carried out by Claire Dowbiggin.

The present article is an analysis of a recent funeral homily in which the preacher had made a conscious effort to follow the Krieg model, with its five phases. The homily is an exact transcription of what was preached. The 34 questions used in analyzing this homily are the same ones used in the original work by Dowbiggin.

Phase One

The five important content issues required in the first stage of Krieg's model are: sharing empathy; briefly recounting the deceased's last days; stating the twofold intent of the homily; recalling God's ways, and honoring the deceased. Seven questions, each with response scores ranging from zero to three, were used to ascertain the degree to which the following text conformed to the Krieg model.

Our mother Elizabeth died four days ago, after giving us a convincing example of how to die with dignity despite the dreadful disease of cancer. During the past 12 months of her dying, she did everything reasonable to live as long and as fully as possible. At the same time, she displayed a deep and abiding confidence that God was with her throughout the awful ordeal. Over many years our mother attended the funerals of countless friends, in this parish and elsewhere. She knew that death is incredibly powerful. And she knew that the love of God is even more powerful. She knew that in the face of death we need to remember, we need to celebrate, and we need to

believe. In this eucharist we remember and we celebrate how God worked in the life and death of Jesus, and in the life and death of our mother.

A score of 16 out of a possible 21 was given to the above text. It was felt that the extending of empathy required by the Krieg model, especially to friends and to the parish, was not explicit. On the other hand, extending such empathy was part of the presider’s opening comments, a practice that is increasingly common.

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**Phase Two**

According to Krieg’s model, in phase two “the homily puts into words the swirl of thoughts, feelings and concerns of the congregation at the loss of the loved one. Ambiguities and dominant emotions are highlighted, for example, relief that the suffering is over, and yet pain and numbness at the separation.” Four questions were used in an attempt to determine how well the following text conforms to the Krieg model.

Elizabeth was a member of this parish for 67 years, literally her entire adult life. She was married in this parish and had her eleven children baptized here. You, who are her fellow-parishioners, know that being a member of this parish was not just a token thing for her. She loved this parish passionately. She had a deep and strong commitment to it, including a very active ministry to the sick and dying. To you, her fellow-parishioners, I extend condolences on the loss of a pioneer, with a lifetime of service and serving among you and with you. You modeled the faith for her, and she modeled the faith for you. You ministered to her and she ministered to you. That’s what it means to be part of a faith community. I am confident that the pain and sorrow we feel today will be balanced by a gratitude and peace we will feel tomorrow.

A score of 10 out of a possible 12 was assigned following the analysis of the above text. It was felt that Krieg’s requirement that the assembly’s “swirl of thoughts, feelings and concerns” could have been expressed more clearly.

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**Phase Three**

The heart of a funeral homily, as of any homily, is handling the proclaimed scripture. In Krieg’s model the preacher is told that in phase three “The sense of the readings is drawn out, especially as they express or contradict the sentiments of the congregation, and as they direct one’s attention towards Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection.” Nine questions were used to try to assess the degree to which the following text meets Krieg’s requirements.

The bible readings proclaimed at a funeral serve as a benchmark for our reflections on life and death. The two passages we just heard [1 Kings 17.8-16 and John 21.1-14] were chosen for our mother’s funeral because of their clear messages of hospitality. Both of them are very moving statements about hospitality, about hospitality extended and hospitality accepted. They reveal the transforming power of hospitality. They speak of that kind of
hospitality, that kind of shared eating, drinking and visiting, that feeds the soul as it feeds the body. They are descriptions of holiness hospitality, of “holy hosting,” where people not only meet people, but where people meet God as well. In St. Luke’s gospel this kind of hospitality is called salvation hospitality. It is a “holy hosting” that nourishes both body and soul. Genuine hospitality is prayer in action. Genuine hospitality is faith at work. Genuine hospitality is witnessing to the presence of God. Genuine hospitality is a resurrection message. Genuine hospitality truly can give new life.

The first reading is the familiar story of the widow extending hospitality to Elijah the prophet. The wandering prophet was in desperate need of a meal and some company. At great risk to herself and her child, the widow welcomed the prophet, cooked and shared the last of her food with him, and told her story of despair. The result was a dramatic example of how God can transform ordinary, everyday events. The human hospitality the widow extended to the prophet was transformed into a holy hospitality. It was holy because her hospitality nourished both body and spirit. The experiences of eating, drinking and visiting became moments of grace; they became an experience of hospitality where God was one of the guests.

The story in today’s gospel describes one of the most powerful appearances of Jesus after his death and resurrection. Peter and six fishermen had spent a long, cold night fishing and came up empty-handed. Those of us who fish merely for fun would have been disappointed with such results but imagine how it must have been for those who fish for a living and who were depressed to start with. Just after daybreak a stranger on the shore calls to the seven tired men on the water and suggests that they cast their net to the right of the boat. They do this and are rewarded with a catch so huge they can barely get the net, bulging with squirming fish, safely to shore. Once there they join Jesus around his glowing charcoal fire, and share his roasted fish and warm bread.

I believe it is neither accidental nor incidental that Jesus chose this setting for one of his post-death appearances. He appears not in a church, not in a bible study class, not in a bustling shopping mall. No, he appears within an ordinary, human event of hospitality. And one thing that is really special about this particular appearance is that Jesus is the host. It is Jesus who builds the fire. It is Jesus who prepares, cooks and serves the food. It is Jesus who transforms a fisherman’s breakfast on the shore of a foggy lake into an experience of holy hospitality. For Peter and his friends, what must have been a common experience of human hospitality, is transformed into an experience of salvation hospitality. Death is indeed powerful and frightening. In the resurrection of Jesus it is clear that God's love is more powerful than death. It was the hospitality of Jesus that enabled the fishermen to understand that Jesus was alive. What God did in Jesus, God can do in us. That's the great message of hope in which Christians root their faith.

A score of 15 out of a possible 27 was given to the above text. It should be noted that a third scripture reading was not used in this funeral, no explicit reference was made to the responsorial psalm, and no contradiction between the sense of the readings and the sentiments of the assembly was noted. This resulted in the loss of 9 points out of the possible 27. If allowance had been made in the scoring procedures for a “does not apply” category, the score would have been 15 out of a possible 18.
Phase Four

The fourth phase of Krieg's model calls for a verbal portrait of the deceased, focusing on a unifying theme, and showing how this quality flowed from the person's response to God's invitation to life and to love. Krieg also cautions against the tendency, in such remarks, to focus on a person's accomplishments. In such an approach it is often implied that individuals "earn" God's love by their works. Ten questions were used to evaluate how well the following text meets the requirement of Krieg's model.

All of you who knew our mother Elizabeth, know that she was a warm, outgoing person, a person who practised hospitality almost automatically. She was happiest in the midst of a crowd. Being surrounded by friends and family was the story of her life. She came from a large family, and she raised an even larger family herself. She established an incredibly wide network of friends, and somehow maintained personal relationships with most of them.

Although she lived alone for the past twenty-nine years, her home was rarely empty. A constant stream of visitors passed through her doors. She was never more herself, never more alive, and never happier than when she could visit with a dozen people around her kitchen table. Hospitality was her middle name. It was the spice of her life.

All of her eleven children can give countless examples of the gracious hospitality she extended to friends we brought home unexpectedly at mealtimes. Our father did the same thing with business associates. In the time it took to drink a glass of homemade dandelion wine, a variety of exotic foods would appear on the table, and the strangers left as new friends.

I cannot think of a priest stationed in this parish who didn't regularly drop in at mom's for some "Elizabethan hospitality." It is a clergy tradition known throughout the archdiocese.

Her lifelong practice of baking and sharing a hundred loaves of "paschal bread" each Easter is well known to most of you. Her "pascha" was at the centre of numerous experiences of holy hospitality. The Boxing Day gatherings she hosted for 41 years showed her at her best. Close to 75 people would be crammed into her home; an eight-course dinner of indescribable delicacies was ready, and she had a hug and a gift for everyone.

As mom was dying during the past 12 months, this hospitality-centered focus of her life continued. Her phone rang constantly. People came for visits in a never-ending stream. Even when she was in pain and misery and not capable of cooking, she continued to monitor and direct the kitchen activities.

Our family believes fervently that the most obvious way in which God was present in our mother's life was in her gift of extending hospitality. She had an awesome ability to connect with people and a prodigious memory of names and events. We believe that many of the experiences of her human hospitality turned into experiences of holy hospitality. God was a guest at many of those gatherings. We're convinced of that.

A score of 27 out of a possible 30 was assigned to the preceding phase four of the homily. The questions concerning favourite verbal expression and hobbies were the only two questions receiving less than full marks.
Phase Five

The final phase of the Krieg model calls for the preacher to reiterate his testimony, including the expression of wonder at God’s ways, to honour the deceased, and to exhort the assembly to give thanks to God for the mystery of God’s compassion. Four questions were utilized to evaluate how well the following text conformed to Krieg’s model.

Funerals are occasions for us to remember and to celebrate how God was present in the life and death of Jesus, and in the life and death of the deceased. Our remembering and our celebrating deepen our belief that God is at work in our lives as well, even when we struggle to find tangible evidence of that. This eucharist and all eucharistic celebrations follow a style of remembering and celebrating that is very focused. It is focused primarily on the death and resurrection of Jesus. In celebrating the life of our mother Elizabeth we do the same: we focus on the transforming power of her gracious hospitality.

Out of a possible score of 12, a score of 10 was given for this final part of the homily. Less than full marks were given for the two questions dealing with “giving testimony” and with “honouring the deceased.” Both of these concepts are difficult and complex. The first is discussed endlessly in treatises on homiletics, where the point is repeatedly made that preaching is not so much teaching as witnessing or giving testimony. As regards honouring the deceased, the main error to avoid here is merely cataloguing the deceased person’s accomplishments.

Conclusions

This article is an evaluation of a homily that was recently preached at a funeral. It was prepared and delivered by a preacher who is familiar with Krieg’s five-phase model of a funeral homily. The evaluation of the homily consisted in trying to determine the degree to which it conformed with Krieg’s model, using the questions in Dowbiggin’s original research.

A total score of 78 out of a possible 102 was assigned to the homily under discussion. As was noted earlier, had the questions prepared for the evaluation of phase three allowed for “does not apply” responses, an even higher score of 78 out of a possible 93 would have been given.

We are aware of very few models for funeral homilies other than Krieg’s and we are aware of no attempts to prepare, preach and analyze homilies according to the requirements of other models. Hopefully, what has been presented here will be of some help and encouragement to busy pastors faced with the ongoing challenges of funeral preaching.

In many Roman Catholic parishes the practice is increasingly common to have a “eulogy” by a member of the deceased’s family, as well as a homily by the presider. In the opinion of many, the better practice is to give a Krieg type homily in which references to the deceased are incorporated into the homily in an appropriate way.
Roman Catholic Funerals: The Practice

Leo Klug and Claire Dowbiggin

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The Canadian edition of the Order of Christian Funerals (OCF) provides the norms that are to be followed in celebrating Roman Catholic funerals. How closely the OCF directives are followed in practice has not previously been studied. The intent of this article is to share insights garnered from a research study of how 24 Catholic funerals were actually celebrated. The focus of our concern is the church services (the Funeral Liturgy) themselves, excluding the vigil and cemetery rite, and with only minimal reference to the preaching. The OCF's norms were used as the basic criteria for evaluating these funerals. Previous articles focused on the preaching at these funerals.

Introductory Rites

The first part of a Catholic funeral typically includes five distinct rites: the greeting, the sprinkling with holy water, the placing of the pall, the entrance procession, and the opening prayer. The first three of these are referred to as the reception rites because they focus on the reception of the body at the church entrance.

In six of the 24 funerals studied the coffins had been open for viewing at the church entrance and were closed as the services started. In 20 cases the presider and ministers met the coffin, the family and the pall bearers (all of whom were male) at the church entrance for the reception rites, and then led the procession to a place near the altar. In five parishes those assembled were invited to turn to face the coffin for the reception rites. In all of the funerals the sign of the cross, a greeting, and one of the opening prayers from the OCF were used. In 16 funerals holy water was used at this time, and four times incense was also used.

The white pall was placed on the coffin in ten funerals; in only one case did members of the family, instead of the funeral director, spread the pall. In the judgement of the researcher there was an even distribution of expensive, moderately priced and inexpensive coffins used. A total of 16 coffins had flowers placed on them, three had pictures of the deceased, one had helium balloons, one had war medals, and two were draped with the Canadian flag.

Nearly all (21 out of 24) of the funerals included the playing of music during the entrance procession and in 20 of these cases hymns were also sung, although in only 15 cases was there congregational singing. For two of the funerals the ashes, and not the bodies of the deceased, were present for the reception rites and the funerals. In 19 of the 24 funerals the Easter candle was used, placed close to the altar where the coffin was to be situated for the Mass. All of the presiders wore white vestments, although often colors of various kinds had been incorporated into the chasubles and stoles as part of their design. The quantity of flowers placed near the altar ranged from many (in four cases) to a moderate number (13 cases) to few or none at all.

Catholic funerals are meant to have a strong communal thrust, where the emphasis is placed on a given community of faith celebrating the life and death of one of its members. In fact, it is the assembled community that is considered to be the primary minister of the funeral celebration. A Catholic funeral is not so much for the deceased or for the next of kin as it is for the community. The importance of putting due emphasis on the communal is pointed out in many places in the OCF including, for example, the Introduction (n. 40) and the rubrics (nn. 296-324) where the word community is used 25 times, and words like assembly and congregation many more times.

Commentaries on the OCF such as those by Marchal, Rutherford and Barr, and Henderson all stress the primacy of the communal in funeral celebrations. Hence it was surprising that in the 24 funerals studied more was not done to invite the assemblies to face the church entrance and to be more fully part of the reception rites. Such invitations would emphasize, right from the start, that it is the assembled community, not only the priest, that is welcoming the body and the family.

In many cases the presiders at the 24 funerals could not be clearly heard during the reception rites, except by those close to the coffin. The public address systems of most churches are not connected to church vestibules. This problem with audibility heightens the impression that the reception rites are quasi-private, held before the funeral celebration begins. In one-third of the 24 funerals researched, the reception rites took place just inside the main body of the church, even though the assemblies did not seem to be involved in them.

Sixteen of the funerals used holy water during the reception rites, and in 14 of them holy water was used again for the final commendation. Liturgists generally advise against the repetitive use of the same symbol in a given service, and the OCF supports this principle (n. 329). Some commentators have suggested that the families of the deceased could be more fully involved in the sprinkling of holy

water during the reception rites. One suggestion Marchal makes is to have members of the family fashion their own sprinklers, using boughs taken from trees or shrubs in the deceased’s yard.7

The principle of avoiding the repetitive use of symbols would apply to incense as well. Since only 17% of the funerals used incense during the reception rites (compared to 75% during the final commendation), it might be better to restrict the use of incense to the end of the funeral and the use of holy water to the beginning.

The use of the white pall to cover the coffin is an optional symbol, although in Canada it is recommended. The two reasons given for the use of the pall are that it is a reminder of the baptismal dignity of the deceased, and that it signifies equality in the eyes of God, i.e., it serves to tone down the impact made by expensive versus inexpensive coffins (OCF, no. 38). Only one-third of the coffins used in the 24 celebrations were judged to be inexpensive. The use of expensive coffins and the way they are used can be a counntersign for Christians, and more education is needed concerning these matters.

When the pall is used, it is suggested that members of the immediate family place and remove the pall (OCF, no. 300). In his study of the impact of funeral rites on grieving Catholic widows, Rutherford notes that the rite of spreading the pall is one of the high intensity ritual actions that the family of the deceased tend to remember.8 Of the 24 funerals studied, only 10 used the pall, and in only one case was a family member involved in this rite. Given that this practice is simple, powerful, and easy to do by grieving people, it is surprising it was not done more frequently.

The OCF prohibits the placing of flags, insignia, and other symbols on the coffin. A bible or cross may be on the coffin as the people assemble, but they are to be removed before the service begins (OCF, no. 38). As was noted earlier, in more than 60% of the funerals studied, this directive was not followed, and all of the insignia mentioned earlier (flowers, photos, balloons, medals, flags and crosses) remained on the coffins for the entire liturgy.

Congregational participation in the entrance hymn was surprisingly good, given the brief tradition Canadian Catholics have in this regard. As was noted earlier, in most of the 24 funerals the Easter candle was placed in front of the altar, next to the eventual location of the coffin.

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**Liturgy of the Word**

In all of the 24 funerals studied, there was a first reading, a psalm, a second reading and then a gospel reading. With only two exceptions, the first and second readings were done by lay people. The psalm was sung by a cantor or choir in 80% of the funerals, with minimal congregational participation. With only two exceptions, the scripture readings were taken from among those suggested in the Lectionary for funerals. The most popular first reading was Wisdom 4.7-15, chosen in eight of 24 cases. By far the favourite psalm refrain was psalm 23, used in 61% of the funerals. The second readings reflected a great variety of choices, with

7 Marchal, 16.
passages from Thessalonians being used four times. The favourite gospel readings were John 12.23-28 and Matthew 5.1-12, each used in six funerals.

All but one of the funerals included general intercessions, with the opening and closing prayers taken from the OCF (n. 336) in 80% of the cases and offered spontaneously in the rest. In nearly all cases the intentions appeared to be taken from one or more of the standard liturgical books. The OCF itself provides two dozen sample intentions, although most tend to be stilted. Praying for the deceased by name was nearly always done.

Here as elsewhere in Catholic funerals, the primacy of the communal needs to be emphasized. In the prayer of the faithful it is the whole church that prays. As Rutherford puts it, we don't merely pray for the dead, we pray with them. Many of the intentions used in the 24 funerals still focused unduly on praying for the soul of the deceased and for individual purification. The OCF retains a definite place for prayer on behalf of the deceased, but the overall focus of the funerals has shifted away from that.

The Catholic funeral liturgy allows, but does not require, that two readings from scripture (aside from the psalm) be proclaimed before the gospel reading. As was noted above, all of the 24 funerals included the third reading. One can only hope that this reflects a heightened appreciation of the efficacy of sacred scripture. On the other hand, it is hard not to conclude that, in many cases, more creativity could have been shown in the choice of scripture readings. Henderson lists two dozen other possibilities that could be suitable for many funerals. Boadt argues that the OCF provides too few biblical texts that specifically address the absurdity and meaninglessness of so many deaths.

The researcher taped the scriptural readings as part of the data gathering, but evaluating the quality of the proclamations is still a subjective exercise. By and large we were dismayed at the poor quality of the delivery of about 80% of this "essential element" of the funeral liturgy (OCF n. 304). Many of the readers were emotionally upset and in the throes of grief, and should probably have been excluded from this ministry, as suggested by the OCF (n. 15). As well as being upset, many of the readers appeared to lack the gifts needed for liturgical proclamation, and were not familiar with public address systems. The quality of the portable microphones used by many of the presiders was poor, and probably 20% of them spoke with heavy accents, making them difficult to understand.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

The OCF (n. 337) directs that during funerals the Liturgy of the Eucharist be celebrated in the usual manner, and that is indeed what was done in the 24 funerals studied. In half, the deceased's name was included at the appropriate time in the eucharistic prayer. The greeting of peace was exchanged in 20 of the 24 funerals, and in most of them the presider exchanged greetings with the next of kin.

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9 Rutherford and Barr, 151.
10 Henderson, 239-240.
In 19 funerals a hymn was sung at the preparation of the gifts, with some congregational involvement, and in more than half of the cases the next of kin were involved in bringing the gifts to the altar. During communion 21 of the celebrations had singing, in most cases with minimal participation. The question of suitable music for funerals invites extensive commentary. Suffice it to say that the OCF puts great emphasis on the importance of the music ministry (nn. 30-33). It is gratifying to be able to say that in more than half the 24 funerals attended the researcher judged the music/singing to be very good. Undoubtedly, this helped the celebrating assemblies to express convictions and feelings that otherwise could not be conveyed (OCF n. 30).

Final Commendation

All of the presiders used the OCF invitational prayer for the final commendation, 88% used holy water, and 75% used incense during the final rites. In all but two cases, the prayer of commendation was used as well as a song of farewell (in six cases a solo was sung and four times organ music only was used). In one funeral the coffin was re-opened after the final rites, allowing the assembly to view the body as they left the church.

Catholic funeral rites include three main events: the vigil, the church service and the committal rites. Ideally, all three are part of one funeral celebrated by the same assembly. In practice, this rarely happens. Many people, for a variety of reasons, attend the vigil only or the church service only. It seems that more and more people present at a church service do not attend the rites at the cemetery. For these, the final commendation at the end of the church service might be a substitute of sorts for the cemetery rites. For those who do participate in both, the question might be asked if the final commendation is redundant. More than a few observers of Catholic funerals have noted that the final commendation is the weakest part of the church service.¹²

It seems that both the theory behind the final commendation and the operationalization of the theory are unclear. Originally, what is now the final commendation was one of the “stations” or stop-overs in early Christian funeral rites, before the incorporation of the eucharist as we now know it. In the medieval church it was known as the absolution, and it was full of gloom and doom. As Rutherford points out, this renewed rite is supposed to differ in spirit and theology from the former absolution after Mass. It is no longer to be viewed as an appendage to the funeral Mass, but as a distinct part of the celebration.¹³ In the actual practice of the 24 funerals we studied, the final commendations resembled an appendage more than a distinct rite.

Clearly, the intent of the final commendation is to make it an experience of closure, the assembly’s last opportunity to say goodbye to the deceased. In the words of the OCF, “The final commendation is a final farewell by the members of the community, an act of respect for one of their members, whom they entrust to the tender and

¹² Rutherford and Barr, 186.
¹³ Rutherford 156.
merciful embrace of God." These rites would have a much better chance of being successful if they were held at the graveside (which is an official option), preceded by an actual procession, which would mark this transitional event.

The OCF allows for a number of options in the final commendation, and their use could make this a powerful experience. In the 24 funerals studied, little or no creativity was evident. Rutherford's conclusion that this rite has not taken hold, and is simply a matter of new words accompanying old gestures, seems accurate.

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Words of Remembrance

At 18 of the 24 funerals studied, someone (usually a relative or close friend of the deceased) delivered a statement highlighting key events in the life of the deceased, usually in chronological order. In six of the 18 cases this "message" was referred to as a "eulogy", and in six other cases the terms "words of remembrance" or a "few words" were used. In the remaining cases, no reference was made to this event in the funeral.

In two cases, the words of remembrance were delivered as soon as the assembly was seated, following the completion of the opening rites. In one funeral the words of remembrance came after the gospel, before the homily, and in another one right after the homily. In the remaining 14 funerals they were delivered right after communion, immediately preceding the final commendation.

The Canadian edition of the OCF does not use the term "words of remembrance", nor does it even allow for such messages in the regular funeral liturgy with Mass. In the instruction preceding the eleven models for funeral vigils, in the Vigil for the Deceased with Reception at the Church, and in the Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass, the following words are used: "A member or a friend of the family may speak in remembrance of the deceased. When such a message is delivered at a funeral without Mass, it is to be done immediately before the final commendation."

Thus speaking in remembrance of the deceased (outside the homily) seems not to be allowed at the regular funeral liturgy. However, in the 24 funerals studied, 75% had such messages and 78% of them were delivered just before the final commendation. The quality of the delivery of the 18 presentations tended to be marginal. The presenters were usually full of feelings and many seemed to lack the requisite skills. It also seemed that many of them had little idea of what was expected of them in that role.

A formal content analysis of the material in the 18 words of remembrance presentations was not undertaken. However, some general observations can be made. The first is that most of the 18 presentations were clearly eulogistic. The primary characteristic of eulogies is that they praise the deceased; they list the positive qualities and accomplishments of a person, ostensibly to edify and deepen the faith and hope of the listeners. One can see why it is so common, and perhaps justifiable, to refer to such presentations as eulogies.

14 OCF, no. 146.
16 OCF, no. 368.
Many different themes emerged in the 18 presentations. The primacy of family in the lives of the deceased was one of the most common themes, and there was a strong focus on the interests, activities and hobbies of the deceased. Often gratitude was expressed for shared memories, and to the assembly for being present. Most of the presentations contained references to chronological events in the life of the deceased. In several cases, this is all that was done. In two cases, the persons delivering the messages made explicit reference to a favourite passage of scripture. In several other instances references were made to the importance of prayer and faith in the lives of the deceased.

If what was found in these 18 words of remembrance is typical of many or most Catholic funerals, it is a matter that invites further discussion and research. If this practice is to be a part of Catholic funerals, those preparing and delivering such messages clearly need some guidelines. One of our conclusions is that if Catholic funeral preachers gave funeral homilies which include certain types of references to the deceased, the need for words of remembrance would be less or even eliminated. It is our opinion that the present practice of delivering "words of remembrance" often detracts from the giving of proper funeral homilies. As an aside, when listening to the taped preaching and the taped words of remembrance in this research project, the latter were often much more moving and inspirational than the former!

Conclusions

Based on our research, our general and basic recommendation is that more be done to educate all concerned about the tremendous "faith potential" of good funeral celebrations. The OCF is an excellent resource in this regard, and is full of sound pastoral suggestions.
The Holy Chrism

William Turner

William Turner is a Roman Catholic presbyter, originally from Ontario, who is now doing doctoral studies in Lansing, Michigan. This article is taken from his 1994 M.A. thesis for The Athenaeum of Ohio, Sign and Source of Blessing: The Theology of Oil, and is used with permission.

Chrism is a beauty-oil: sensuous lotion, lover's potion, sign of the good times – healthy glow, vitality and youth. Heady scent upon the sainted head, fresh fragrance of the Lord's loved ones, by the odour of whose unguents we are allured.¹

Mark Searle portrays the sensual properties of chrism in this poetic rendering. He expresses the attachment of the anointed person to the Lord, and the visible and scented effects that the use of chrism makes obvious in the environment of the Christian.

The uses of chrism in the Roman Catholic rites are today restricted to the following: at the baptism of children following the water rite, as a seal at confirmation, at the ordination of priests and bishops, and finally at the dedication of a church and/or altar.

Baptism for Children

The following prayer is used at the anointing with chrism at the baptism of infants:

God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has freed you from sin, given you new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and welcomed you into his holy people. He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation. As Christ was anointed priest, prophet and king, so may you live always as members of his body, sharing everlasting life.²

The child is then anointed on the crown of the head. Adults who are baptized are not anointed in this fashion; rather, they are later confirmed. There is some confusion here. Louis Ligier had hoped that the anointing of infants might be omitted as it causes confusion when confirmation is celebrated at a much later date. In effect, what has happened is that baptism is seen as the forgiveness of sins, and confirmation is seen as ratification of a previous baptism. This, however, is not the theology of the church.³ The RCIA no. 34, speaks of the close relationship between the mission of the Son and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. There is no separation between the two. The baptismal anointing with chrism is referring to the newly baptized having a participation in Christ's work, while the

² Rite of Baptism for Several Children, no. 98.
confirmation anointing refers to the gift of the Holy Spirit. The question unanswered is: how can the two be separated?\(^4\) There has yet to be an answer given to this question.

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**Confirmation**

The second use of chrism is in the rite of confirmation. The anointing prayer simply reads: “Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Pope Paul VI, in his *Apostolic Constitution on the Sacrament of Confirmation* notes that there has been chosen here a very ancient formula of the Byzantine rite by which the gift of the Holy Spirit is expressed and in which the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost is recalled. The prayer and outstretched hands before the anointing do not belong to the essence of the rite, but are said to be held in high esteem. This is not to be confused with the laying on of hands in anointing itself.

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**Ordinations**

The third use of chrism is at ordination. In the case of an ordination of a priest, the rite reads:

> The Father anointed our Lord Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. May Jesus preserve you to sanctify the Christian people and to offer sacrifice to God.\(^5\)

The bishop anoints the new priest’s hands. In the case of an ordination of a bishop the prayer reads:

> God has brought you to share in the high priesthood of Christ. May he pour out on you the oil of mystical anointing and enrich you with spiritual blessings.\(^6\)

The principal consecrator anoints the head of the new bishop. Alan Detscher says that these actions came from the Celtic Church. Originally the hands of a deacon and the head of a presbyter were anointed. The anointing of a deacon was abandoned, and the anointing of the priest was transferred to the ordination rite of the bishop. These anointings refer to the person as consecrated because of the laying on of hands and the consecratory prayer. The anointing itself is not the matter of the sacrament, but it is a rite of explanation of what has already taken place.\(^7\)

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\(^5\) Ordination of a Priest, no. 24.

\(^6\) Ordination of a Bishop, no. 28.

Dedication of a Church

The fourth use of chrism is found in the rites for the dedication of a church. The rites provide various scenarios. There can be a dedication of a church and an altar where both are anointed; there can be a dedication of a church already in use where both altar and walls are anointed; there can be a dedication of an altar only, where only the altar is anointed. The rites also provide for a blessing of a church and/or altar without anointing.

The prayer at the dedication of a new church and the prayer for the dedication of a church already in use are the same. The bishop says:

We now anoint this altar and this building. May God in his power make them holy, visible signs of the mystery of Christ and his church.

Chrism is then poured on the center of the altar and on each of the four corners of the altar. The bishop (or designated priests) then anoints twelve or sometimes four crosses, distributed evenly on the walls of the church. In the rite of dedication of an altar only, the prayer is slightly changed:

We now anoint this altar. May God is his power make it holy, a visible sign of the mystery of Christ, who offered himself for the life of the world.

The introductory statements in the rites of the Dedication of a Church explain the theology of these anointings. It is stated that it is the celebration of the eucharist in the building that is the dedication. The anointing is a symbol of what already exists and enhances what already exists. It is right that the title 'church' has been given to the building as well as to the people. The people are the temple of God made with living stones. The anointing in union with the other visible signs of incensing, lighting the candles, and covering the altar with a cloth express the work that the Lord accomplishes through the church in its celebrations. When the altar is anointed, it then becomes a symbol of Christ, the Anointed One. On the altar of his body, he offered the sacrifice of his life. When the walls are anointed, it is a sign that the church is forever dedicated to Christian worship.

There is a famous parallel construct that is said to have begun in Gaul. Just as the individual Christian becomes the temple of God by receiving in succession the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and eucharist, so the edifice becomes a temple of God by lustrous ablutions (baptism), anointing with sacred oils (confirmation), and the celebration of the eucharist. This reference may explain why the rites have retained the anointing here, while they no longer retain the anointing of other things such as chalices and patens, bells, and the water of the Easter Vigil. Until the new ritual these also were anointed with chrism.

Chrismation in church rites indicates that persons have shared in a unique way in the life of Christ, who is the Anointed One. Like Christ, they have been anointed with the Holy Spirit. The center of the Christian life is Jesus, the bread of life. His presence is specifically celebrated in the church building and at the altar of sacrifice. It is, therefore, fitting that chrism is used to anoint these signs of his presence.

8 Dedication of a Church, no. 64.
9 Dedication of a Church, no. 49.
10 Dedication of a Church, nos. 1-3.
Consecration of the Chrism

The bishop consecrates the chrism after he has blessed the oil of the sick and the oil of catechumens at the Chrism Mass. He may pour balsam or perfume into the oil and mix it, if this has not been done beforehand. He is instructed by the rite to breathe over the vessel of oil and then pray the prayer of consecration. There are two prayers offered for the occasion. The first reads:

God our maker, source of all growth in holiness, accept the joyful thanks and praise we offer in the name of your church.

In the beginning, at your command, the earth produced fruit-bearing trees. From the fruit of the olive tree you have provided us with the oil for holy chrism. The prophet David sang of the life and joy that the oil would bring us in the sacraments of your love. After the avenging flood, the dove returning to Noah with an olive branch announced your gift of peace. This was a sign of a greater gift to come. Now the waters of baptism wash away the sins of men, and by the anointing with olive oil you make us radiant with your joy. At your command, Aaron was washed with water, and your servant Moses, his brother, anointed him priest. This too foreshadowed greater things to come. After your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, asked John for baptism in the waters of the Jordan, you sent the Spirit upon him in the form of a dove and by the witness of your own voice you declared him to be your only, well-beloved Son. In this you clearly fulfilled the prophecy of David, that Christ would be anointed with the oil of gladness beyond his fellow men.

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

Make this chrism a sign of life and salvation for those who are to be born again in the waters of baptism. Wash away the evil they have received from sinful Adam, and when they are anointed with this holy oil make them temples of your glory, radiant with the goodness of life that has its source in you. Through this sign of chrism grant them royal, priestly, and prophetic honor, and clothe them with incorruption. Let this be indeed the chrism of salvation for those who will be born again of water and the Holy Spirit. May they come to share eternal life in the glory of your kingdom. We ask this through Christ our Lord.12

This prayer expresses the theology and purpose of anointing with chrism. It is a traditional prayer which is found in the Gelasian Sacramentary. The anointing of Christ is presented so as to be understood against the Old Testament background of the anointing of kings and priests. They are recalled as the spiritual exemplars of our own sacramental events. Matthew O'Connell wrote that this prayer helps us grasp more fully the idea of a royal and prophetic priesthood, which is the central signification of the post-baptismal anointing and of confirmation.13 What is spoken of here is the Christian's priestly dignity and the place of the Christian in the world

12 Rite of Blessing of Oils and Consecration of the Chrism, no. 25.
that has been redeemed by Christ. The Christian is made part of that history and is led to share in eternal life through Christ. It is fitting that the prayer refers ultimately to Christ as central in his role as the Anointed One.

The second prayer of consecration is newly created. It is a prayer that gives emphasis to the church and the paschal mystery from which the church gains its strength. It reads:

   Father, we thank you for the gifts you have given us in your love: we thank you for life itself and for the sacraments that strengthen it and give it fuller meaning. In the Old Covenant you gave your people a glimpse of the power of this holy oil and when the fullness of time had come you brought that mystery to perfection in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son.

   By his suffering, dying, and rising to life he saved the human race. He sent your Spirit to fill the church with the very gift needed to complete your saving work.

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

   And so, Father, by the power of your love, make this mixture of oil and perfume a sign and source of your blessing. Pour out the gifts of your Holy Spirit on our brothers and sisters who will be anointed with it. Let the splendor of holiness shine on the world from every place and thing signed with this oil.

   Above all, Father, we pray that through this sign of your anointing you will grant increase to your church until it reaches the eternal glory where you, Father, will be the all in all, together with Christ your Son, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, forever and ever.¹⁴

Gerald Austin reflects on this prayer and the fact that it speaks of the Church as Spirit-filled. That it mentions “every place and thing” reminds the hearer that chrism is used to anoint things (church and altar), as well as people.¹⁵ Martin Dudley points out that this prayer, in union with the other, deliberately links baptism to Christ's own anointing. Chrism is a sign and source of God's blessing. This anointing is the anointing with the Spirit. The baptized are transformed in this anointing into the likeness of Christ, and they are given a share in his royal, priestly, and prophetic work.¹⁶ It is interesting as well as appropriate that this idea is again repeated in the prayer of the anointing of infants at baptism. The preface of the Chrism Mass continues this theme by recalling that God, by the Holy Spirit, anointed his Son High Priest of the new and eternal covenant. It may also be noted that the opening prayer of the Chrism Mass recalled that fact and tied it to the share we have in Christ's consecration to priestly service.

The history of chrism has given the church a tradition and an understanding of what it means to be the anointed of God. The early concepts of prophet, king, priest and messiah all speak of people being chosen, set apart, and directed to carry out the will of God. Christian theology advanced those concepts in centering them on Christ, the Anointed One of the Promise. Christians were to share in the mission of

¹⁴ Rite of Blessing of Oils and Consecration of the Chrism, no. 25b.
¹⁶ Dudley, 123.
Christ, and in as much as he was anointed by the Holy Spirit, so they were anointed by that same Holy Spirit. The rites after the water-bath of baptism that developed in the early church complimented and made visible and tangible what was already in effect through baptism. In the Middle Ages a royal priesthood was envisioned in the anointing of kings. They, too, were set apart, anointed, inwardly purified by the Holy Spirit, and consecrated into a special relationship with God. Today's rites for baptism, confirmation, ordination, and the dedication of a church and an altar bear the mark of these concepts and share in this theology. Chrism is a sign of the spirit-filled church. It can indeed be the prayer of this church that “the splendor of holiness shine on the world from every place and thing signed with this oil.”

Pastoral Applications

As the church presents the theology of chrism, certain ritual and sensual properties should be evident. Christ is a perfume. Francois Louvel calls to mind that perfume expresses joy! The chrism is an oil of joyfulness. Like the oil of the Old Testament, chrism must be a sweet-smelling perfume that affects the sense of smell. It should linger on the skin as a sign of the aroma of Christ that permeates the person of the one chrismated. Choice should be made of a balsam or oil perfume that would have this effect. It would be ideal if, hours after being anointed, the person could still sense its trace. Such is the property of many expensive perfumes on the secular market; certainly the chrism should be equally effective.

The special place of chrism could be evident in its positioning among the other oils in an oil house or ambry near the baptismal font. The type of container and/or color of container might also emphasize the special character and use of chrism. In former days, the color gold was associated with chrism by the use of a veil on the container, as green was associated with the oil of the catechumens, and violet with the oil of the sick in the same fashion.

Honor could be given to the oil through a procession with candles when it is brought forward during ceremonies. If it could be carried from the credence table, the ambry, or some other place with reverence, this action could support the significance of the oil.

Bishops often bring their own oils to the church when they come to celebrate confirmation. But it would seem that the oil already given by the bishop for use in the parish would be a more appropriate oil for use.

In many places cotton saturated with oil is prevalent, but this could be replaced with containers of oil that could be more visible and more serviceable for generous use. The oil might also receive some prominence when it is used at ordinations. The anointing of an altar and the walls of a church could also be emphasized by using the oils generously. These are visible, fragrant and sensual signs of Christ’s presence that need to be experienced when chrism is employed.

May this sign and source of blessing so permeate the church that all Christians will be filled with the aroma of Christ, the Anointed One.

17 François Louvel, Signs of Life (Chicago: Fides Publishers 1953) 36.
Preparing for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000

In his apostolic letter, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, Pope John Paul II asked that there be a preparatory phase of three years, 1997 to 1999, for the jubilee of the year 2000. The first year of this period, 1997, is devoted to reflection on Christ, celebrating the Incarnation and coming into the world of the Son of God (no. 40).

During the liturgical year communities may wish to gather to celebrate this preparatory stage. The following are suggestions, the dates based on the nature of the celebration or the readings of the lectionary in light of the themes given in the apostolic letter.

1. Monday, December 9, 1996: Immaculate Conception, beginning of Year 1 (In Mary’s womb the Word became flesh.)


3. Sunday, January 19, 1997: Second Sunday of Ordinary Time (We have found the Messiah.)

4. Sunday, January 26, 1997: Third Sunday of Ordinary Time (Jesus proclaimed the good news of God: Repent and believe the good news.)

5. Sunday, September 14, 1997: Triumph of the Cross (The Son of Man must be lifted up.)

Because of the focus of the Eucharistic Prayer for Masses for Various Needs and Occasions, it is appropriate that it be used for the preparatory phase celebrations which do not have their own proper prefaces. The prayer’s preface and corresponding intercessions may be chosen to suit the feast.
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