

RECOVERING THE FULL CELEBRATION OF THE LITURGY

Article prepared by the Worship Office Archdiocese of Newark

PARTICIPATION

*The Church earnestly desires that
all the faithful be led to that full, conscious,
and active participation in liturgical celebrations
called for by the very nature of the liturgy.*

-Sacrosanctum Concilium, 14

The outbreak of the Covid-19 Pandemic in 2020 required a temporary reduction of liturgical practices in the celebration of the Eucharist and administration of the sacraments. With almost all aspects of life returning to normalcy, it seems opportune for the Archdiocese of Newark to foster a renewed fullness in liturgical celebrations.

That all the baptized share in the one priesthood of Jesus Christ is the key to understanding the Church's call for full, conscious and active participation — thus transforming liturgical assemblies from passive congregations to dynamic worshipers.

Full participation means that every member of the community has a role in the liturgy; it does not mean that everyone does everything. Liturgy, like the Church, respects the different roles assigned by Christ; it allows all the different voices to blend in one great hymn of praise.

Active participation certainly means that, in gesture, word, song and service, all the members of the community take part in the act of worship, which is anything but inert or passive. Yet active participation does not preclude the active passivity of silence and listening: indeed, it demands it when listening to the readings or the homily or internalizing the prayers of the celebrant and the chants and music of the liturgy. These experiences are in their own way profoundly active.

Conscious participation calls for the entire community to be properly instructed in the mysteries of the liturgy. But it does not mean a constant attempt within the liturgy itself to make the implicit explicit, which may trivialize the act of worship. Nor does it mean the suppression of all subconscious experience, which is vital to liturgy which thrives on symbols.

Above all, the faithful form one body by the common offering of the Sacrifice and by participating together at the Lord's table. The role of the assembly cannot be underestimated, nor diminished. It is their right and duty by virtue of their Baptism.

LITURGICAL MINISTERS

*Liturgical ministers ought to discharge their office
therefore with the sincere devotion and decorum
demanded by so exalted a ministry and rightly
expected of them: by God's people. Consequently they
must all be deeply imbued with the spirit of the liturgy.*

-Sacrosanctum Concilium, 14

Liturgical celebrations require the functioning of a variety of ministries in order to project a

rich, full expression of the very nature of the Church—a microcosm of the Body of Christ. At Mass in particular, a priest presides, often with the assistance of a deacon. Acolytes serve; readers proclaim the word of God to the assembly; extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion assist with the distribution of the Body and Blood of Christ.

Ushers and greeters welcome the people of God as they assemble and assist with the gifts and the collection. Cantors and instrumentalists support the singing of the assembly while choirs add beauty to the liturgy with trained voices.

The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* tells us that, "servers, readers...and members of the choir also exercise a genuine liturgical function." In other words, these ministries are a necessary part of the liturgy, not just "add-ons" to help the priest. The plurality of ministries in the liturgy should reflect the lived reality of the Church: all are needed to serve and celebrate.

During the pandemic, many liturgical ministries of the church were minimized or eliminated. A minimalist liturgy makes for a service that is meager and wanting—a weak image of the Church! Altar servers were replaced by book stands; lay readers were replaced by clergy; musical elements were reduced as if unimportant.

Now that post-pandemic life is emerging, a moment of grace lies before us calling parishes to revitalize their worship; to invite back ministers who stepped down during the pandemic and to install additional ones where needed. Now is the time to restore the parts of the Mass and the function of ministers required for a rich, full celebration of the liturgy.

With properly prepared ministers assisting at worship, the faithful are better able to encounter Christ in the Assembly, the Word and the Eucharist. The Church cannot afford to minimize its experience of prayer when so many need the presence of Christ in their lives. With the full use of clerical and lay ministries, worship will come alive again.

RECEIVING THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

*Take and eat; this is my body...
Drink from it, all of you, for this is
my blood of the covenant, which will be shed
on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.*

—Matthew 26:26-28

In the Gospel of Matthew, at the Last Supper, Jesus specifically commanded his disciples to "eat" and "drink" his Body and Blood. This command is at the heart of all of our worship—the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Jesus gave his Body and Blood to be consumed. In the Gospel of John, Jesus taught: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you" (6:53).

Because of concerns about sharing the chalice during the pandemic, the Archdiocese of Newark, like many others, placed a moratorium on its distribution for the assembly. It was reserved to the clergy who are obligated (for validity) to receive the Blood of Christ at every Mass.

Communion from the chalice is being restored now, so that all may have the opportunity to participate more fully in the celebration of the Eucharist. The church rightly teaches that whoever receives Communion under only one kind receives the whole Christ, "Body and Blood, soul and divinity," since the living Lord is totally and completely present in each of the species. However, it also states that "Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it takes place under both kinds" (GIRM, 281).

Beginning as early as the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, April 6, 2023, but no later than Pentecost Sunday, May 28, 2023, parishes across the Archdiocese

of Newark will once again begin offering the Blood of Christ at Mass. This will allow all parishioners to respond to Jesus' command to eat and drink at their own level of comfort.

Parishioners wishing to receive Holy Communion from the chalice should approach the minister and bow their head slightly in a sign of reverence. When the minister says "The Blood of Christ," the communicant replies audibly, "Amen," takes the chalice from the minister and drinks. The minister then takes it back and firmly wipes both sides of the rim while turning it slightly for the next communicant.

"The consecrated host may be received either on the tongue or in the hand, at the discretion of each communicant" (GIRM, 160).

Saint Paul wrote, "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). Eating and drinking the Body and Blood of the Lord fulfills his Last Supper command, commemorates his sacrifice on the Cross, and moves believers into a deeper participation in the Eucharist.

LITURGICAL MUSIC

The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value...as sacred song closely bound to the text, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy.

-Sacrosanctum Concilium, 14

Music is all around us in every aspect of our lives. It accompanies us in our cars and on our walks. It is playing overhead in stores, salons and even elevators. It has been around since the first person hummed a tune, perhaps trying to imitate the chirps and songs of birds.

Music is an integral part of the Church's worship. Unlike much of the music heard in daily life, liturgical music is live and it invites participants to sing. The use of live church music is a reminder of the importance of authenticity in the liturgy. No artificial flowers; no artificial symbols; and no prerecorded music! It is also key to the participation of the assembly in the liturgy.

Many parishes were forced to reduce the amount of singing or even eliminate it altogether during the height of the pandemic. Now that post-pandemic life is emerging, a moment of grace lies before us calling parishes to revitalize music; to return to fuller celebrations of the liturgy and fulfill the teaching of the church which requires that "Every care should be taken that singing by the ministers and the people not be absent in celebrations that occur on Sundays and Holy Days of obligation" (GIRM, 40).

Music in the liturgy fulfills many purposes. It often accompanies liturgical action like the opening song of Mass which is sung during the entrance procession or the Lamb of God which accompanies the breaking of the bread. Music itself can be a prayer as in the singing of the Gloria or the Holy, Holy, Holy. Liturgical music shapes the liturgy and the seasons of the church year. It can voice hope at a funeral and joy on Easter morning.

Music in liturgy is also key to participation. The assembly is united as one body when it sings together the hymns and acclamations of the Mass. Most of the vocalizing done by the assembly in a liturgy is singing. When the entire assembly sings along at Mass, it makes for a vibrant community of faith, which draws others into the church.

The US Bishops' document on music, *Sing to the Lord*, says that "good celebrations can foster and nourish faith. Poor celebrations may weaken it. Good music makes] the liturgical prayers of the Christian community more alive and fervent so that everyone can praise and beseech the Triune God more powerfully, more intently and more effectively" (STL, 5). It is time for parishes to restore vibrant music and robust singing to their liturgies. It is time to promote rich, full celebrations which increase the faith and participation of all who come to worship.