

Religious of the Assumption
International Session on Liturgy
Auteuil
5 – 13 November 2016

*In You,
All our well-springs*
Ps 87 (86): 7



1817-2017

Bicentennial of the Births
Of Saint Marie Eugénie and Mother Thérèse Emmanuel

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For this publication, we have chosen to publish only the contributions prepared for the International Session on the Liturgy by the outside experts and by Assumption Sisters. The rich contents of the group exchanges and in the large assembly are thus left to the living transmission of the session in each province!

The chapters entitled “Common Thread” pick up the interventions of Brother Pierre Faure, a Jesuit deacon-liturgist, who accompanied the session day after day. The wonderful, expert words that he offered us, springing from his attentive listening to the exchanges and of all that was lived at the session, connected, deepened, and challenged. His interventions were a precious “common thread” that nourished all the content of the experience of our group. Our deepest thanks to him! Our gratitude also goes out to all those who, from both near and far, contributed to the beauty of the session.



Programme de la session internationale de liturgie – Aureuil, 5-13 novembre 2016

"En toi, toutes nos sources !" P: 86, 7

	Le Mystère pascal...		... engendrer la réconciliation
Matinée	Samedi 5 nov. Ouverture – Sr. Martine Témoignage de cinq sœurs sur la Liturgie à l'Assomption Par groupes de langue : réactions et partages	Dimanche 6 nov. "fil rouge" La célébration de l'Eucharistie P. Jean-Claude Reichert, prêtre	Mardi 8 nov. "fil rouge" Vivre la réconciliation dans nos vies personnelles et communautaires P. Manuel Grandin sj
Après-midi	L'intuition de la congrégation sur la liturgie. Sr. Cristina Massó Echange en groupes Assemblée, "fil rouge" Répétition de chants	La célébration de l'Eucharistie P. Jean-Claude Reichert, prêtre	Célébration de la réconciliation
Soirée		Ateliers A1	Répétition de chants
		Ateliers B1	

	Conditions de la vie liturgique		Intégration
Matinée	Mercredi 9 nov. "fil rouge" Une prière plus universelle... Fr Pierre Faure, sj	Jeudi 10 nov. "fil rouge" Le silence, condition première de toute action sacrée. P. Pierre de Béthune, osb Déjeuner en silence	Samedi 12 nov. Relecture personnelle Partage par groupes de langue P. Créonemes Maciel, sj
Après-midi	L'Adoration à l'Assomption Partage spontané de 4 sœurs	Vendredi 11 nov. "fil rouge" Office divin : Prière de l'Eglise et notre prière P. Créonemes Maciel, sj	Dimanche 13 nov. Assemblée finale Messe Temps de préparation de la fête
Soirée	Soirée libre	Déjeuner dans Paris Assemblée Ateliers A2	Partage en groupe Assemblée Préparation de la fête

OPENING REMARKS

Sr. Martine Tapsoba, RA

Dear Sisters, and dear Friends who are going to accompany us for a while or for the whole session, you are most welcome!

It is always a joy to be together as family. How much more so this time, on the occasion of this long awaited session on the liturgy! As you are going to see, the session has been prepared with love and care by the team. Sister Marie Sophie of Belgium, the Provincial of Northern Europe, Sister Laure of France, Sister Marie Madeleine of Togo (West Africa Province), Sister Jose of Mexico, and Sister Aremar of the Philippines (Province of Southeast Asia) made up this team, and Sister Carmen of the General Council took care of its coordination. The Sisters of the team who were in Europe came together at Auteuil several times in order to work on and elaborate a new project, readjusting and seeing to all the details, right down to the arrivals at Auteuil. And here we are, all ready to launch ourselves into this beautiful adventure. Welcome to you all, coming from 19 provinces and one region! You are going to make a big beautiful international community

This is the first international session since the celebrations surrounding the Fusion. It is the first session that we are going to live with our new Assumption Sisters from the two new provinces of Madagascar and France Notre Dame. Sadly, not all those who had registered on the list of participants can be here. We regret the absence of Sr. Anne Joseph of the Province of the USA; she left us on October 22 for eternal praise in the house of the Father. She had been overjoyed when Sr. Nuala had asked her to take part in the session. She was very happy to see the Motherhouse and to greet Mère Marie Eugénie once more – now, she sees her even better. And as you know, Sr. Carmen Escribano cannot be with us, since she had surgery two days ago. She has actively prepared this session with the entire team, right from the very start until the eve of its being realized, even translating the texts of the outside speakers into Spanish. We are very grateful to her and we carry her in our prayer, sure that she is and will be in communion with us during the whole session, a session whose very title calls us to receive from the One in whom “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17: 28).

“In you, all our well-springs!” Ps 87 (86):7

Yes, in God are all our well-springs. In fact, the goal of the liturgy that we celebrate each day is God himself. We feel ourselves invited to return to God through the liturgy as well-spring of our Christian life but also to return to the liturgy as place of renewal and mooring of our relation to God. The session is surely the occasion to return to the sources of our liturgical practice as Congregation and thus to revisit our heritage received from our first Mothers, in particular MME and MTE, whose 200th anniversaries of birth we have been celebrating. It is not a small matter that we have chosen this session as one of the activities marking the Bicentennial in order to thank God and our two Mothers for the spirituality and the charism received from them.

Today, we can say: “At last a session on the liturgy!” The wait has been long. And yet, for years and years we’ve considered the question of the liturgy, in important meetings like the CGPs and General Chapters, because it’s the “daily bread” of our lives. Still, we haven’t had a real international,

congregational session on the liturgy since 1977, during the Generalate of Mother Hélène Marie. At the same time, however, it's important to point out that in 2010, thanks to a decision of the European Provinces, a number of Sisters came together from 10 to 12 July here at Auteuil for a liturgy workshop. They deepened their thinking on the Office of Readings, on daily Eucharist wherever possible, and on the rhythm of life. . . (Cf. Partage Auteuil n°85)...They felt the need to deepen together our understanding of these essential elements of our liturgical life, to share their experiences, and to seek ways of living all of it today. Meanwhile, almost all the provinces organized liturgy sessions, according to their interests, in order to evaluate and renew their practices, both before and especially after the CGP of 2014. At that meeting, we had reflected on ways to implement the decision of the General Chapter of 2012 to organize a session on the liturgy. At the CGP of 2015 in Guatemala, it took preliminary form.

In 1991, fourteen years after the 1977 session, we had the joy to welcome the profound and rich reflection of Sr. Clare Teresa. The Letters on the Liturgy I and II have given us a lot of light since then; they remain a reference. Worked on in the communities, they have inspired provincial sessions on the liturgy. Twenty-five years after those Letters, it is thus a very happy thing that we have succeeded in organizing the present international meeting. What a beautiful way to celebrate the jubilee of those texts without having really planned it like that! I see in all this a wink of the eye of our two Mothers and also a beautiful birthday present for them who were so attached to the liturgy.

Without being the sole activity of the Church, the liturgy is a vital action in the life of disciples of Christ since it is defined as the “source and summit of the life of the Church.” Through it, we participate in the prayer of the Church. It is also a kind of “showcase” where our community life is reflected, as well as an apostolic center.

The love of Mothers Marie Eugénie and Thérèse Emmanuel for the Office, so explicit at the beginning of the Congregation, is profoundly linked to our mission as educators who need solid nourishment. This prayer makes us daughters of the Church of which the foundation is Christ, the Incarnate Word; He had espoused our humanity, taking on its joys, assuming its cries and its supplication through the prayer of the psalms. In the liturgy, we remember and celebrate the history of our salvation.

The reflection of our Orthodox sisters and brothers, who consider the liturgy as “privileged crucible of the experience of the faith, the place from which flows mystical, pastoral and discursive theology, can help us to go further into the understanding of a liturgy “well-spring.”

Because we know the importance of the liturgy for our personal and community lives, because we are aware of the ardent and persevering fight made by MME to have the Liturgy of the Hours accepted in our Constitutions, we are always seeking to remain faithful to that gift and we carry the desire to preserve this treasure in in all the many configurations of our lives.

Over the course of these last two decades, how many times have we evoked the liturgy with the desire that it inform and truly nourish our lives! It is a demand on us, a necessity that we have to return to periodically. The never-ending changes in our societies, in the Church, and even in our religious life, oblige and push us to spend time with the questions: How shall we understand and live the liturgical dimension of our lives today? How shall we make of our lives a liturgy? And how shall we make of the

liturgy life for us? These are the expressions that we have heard, written into our community projects, as a sign of this permanent desire that has no (and may never have) a definitively satisfying response.

We can carry in our reflection the questions that certain communities pose concerning the movements and the creativity that we have to live, from the desire to make the liturgy a food for our lives, a place of formation and transformation for us, and to make of the Eucharist a place of integration, connected to the Eucharistic dimension of our whole lives as Christians, even when it is not easy to celebrate the Eucharist daily in certain countries where we live out our mission. In all these domains, we will, without doubt, be enlightened by what the speakers bring and the sharing of our diverse experiences.

It's good that you who have come to represent your Province or Region have been preparing for this session since the CGP of 2014 by the work done in the communities. You have also been preparing yourselves for this session since it was announced. Today, you receive the grace to be not only witnesses but also fully involved participants; afterwards, you will transmit it all to our communities so as they can continue to reflect and live the liturgy as a way to be Church and to carry its mission in today's world.

Let us welcome the richness of our internationality, let us open ourselves to the diversity that enriches us, let us go out from whatever makes us feel safe, let us allow ourselves to be questioned and challenged by new things that come from elsewhere; let us try to feel with the other, to understand and dare to share what makes us live. We are going to listen to each other, let ourselves be enriched by all that will happen in this session hall, the Chapel, and in our various places of conviviality and exchange. The Lord is in the midst of the people that we are; He speaks to us and we will speak as an assembly that is celebrating and awaiting his light to get underway in the Congregation.

May we draw the greatest good from this moment and may Mère Marie Eugénie and Mère Thérèse Emmanuel accompany us in this prayer!

I wish a good session to everyone!

Sister Martine Tapsoba, Superior General

TESTIMONIES of FIVE RELIGIOUS OF THE ASSUMPTION

How does the liturgy nourish my life in the Assumption?

What are my joys and my difficulties?

CATHERINE ANNE SOLEY, RA (USA)

I am very grateful to have been given this time to reflect on the role of the liturgy in my life. Liturgy is not only central to the life of an Assumption Sister, it defines that life. However, the liturgy is not something that we simply put on, like the habit. Like the habit, it is something that we grow into – both in practice and in understanding. Liturgy is as ever expanding as the Spirit that breathes life into it.

My first encounters with Assumption Sisters were in the liturgy. I was looking for the opportunity for Eucharistic Adoration, at a time that fit my busy life. The Sisters in the West Philadelphia community warmly welcomed me, encouraging me to join them for Vespers as well. Later, I would stay on for dinner... the rest is history!

At first, liturgy was something we did, separate from the rest of my visit and certainly separate from the rest of my life at that time. I was charmed by the chanting of the psalms, the fidelity of the Sisters' prayer.

As a postulant and even more so as a novice, liturgy – Divine Office, adoration, Daily Mass -- structured my day; I learned how to navigate the Breviary and attempted to sing. Over time, both my prayer - and my experience and appreciation of liturgy - have deepened.

In those early years, I was beginning what is truly a life's work: understanding how liturgy functions as a life giving part of any spiritual life....especially of a life given totally to God. Praying together as Sisters, liturgy gives voice to the deepest yearnings of our hearts... gives form to the inexpressible ...lifts us up when we may not have the energy for prayer...all the while ... deepening our communion. Many become one voice... one body – offering praise in solidarity with the church and with all creation. It is the strength of our communion that enables us to live fully our beautiful Assumption life – and to live it joyfully! All we do finds its source in Jesus Christ through our prayer...Always, we return to that center.

The Sacristy

It is in the role of sacristan that I have found my truest mode of expression in the creation of liturgy. I have come to understand the role of sacristan as complex, layered and varied. In this work, moving through the liturgical calendar, I continue to explore how the environmental elements can shape the experience of liturgy. I want to go deeper and explore with others the contemplative dimensions of the sacristy. It is my hope that we will be able to do this during the session. For now, I will touch on the role of the sacristan as a participant with the liturgist and the Sisters in supporting, enhancing and

shaping the encounter with God. When most successful, the physical environment, the liturgy, and the prayer of the Sisters encourage, inform, and support each other.

The work of the sacristan is privileged. It is an invitation to explore beneath the surface. It can be, in itself, a place of encounter. It begins with engaging a particular gospel, a feast or a liturgical season. The subsequent building up and taking down; the manipulation and alteration of the space become prayer. It is itself a contemplative experience. This occurs not only in the big feasts and liturgical seasons, but also in the “everyday”, the daily experience, and the repetitions inherent in our life of prayer. Each presents its own challenges.

One big challenge is familiarity. This can lead to prayer’s becoming rote, to taking things for granted, to a loss of the sense of awe and wonder, to no longer being as open to the possibilities within our prayer. Familiarity can be countered with surprise. This can be startling, dramatic, unexpected. Or, it can be very subtle, simple, and barely noticeable. To facilitate this experience, the sacristan utilizes and extends the potential of the language and means of the sacristy, which include both symbol and ritual. These are embodied in

- * Flowers and natural materials

- * Images, icons, texts

- * Liturgical colors

- * Textiles

- * Texture

- * Light and darkness

- * Candles and incense.

The chapel is a special place where we meet God in a direct, particular way. Jesus offers us His Presence in the Tabernacle. But He also promised that wherever two or more are gathered in his name, he would be with them. Whenever we come together in prayer, we are crossing a threshold, entering into a space pregnant with the possibility of encounter. The sacristan, in communion with her Sisters and following the lead of the Holy Spirit, helps to shape and support that encounter with God. Thank You.

SIMONE OUÉDRAOGO, RA (WEST AFRICA)

I begin by thanking God for the gift of the liturgy as we live it in the Assumption, because for me, Assumption liturgy is a grace, a treasure that I discovered, a true source of energy for life. From our way of living it, here is how I feel myself nourished by it.

First, in the liturgy, I have the chance to taste the depth of the Word of God, to understand it thanks to the commentaries and reflections of theologians and of the Fathers of the Church, and the homilies during the Eucharist. I receive light for my life from all those sources because the events, circumstances and situations of my life gain sense in the light of the faith by this daily contact with the Word of God and I feel myself thus held in readiness.

The Liturgy of the Hours celebrated in community puts within my grasp the many diverse experiences of people seeking God, men and women believers, and thus, I find the right words in all circumstances to express my personal prayer to God. Thanks to our celebrations, I have the chance to be consciously in relationship with the Father, with Jesus, and with the Holy Spirit who guides my prayer. The importance that we place on the celebration of the Office in choir and the daily participation in the Eucharist is for me a grace because with all that, my interior life is permanently nourished, fortified, and held at the ready.

In effect, it has been given to me through the mysteries of Salvation throughout the liturgical year, the celebrations of the Virgin Mary and the saints, to be guided and enlightened each year and to live fully the events of the world and of my own life by integrating these daily to these mysteries. Two little experiences in this sense:

One day, I was having some trouble, and I had to stop myself in order to see if it was worth the pain to continue to go forward in the Assumption. I gave myself the task of looking at each element of our life and then to consider what I would lose if I were to choose –because of the difficulty of the present moment – to turn back. Thus, I arrived at the life of prayer, and I considered the liturgy celebrate in community. My tears flowed at the idea of how much I would lose if I couldn't get beyond the obstacles in order to preserve the treasure that I had discovered. In effect, I experienced an immense joy in the liturgy, especially the Divine Office that I had never known elsewhere. I had to accept to pay the price of giving myself over to the Lord, source of my joy.

The second experience. In 2014, on the day after Easter, I found myself detained at the Brussels airport because through ignorance I had surcharged my passport when I was leaving for the session of young sisters here at Auteuil. Very unhappy experience that tested my faith! But in this trouble, I was also give the opportunity to participate in the mystery of the passion of Christ that we had just celebrated. Through the words and treatment of the airport police, I lived as if in a dream an intense communion with the humiliations, scorn and rejection that Jesus himself had lived. . .I was unhappy but deep down inside of me, I had a light and some reassurance thanks to the memory of what I had just celebrated at the Pascal Triduum. . .in addition, in the jail for people without papers, welcomed by a group of believers who read in my arrival in that place a sign of God for them, I found myself invited to prepare the prayer of each hour and to animate it with joyful detachment. Canticles, psalms and space

for sharing rendered the climate joyful and attractive. My departure from that place was celebrated by that group as a sending out on mission knowing our suffering, they said, you can, with your sisters, continue to pray for us. This experience is also the sign that the liturgy is for me a grace that forms all of me, giving me what I need to live a true communion with Christ and humanity. It is my joy, the source and the summit of my life. I thank God for it, I am grateful to MME who conveyed to us something solid in fighting to give us this liturgy as heritage of the Assumption.

With respect to difficulty, I would underline simply the weight that we face, when sometimes the Office isn't well prepared or perhaps is sung poorly. Also, when we are in the midst of full apostolic activity, the schedule of masses in the parish often doesn't help. Sometimes it's difficult to take the time to taste what we are celebrating. An accelerated rhythm doesn't favor prayer.

MARY JO CONCEPCION, RA (SOUTHEAST ASIA)

When I started to reflect on the question: How is my life in the Assumption nourished by the Liturgy, I thought: Can life in the Assumption ever be without liturgy? Or: can life ever be without liturgy? Perhaps...but what a colorless life it would be.

Even before I was aware of our liturgies in its different forms, I believe I was already being enriched and nurtured by them. But my most vivid memory of when liturgy took on a different meaning was when I was here (Auteuil) many, many years ago during the Young sisters' session. Of course the prayers were all in French, a language I hardly understood. Gradually I learned the tones, and could sing with the sisters. Still, I did not understand what I was singing.

But I did not have to understand all I was singing; I took pleasure in the melodies that somehow gave expression to the psalms. Something spoke so deeply in me: I could lend my voice. I could still be a voice for the voiceless and for those who did not pray nor know how to pray. This became my prayer, this has sustained me. A couple of years later, I found myself in exactly the same situation when I was sent to Sweden. The Swedish language is easier to read than French, and musically very pleasing to the ears. But my heart carried the same prayer; rather, this way of praying carried me. It was my initial entry to the new culture and people I was embracing. In retrospect, it was not just my voice that I lent. The learning of and praying with a new language was a way of emptying myself of all that was familiar, to be filled with the new and with what God has meant for me. God was forming my spiritual being.

I have always enjoyed liturgical celebrations especially during big feasts, with the presence of so many people and when the singing is beautiful and full of life. Yet, in my years in Scandinavia praying the divine office in community was often a lonely endeavor. We were a choir of 3 or 4 sisters...during my last years in Sweden, we were a duet. Believe it or not, even with just 2 of us, we would sing the office.

While in Scandinavia, taking part in the parish liturgy was my way of understanding not only the language, but the people to whom I was called to. Gone were the lively celebrations I was used to with guitar and all the works for mass...to be replaced by the more subdued, rather formal or even boring way of celebrating, using only the organ. I found it rather austere yet the austerity and simplicity helped

me focus more on the essence of what was celebrated. Perhaps it was because of this simplicity that I was able to become aware of and appreciate more the use of symbols in the liturgies, whether it be in the celebration of the Eucharist, or the Divine Office, at Adoration, or in the way the chapel is decorated. I also discovered the value of silence, the significance and beauty of nature. These stood by me in my loneliness which is the faithful companion of every missionary. With the changing seasons I better appreciated the liturgical seasons as well. The life – death – life cycle in nature made the Paschal mystery so real and concrete.

I do not pretend to be a liturgist, but I have discovered other expressions of liturgy that have also nourished my spiritual life. In 1990 I had the chance to make my annual retreat in a Jesuit retreat house in England. It was a retreat using clay, a retreat so different from all the retreats I've been to, but which has made a great impact in my spiritual life. It was in this retreat that I discovered more my own unique way of praying, my unique way of communing with God, or rather, God's unique way with me. I am not a great artist but I have always felt that it is through the work of my hands that I give expression to my praise and adoration. Whether it is using clay, or paints, pens...or even drawing in the computer – the experience of having created something, even if it be so simple, simply lifts my soul.

My first assignment when I went back to the Philippines in 2011 and where I still am is in the community of Iloilo. In community we are a good mix of old, sick, retired and sisters on the go. At present we are a community of 12 sisters. We are an international community as well, with an American sister, and a young Vietnamese sister. We try to sing in Vietnamese from time to time. It is a source of joy and strength for me that in this community we have the opportunity to celebrate the Eucharist daily with the school community. We begin the morning by praying our morning oraison at 5.15, and praying together with the sisters in the chapel is in itself a great comfort. Each weekday at 6.15 in the morning a school class is responsible for the mass, from the singing, to the readings, and to the serving.

Those of us who work in school make efforts to be present for our prayers in the middle of the day, and of course for Vespers. Our regularity is a great gift, and this has been the community's strength. This year we are blessed to have sisters who sing well, and who play the guitar. Still, there is room for more improvement.

Just as I am happy and most grateful for my 22 years in Scandinavia, I am happy to be back in the Philippines. The distance may be so much, but through prayers what is so far away can be very close. And knowing that the whole world prays the same prayer as we celebrate the Eucharist and sing our office is just awesome and is a source of consolation and strength.

PATRIZIA PURICELLI, RA (ITALY)

Today, I think of my life in the Assumption as a daily pathway of awareness that grows, like a gift of Love received without any merit on my part. So, I try to welcome the call to Love by living beyond myself, going out toward the other. A life given over in freedom with setting conditions, in order to put myself at the service of the Project of God in simplicity, so that my brothers and sisters in humanity have life in abundance.

I live the Liturgy as a great space that nourishes this fundamental attitude, the interior mirror where I learn, before God, to recognize myself and the other with lights and shadows, great resources for good and also mysterious chasms, feelings, emotions, readings full of wisdom about the human experience, the widening of the being that opens itself to the marvels of the work of God, He who always comes to seek out and save us.

The psalms are my great masters and life companions. My voice acts like an echo of Jesus Christ's voice; when I proclaim the words of the psalms, they resound in me like a pledge to believe and cling to. To receive the psalms in their structure given each day helps me to let them illuminate meaning and bring a sense of salvation to events both great and small as they present themselves. I receive the psalms like a continual sowing of sacred words that make the experiences of humanity and of Creation fruitful.

The Eucharist celebrated in moments of Solemnities and more often in the sober simplicity of daily life, nourishes my confident trust in the work of Christ dead and resurrected, a mysterious and secret work that is in the deepest part of hearts and a transformative action of the entire Creation, with the free cooperation of human beings.

If to live at the Assumption signifies passing through the things of this world while having a gaze fixed on the things of above, the Liturgy is for me a continual song that remains constant in the midst of my inconstancies, my falls, my fears; it immerses me each time in the tranquil waters of Life. It is often in the liturgical life that I find the courage to begin again, to abandon myself with trust to the pathway of risk and boldness, the courage to welcome the joy of the Kingdom present, and a new way of looking at reality.

My Joys

Our Liturgy lets me breathe with both lungs the richness of the life of the Church, within a great respect for the living Tradition that transmits the Faith of the Apostles of all times to us and also, in a creative liberty that makes us enter into contact with the Spirit that works in all cultures; the gives me joy and also a sense of the treasure that belongs to us.

I rejoice that our Liturgy, while remaining canonical, seeks to render the events that we live present with symbols, gestures, and time for preparation. . .

Personally, I love to pray with the Benedictine monks and taste the solidity and the beauty of the texts and the music; still, sometimes I miss that connection with current events that is delicately present in our Offices and Eucharists!

In our liturgy, a certain sober beauty makes me rejoice, beauty that doesn't seek to make a big splash, or to use lots of words. We like to have everyone participate and to share their gifts.

I like to find the second reading for the Office of Readings, which gives color to the Office; but that can be hard sometimes, and you have to pay the price of fatigue.

I love the care necessary for singing together at the service of prayer, avoiding taking power.

My Difficulties

Sometimes preparation can become a task that weighs one down a little.

The routine can be like laziness without wanting to be renewed.

When the voices in the singing are not educated or sound old and everything gets heavy....that's a real penance.

Lack of attention to singing in choir, the mark of individualism

A certain self-sufficiency and lack of humility.

LEILA MARIA SALINAS ZEPEDA, RA (CENTRAL AMERICA AND CUBA)

The celebration of the Liturgy (Eucharist, Office, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, etc.) is the cornerstone of my life, something which gives consistency and structure to the deepest part of my being. Without the Liturgy, I wouldn't be Leila, and the Assumption wouldn't be the Assumption.

Liturgy integrates my contemplative, community and apostolic life. It centers my gaze and my heart on the Mystery of the Christ. Throughout the liturgical year, we live and celebrate the mysteries of his life, his death and resurrection, and we are immersed in them.

The Word of God, proclaimed, heard and celebrated in community, the reading of the Fathers of the Church, the psalms as an expression of the prayer of the People of God who reread their history, who go to the Lord in praise, adoration, offering, thanksgiving and supplication: all of that gives substance to my contemplative being.

At the same time, the liturgy builds and affirms my communitarian being. In community, we let ourselves be transformed by listening to the Word that permits us to discover God in life, in others, in the cries of the world. As the 2012 General Chapter Fiche, "Our Contemplative Identity, a Way of Being in The World" puts it: "We reread history, discern the calls, and engage ourselves with a radical hope to sow the seed of the Kingdom on our path."

Liturgy opens me to the universal community, to the Church of yesterday and today, to the life of the saints, to the world. I lend my voice to the entire body: community, people, Church, humanity. And it is all the body that listens, welcomes, responds, celebrates, gives thanks, intercedes, weeps, complains...and rejoices. I am immersed in this people. It's not a question of a devotion particular to me or to a congregation, but rather to celebrate the liturgy with the people of God, in lending my whole being to Jesus, head of the Body.

The prayer of the Church is thus an integrating and structuring element in my life and my vocation to the Assumption. Without the liturgical rhythm and structure of the day, week, and year, our style of life would be very different and we wouldn't be Religious of the Assumption.

On the other hand, the Liturgy makes my apostolic life fruitful; it is the source of my apostolic life. My prayer is full of faces, events, of the reality that we live as a people, as the Church, as world. The Liturgy pushes me to apostolic action, drives me to commitment.

Our communities are apostolic and contemplative; we can also say that they are liturgical. The Liturgy unites the community, waters and colors the contemplation and the apostolate. In consequence, we say that the Liturgy occupies a central place in our spiritual life. At least in my personal experience. From my childhood, I lived in the Assumption this harmony, this spirituality, this depth of the Faith, this anointing in the celebration of the Divine Office, in the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament that the Sisters celebrated with so much love.

Contemplation, community and apostolic action have one unique source. Marie Eugenie said it best: "All of our life is Eucharist." I would say also that all of our life is a liturgy.

My Joys

To feel, to experience that the community is being built and developed through the celebration of the Liturgy. I feel great joy when we live a well-prepared liturgy and when the community's attitude is one of participation.

Great joy also to feel in certain young sisters this love for the liturgy and that sense of the Church, a sense that is so "Assumption": the heritage is alive in the new generations.

Joy when our love for the liturgy is reflected in the arrangement of our chapels: a candles, flowers, the cloths, symbols that speak, an environment that creates harmony, serenity and peace.

My Difficulties

I suffer when we let go of the Eucharist, the Office of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament so as to put more emphasis on work, rest or leisure. When I feel that the Office hasn't been really prepared or that we are praying in a routine and superficial fashion.

Sometimes it seems that certain sisters haven't discovered the richness that we have in our charism and so they don't put enough value on the celebrations.

If we don't know how to transmit all this to the new generations, what will become of the Assumption in the next 20, 30 or 50 years?

Conclusion

In this Bicentennial Year, I think it would be appropriate to drink from the sources. To remember the love of our first Mothers and Sisters for the liturgy, all that they had to suffer and how they struggled in order to leave us an inheritance of love for the Liturgy, the Divine Office, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. To become more aware of the richness that we carry in our hands and to try to renew in our communities our choice to be faithful to the charism.

In this year, let us question ourselves on the formation and the witness that we are giving to our younger sisters on this essential point of our charism.

INTUITION OF THE CONGREGATION ON LITURGY: MARIE EUGENIE and THE EARLY YEARS OF THE FOUNDATION

CRISTINA MASSO, R.A.

1. Quotation from Father Combalot on the liturgy.
2. Religious cultural context of the nineteenth century:
 - A. The Church of the 19th century. Some aspects.
 - B. Religious environment at the time of Father Combalot and Marie Eugénie
3. The liturgy in general. Essential elements for the Assumption.
4. The steps, stages that shaped our liturgy and will be reflected in the Constitutions, and lastly in specific chapters.
5. What did the discovery of the Roman liturgy mean for MME? What meaning did she give to the prayer of the Office, to adoration of the Blessed Sacrament from her own experience?
6. Quotations from MME and MTE.

1. Fr. Combalot:

"It is I, my daughters, who charge myself with the sweetest consolation of initiating you into participation in the divine riches hidden in the books of the Catholic liturgy. God will give me the grace to inspire in you the attraction, and then you will possess the truth and the science without danger for your humility and your fervor." (Introduction to Constitutions by Father Combalot, Foundation Texts, 63)

This word of Father Combalot introduces us to his intuition concerning the liturgy and what the Foundation would live. He was following what he was living with the group of liberal Christians who fought for the Roman liturgy. It also shows the future formation of the sisters.

2. The Cultural and Religious Context of the 19th Century

We will begin by recalling the elements of religiosity in the culture of the nineteenth century, lived by MME. And what she discovered, after her conversion, thanks to Father Combalot, who will introduce her to other practices.

A. How does the Church present herself?

☛ The Church, after the French Revolution, appeared as an enemy of the revolutionary forces and firmly attached to reigning Power. From this was born the penchant for a French Church, "Gallican", without any connection to Rome. The revolutionary forces and the liberals were traditionally atheists and their intention was to erase everything that resembled religion.

☞ Faced with this complex situation, the Church felt the call and the need to be reconciled with this new nascent civilization. Popular piety and religiosity are not generally very rooted in dogma and are expressed by many devotions and a great love for the extraordinary and the miraculous. We do not find books containing solid piety, only reprints of the old mystics. A great love of the Sacred Heart (images with the heart of Jesus open and surrounded by flames) and also of the heart of Mary.

☞ Church music was very poor in quality. There was no religious music and Gregorian chant was not appreciated or attractive. The music we find is that of the civil society adapted to religious themes, usually sentimental or adaptations of great composers. We will encounter, however, great composers (Schubert, Liszt, Berlioz ...) who will write works of religious inspiration.

To all this, we must add the suppression of the great religious Orders (Benedictines, Dominicans, Jesuits ...) after the Revolution. Little by little, throughout this century, these orders will return to France. We will also see steps taken to strengthen ties with Rome.

B. Into what religious environment did Father Combalot introduce Marie Eugénie, how does he prepare the Foundation? Which points should be emphasized?

☞ Father Combalot introduced Marie Eugénie into a group of young intellectuals, religious, priests and lay people: Lacordaire, Lamennais, Montalembert, D'Alzon, Dom Guéranger, Veuillot ... who form a "progressive" group within the liberal Catholicism [of the times].

☞ They are the ardent defenders of the universality of the Church and consequently of the Pope, of Rome and of a Roman liturgy that responds to their ideals. They are against the Gallicanism reigning in France.

☞ They seek a path between this Church allied to power and the liberals as well as the counter-revolutionaries.

☞ Let us add the character of Dom Guéranger, Benedictine of Solesmes, who will be the great renovator of the liturgy:

☞ He proclaims that church music is [an important] element of the liturgy, which should be at the service of the text to give it [its full] meaning.

☞ He will return to the Gregorian chant and seek the true sources of the liturgy: Bible studies, the first Christian communities, and the early liturgies.

☞ He puts forth the importance and the superiority of the liturgical prayer over the individual's prayer, because it is the prayer of the Community. Today we would say that it is the prayer of the People of God.

☞ Another aspect is the seeking of a uniform liturgy by suppressing the national, local and particular traditions that had in a way contributed to the decline of the liturgy.

Also, Dom Guéranger knew Marie Eugénie and was surprised to find her so close to his own ideas. He was enthusiastic that a recent foundation, had a great love and understanding of the Liturgy. "The Assumption, is a case apart, it is a new order, with the spirit of the old monastic orders" (D.G)

It must therefore be affirmed again that, thanks to Fr. Combalot, a very broad horizon was opened before ME with regard to the liturgy, in particular the Roman liturgy. This discovery will be experienced

in the first years of the Congregation and will lay the foundation for what will become our liturgy at the Assumption.

Let us recall the elements of the liturgy in general and those which will become a hallmark of the Assumption.

3. The Liturgy

We all know what the liturgy and the elements that compose it are: the sacraments (of which the Eucharist is the center) - the liturgical year - the Divine Office.

This is the most important form of the ordinary Magisterium of the Church. Its goal: the glory of God. The liturgy gives us access to the mystery of Christ, everything is recapitulated in it. It is the gateway to this mystery.

At the Assumption, with the liturgy, we affirm that:

- ☛ The liturgy reveals, makes present, celebrates and communicates the mystery of the Incarnation, the foundation of our Congregation.

- ☛ Our life, throughout the year, is centered in the liturgy.

- ☛ The great prayer of the Church is an essential, integrating and structuring element of our life and our vocation in the Assumption.

- ☛ The liturgy is for us a source and an expression of Adoration.

- ☛ The study of the liturgy nourishes the spirituality of the Assumption as well as its doctrinal and ecclesial basis. It guarantees a solid and serene education.

Marie Eugenie loved the Church as the presence of Christ. The Church is the sacrament of Christ. Communion with the Church is communion with Christ.

- ☛ The celebration of the Office is a liturgy of PRAYER and PRAISE. It responds to the Lord's command to "pray without ceasing". Its GOAL is: SANCTIFICATION of TIME. The essential elements of the spirituality of the Assumption: structuring time. Makes no sense.

- ☛ When we pray and sing the Office, we prepare and prolong the Eucharist.

- ☛ The Office plays a vital role in the Christianization of intelligence.

- ☛ The doctrinal and spiritual riches, the beauty of the Roman breviary are a school for educators: Psalms, readings, prayers and hymns.

Here are the elements of our liturgy named and listed, the place they have in our spirituality, our contemplative life and mission since the beginning of the Congregation. We must stress that ME's innovation was to consider that this spirituality created our style of education.

Let us consider Thérèse Emmanuel's thoughts on the Liturgy. It is Marie Eugénie who tells us these points from Thérèse Emmanuel's love of the Liturgy: "You all know that zeal, and those who have lived with her can remember her great love of the Office. It is certain that in the beginning she insisted more

than anyone that we adopt the Office. She desired it so much. She was always deeply attached to it, and inspired in the novices, all the time that she formed them, love and devotion for the Office of the Church. She taught them to say it with respect and attention, to make it the foundation of their spiritual life....

When you know more about her inner life, as it is in her notes and journal, you will see that the life of the Church, the liturgy, played an important role in her interior life. She gave attention to the feast days and the seasons of the year. Her inner life habitually reflected the liturgical devotion of the moment. Her soul was nourished abundantly by the words of the Office, the psalms found there which we recite according to the season... (July 15, 1888)

4. The Stages that Shaped Our Liturgy and Are Reflected in the Constitutions and in Certain Chapters.

1. Let us return to the Introduction to the Constitutions written by Father Combalot in order to understand the preparation that he wanted to give MME.

Let's go back to the introduction to the Constitutions of Combat to understand the preparation he wanted to give to MME.

- Abbé Combalot was very precise: he wanted ME to have a strong and broad doctrinal formation, especially a very ecclesial one. This was in contrast with the piety she experienced with in Mme Foulon's home. It was like a liberation for her. But Combalot went further: not only ME but all the Religious of the Assumption should receive a religious formation with deep and serious roots in order to be able to educate in a truly Christian way.
- The study of Latin and the Office can preserve love for the Church, nourish us in the works of the Fathers or and those of the times of faith. They should be given priority over other pious readings. For this reason he united the Office to our necessary formation. Nothing preserves the religious spirit on an equal footing with the Office, which all the sisters soon love when they understand it and recite it in choir.
- "You will fall back into this mass of pious books, little devotions, whose least defect is individualism. On the contrary, the Office engenders a serious devotion: one can take all the intentions; it is the most orthodox and perfect devotion, and the practice which dispenses with all the others. Feed on the writings of the Fathers in the readings of the Office; they are deep and full of the piety of the universal Church, the body of Christ. Live to the rhythm of the Church, assuming her intentions. If there were no devotion to the liturgy of the hours, they would feed on less valuable works of piety and fall into particular devotions, which cannot help them to live in Christ present in our world." (July 19, 1842)

2. Let us not forget the first experiences of ME in this respect: the First Communion, the force drawn from the Eucharist during his adolescence, the intuition of the immensity of God, of his rights. The Blessed Sacrament, in its first steps, among the Benedictines of the Blessed Sacrament (1837). ME had a very clear idea: "everything is about Jesus Christ, everything is with Jesus Christ, everything must be for Jesus Christ". He is the center of life ... (1856)

3. Let us see how MME and the first sisters conceived the aim of the Congregation and the elements of the liturgy that are strongly emphasized:

☛ In Constitutions of the 1840's, ME expresses that "we are not established enough to dare to express our purpose as I understand it, a contemplative life enlightened by religious studies and the source of an active life of faith, zeal, freedom of spirit. (August 25, 1843.)

☛ In the constitutions of 1866.

o The Religious of the Assumption aim to be united as perfectly as possible to our Lord Jesus Christ and to work to make him known and loved as well as his Blessed Mother.

o They devote themselves to a life that is half contemplative and half active. The contemplative life finds its nourishment in silence, prayer, the recitation of the Divine Office and the adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament, which is exposed every day in many of their chapels. Their active life embraces works which, without bringing them out, enable them to form persons of their sex in the Christian life: boarding schools, orphanages, schools, retreats, preparation for first communion, meetings and education for girls and women, etc. They can embrace the same works in the missions.

o The spirit of their Institute is a great spirit of faith, zeal for the salvation of souls and deep filial love for the Church.

☛ In the constitutions of 1888.

o The Sisters of the Assumption aim to imitate the Most Blessed Virgin in her love for Our Lord Jesus Christ, especially in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar, and to work through education and works of zeal to make JC and his Holy Church known and loved.

o They devote themselves to a life that is half contemplative and half active. The contemplative life finds its nourishment in silence, prayer, the recitation of the Divine Office and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Their active life embraces works which, without bringing them out of their convents, enable them to train persons of their sex in the Christian life: such as boarding schools, orphanages, schools, retreats, preparation for first communion, meetings and education of girls and women, etc.

o They can also embrace works of charity compatible with their occupations and their demi-enclosure, and go with the consent of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda, to the missions, while preserving the same statutes...

o The spirit of their Institute is to relate everything to our Lord Jesus Christ, both the teaching of human knowledge and the works of faith and piety, following the spirit of the Church in all things, and to work by their entire life to extend in souls the reign of the Savior.

5. What Did the Discovery of the Roman Liturgy Mean for MME? What Meaning Did She Give to the Prayer of the Office, to Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament from Her Own Life and Experience?

We will now analyze some elements of the liturgy, which, from the first years until the Constitutions of 1888, forced ME and the first Sisters to fight to defend them with many arguments.

▲ The Eucharist and the Life of Adoration (MME, 1866). The Blessed Sacrament

o It would take a long time to go into detail; I just want to show you the link by which the worship of the Blessed Sacrament is related to our spirit. We can even say that it is in the worship of the Blessed Sacrament that our spirit achieves its fullness. Since Christ in the Eucharist is an outgrowth of the need we have to meet you, serve you and love you. (MME.5.5.78).

o ... "To lead a life where the Eucharist is the center and where silence to little things and pettiness leads to the abundance of divine and supernatural gifts. (NS 1.4.77) "Our Lord gives us his spirit that lives in us. He gives us his grace, an important relationship with Him through the word of his Gospel, the blessings, and the sacraments, but especially by the sacrament par excellence, the Eucharist." I 25.8.78.

o The worship of the Eucharist is the great devotion ... Where it is possible, that the Blessed Sacrament be exposed every day in our chapels ... (1866)

o "The Eucharist is the pillar of religious life that would not exist without perseverance that is beyond our strength; thanks to the Eucharist, the strength of God is given to us "(II.A. Inst II pg.54-5)

o Whenever we attend the Eucharist, we attend the sacrifice of Calvary (1882)

o The Eucharist, when we recognize who we are, inebriates us, transforms us and amazes us.

o The path of Adoration is different from that of the Office since the beginning, and this explains the rules of the Church concerning the Eucharist- that we need a priest for exposition and benediction. Whenever it is possible to have it, the sisters will take part in Adoration with joy.

o "Our Lord desires to be in us, like a host, we disappear and it is he who lives. (MME.1866)

NB: In the "*Introduction to the Constitutions*" of Fr. Combalot the word "Adoration" does not appear.

Our spirit concerning adoration has been expressed in many texts throughout the years.

o From the foundation of Richmond (1850): The Divine Office and the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament are the sources that nourish our prayer and spirituality.

o 1846. In the schedule is mentioned: 1/2 h of Adoration in the afternoon.

o In 1847, we asked for the first foundation of a house of adoration in Paris even if it did not happen.

o 1849, Perspective of a house of Adoration in Paris, in which some of our women and older students would participate "one night a month, Saturday or Sunday, to represent the laity". And in the same year, 1849, Nîmes was founded, even if this did not happen until 1855.

o Listen to a reflection from MME: a house of perpetual adoration may be desirable for the sisters to refocus their lives and it will be a way to extend the Kingdom. Moreover in Nîmes, this would be very useful, given the Protestant environment of the city. This house would be destined for retreats for women and girls with the addition of Perpetual Adoration.

o We know that it is in Nîmes that the Third Order is founded: a group of friends gather around Adoration and this relationship is new. MTE receives an inspiration from Our Lord: "Form a group of adorers so that I can enlighten them and set them aflame (1863) that they know me and that they love me ..." This group wanted to go further in the knowledge of Christ and the Church. They will take care of poor Churches, especially those in the Orient, a work animated by Father d'Alzon. At Auteuil, the meetings are led by Thérèse Emmanuel who imagines new apostolates highlighting her social concern: thrift stores, catechumenates, care for the poor youth of Chaillot.

o 1857. The foundation of London: a house of adoration. After this foundation, the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament will be considered one of the goals of the Congregation along with the recitation of the Office.

o In the letter of convocation to the General Chapter of 1864, MME expresses the desire that the grace of adoration be possible in all our houses. This desire will become reality (1865 Sedan, 1860 Bordeaux, 1879 Auteuil)

o MME does not consider that the sisters who take care of the Adoration are uniquely contemplative, adoration is not incompatible with the mission of education. Moreover, she would like the prayer of adoration to extend to the whole Congregation: "To make adoration a work of zeal is in our spirit" (1865)

Constitutions of 1866. There is an objection to the Blessed Sacrament. In animadversion n° 10. "It is difficult to approve perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament by the sisters: it would seem incompatible with the work of education of children to which the sisters should devote themselves.

Answer of the Congregation: for the Assumption and its particular vocation, which is action flowing from prayer, the necessary means for that active life are the Office and Adoration.

MTE. "Jesus in the Host will be a source of apostolic graces, as the presence of Jesus in the midst of the Apostles was the source of success in their work. (On the Life of Adoration I, vol. 2, p.54.)

In the bishops' letters that accompany the presentation [in Rome] of the Constitutions of 1888, that of the Archbishop of Paris insists in favor of both the Office and Adoration in the Congregation.

With the approbation of the Constitutions of 1888, adoration will become an integral part of the communities' life. In the daily schedule, ½ hour of adoration figures in the afternoon.

The DIVINE OFFICE

▲ The Divine Office

How did the prayer of the Office begin in the first community of the Assumption? Advent was coming and Father Combalot, because of his great devotion to the Incarnate Word, had the idea of initiating his daughters to the beauty of the liturgy by having them recite the Roman Breviary as a preparation for Christmas in place of the Office of the Virgin that they recited every day. The priest explained the hymns and as the sisters understood Latin, there was incredible enthusiasm with the readings of Isaiah announcing the One who was to come, the hymns proclaiming the desire of the nations, the sighs of the patriarchs and prophets and the last days' antiphons that made the coming of the Messiah and the hope

of the ages even more urgent ... The sisters kept the Roman breviary during all the Christmas holidays. Our great devotion to the liturgy of the Church was born in this first Advent 1839 in the small chapel of the Rue Vaugirard where Matins was recited in the evening, around a table placed in the center of the choir for two candles. It was poverty in all its splendor. Father Combalot has always been severe about the respect due to the praise of God proclaimed at the Office.

o In her correspondence with M. Combalot, texts of psalms and prophets are found continually.

o "The great prayer of the Church makes us truly Catholic in our hearts, nourishes us with doctrine and truth. Let us receive the Office prayed by the poor rural priest, the bishop and the pope".

How has the Office been found in the Constitutions?

🌐The Constitutions of Fr. Combalot. (1839-1840) "The study of the Roman Breviary, my dearest daughters, will introduce you to the most admirable extracts from the holy Doctors, the most touching legends, the most poetic, the most edifying stories in the history of the Saints of the new law. I hope that you will nourish yourselves with this reading, in the order of your religious instruction, because I do not know any better to give you the keys to the texts of the Old and New Testaments found there and applied to the different mysteries celebrated by the Church as she unrolls them before her children during the ecclesiastical year. It is to be desired that in our houses we should endeavor to understand the Office of each feast as it occurs. Thus, the understanding of the theology founded on the Bible, on the holy Doctors, on the prayers and on the words of the Church, as expressed in the Roman Breviary, would be developed and grow among you. At the same time, the delightful hymns of your Office would also hold an immense place in the music and religious poetry of your convents and boarding schools. The Breviary is the book par excellence of Catholic prayer, dogma and morals put into action by the lives of the saints. »TF p 61-62

It is curious to see that Fr. Combalot writes a chapter of the Constitutions "that they have asked me to help them achieve the goal which they set for themselves in coming together". We know that at this moment, the little and first community already prayed with the Roman breviary. A chapter is dedicated to this (VI): Means to give a really Catholic teaching. The Vulgate, the Roman Breviary and other books of piety. It stresses that it is a means to form in the true doctrine, to approach and understand the Bible, and to know the doctrine of the early Fathers. And at the same time students will know the importance of the Bible.

🌐CONSTITUTIONS OF 1840.

- Chapter 9: the schedule of the day: it alludes to the hours at which the Office is generally celebrated...
- Chapter 10: About the Office. The Roman Office will be recited in choir with great respect and attention. At the first bell, all the sisters will leave their occupations to go, as being called by their divine Spouse. They will assemble in front of the choir to enter the chapel with a modest gravity and make two by two a deep bow to the Blessed Sacrament.

They will then take their places, avoiding all kinds of noise, and speaking only by absolute necessity.

- While they recite the great prayer that the Church puts in the mouths of her pontiffs, priests and religious orders, they will take pains and mediate, mix and unite their voices. A perfect harmony, standing with downcast eyes, with grave, modest and devoutly recollected.
- Then, a word on what we do when a mistake is made ... how we leave at the end ... details about certain feast days ... (In notes, written by MME in the margins: Is it possible to create First class feasts and octaves ?- we have never done it before, we would be too afraid to get confused by the rubrics).
- At double first-class celebrations, and all those of the Blessed Virgin, the 2nd Vespers will be performed in Roman chant.
- The general rubrics of the Roman Office will be read annually and will be carefully explained to the Novices. (In the margin: Another annoying rule that has never been followed.)
- The assistant of the Superior, is specially charged with all that relates to the recitation of the Holy Office and she will take scrupulous care that this important act of the religious life take place with all the dignity, all the respect, all the devotion it commands.

TF p.148

- Objections to the Recitation of the Office:

There will be a struggle to keep the Office when the ecclesiastical superiors ask for its suppression in the name of realism, asking the sisters to recite the Office of the Blessed Virgin or the Paris Breviary instead. But they strongly resist: "We must preserve as the most precious of our goods and inspire in those who follow us, as much love as possible for the prayer of the Church" Letter to Bishop Gros - 1841.

o Monsignor Affre made some annotations to the constitutions: "The Office in Latin is generally approved as part of the Rule of the nuns but is not essential. Could we not replace it with a more useful work? "

- Reasons for not giving up the Office:

o Give up education rather than abandon the praying of the Office. You will always find educators, you will have more difficulty finding people who pray. The Office remains the great prayer of the Church, it makes our heart a truly Catholic heart, and nourishes us with doctrine and truth ... When we see this whole series of holy figures passing throughout the liturgical year. We want to keep this great devotion to the Office, being united to the simple priest, the bishop and the Holy Father.

o Letter to Abbé Gros to defend the Office:

1º "So, Father, we all prefer to go a little earlier to heaven, or to limit the number of our students to what will be our number, and not to lose the Office, the chapter, or the works of humility that our rule prescribes. If others have been able to do without these supports, we feel that our weakness makes them necessary for us, and in a work of zeal especially it is necessary, I believe, to consider what the subjects will be before relying on what they will do.

2. "We have the Divine Office: it was the attraction of all the Sisters, and in an attraction to prayer, God can be for something. Moreover, religious women busy with education need to pray more than others; they bring back from the class distractions that the words of an Office that we understand make more disappear than does prayer made alone. The Office makes us daughters of the Church, in the sense that

we follow its feasts, its public ceremonies, and so the children will take among us more of a habit and love for the public prayer of the parish than if we had a particular Office. The song of the church and all that the Office conveys with external worship, pleases them and attracts them to God. As for fatigue, I assure you that it is not greater than that of the Office of the Visitation, because we must never sing except Sunday, and we do not say litanies, nor gradual psalms, nor the Office of the Dead, nor the Office of the Virgin. Many others have borne it before us with all this, and even a lot of singing plus the work of education, for example, the Augustinians, the Benedictines, and the Religious of the Holy Sepulcher. Letter to the Abbé Gros. November 1841 (TF p 90-92)

o Letter to Lacordaire in Defense of the Office:

If, perhaps, Father, what I told you about Latin and Saint Thomas made you believe that I accepted the tradition and all the views of our founder in this respect, I must confess that I did not say, nor would I say the same thing to any other person, because these studies being a matter for the nuns alone, nothing obliges me, if not a confidence which is not usual for me, to confess that I believe that they have been greatly helpful to make them love the Office of the Church and to help them in a thousand ways in religious life, or simply to put them in a position to teach the Catechism of the Council of Trent, which they use for children.

You know, Father, that among all the admirable graces which St. Catherine of Siena had received from Our Lord, she specially valued that of understanding the canonical hours. I love to name here this great Saint who belongs to your Order, for God having allowed our congregation to begin on her feast day, and finding in her such a perfect model of the life of zeal united to the life of prayer, we also see one of our beloved Patronesses. (Letter to Father Lacordaire Vol IV, No. 1502 TF pp. 109-110)

CONSTITUTIONS OF 1844

The sisters will say the Office of the Roman Church with the feasts granted to their Congregation, depending as is specified the Directory. (How to go to the chapel ... as in 1840)

None of them will leave the Office or be excused from attending except for urgent reasons. If there is any sister who lacks voice or health to recite the Divine Office, the Superior will have the power to dispense with it for a time more or less long or even completely. If this sister is a postulant or Novice and has all the conditions demanded by the Rule, the necessity of this dispensation will not be an impediment to her profession ... the proportion of the sisters dispensed to those who recite the Office can be only one to five or at least four ... The sisters thus dispensed will recite in the place of the Office the Paters and Aves indicated for the lay sisters ... They will be charged insofar as possible with the supervision of the boarding school during the Offices ... arranging that no sister is deprived of more than half the Office in choir.

On Sundays and solemn feasts, Vespers will be performed in Roman chant.

STATUTES OF 1854

The sisters recite the Divine Office of the Roman Church. Converse Sisters say instead the Paters and Aves which serve them as Office.

🌐 CONSTITUTIONS OF 1866

In the chapter of the Divine Office it is said: "The sisters recite the Divine Office of the Roman Church with the feasts granted their Congregation ... But this obligation will not be *sub gravi*. The Sisters, however, will regard the Office as one of the most cherished duties imposed upon them by the Rule, and they will endeavor to bring to it all the fidelity, zeal, and attention of which they are capable. "

We know that the presentation of these Constitutions is accompanied by 26 animadversions, some of which concern the Divine Office: Animadversion 11: "It would be better in the place of the Divine Office to recite the little Office of the Blessed Virgin, as is the custom in similar pious institutes. "

In the letters of the bishops accompanying the presentation of the Constitutions of 1888, that of the Archbishop of Paris puts a special emphasis in favor of the Office and Adoration in the Congregation.

In Rome, at the time of the presentation, Cardinal Parocchi and Cardinal Rampolla encouraged her to fight to maintain the choral recitation of the Roman Breviary.

🌐 CONSTITUTIONS OF 1888.

The Sisters recite in choir the Divine Office of the Roman Church with the proper granted them ... The choir will be of rule only in the houses where there are twelve choir nuns. Those who have not reached this number will be as zealous as possible to recite at least a portion of the Office.

In the Offices of Sundays and feasts the Gregorian chant will be preferred.

May the Divine Office, which is the prayer of the Church, be the first and main devotion of the Sisters. May they be faithful heirs to the zeal that animated the first members of the Congregation for the Holy Liturgy. May they always find there one of the most precious foods of their spiritual life. Let them follow the mysteries of faith and find the life of the Church there, nourish themselves with her teachings and her spirit, and use them to bring to their pupils the love and intelligence of Catholic worship.

- Formulations we meet until 1888, the date of the approbation of the Constitutions with the recitation of the Office.

"It was the attraction of all the Sisters, and in an attraction of prayer, God can be for something", it is he who certainly intervenes, feeds and supports the attraction.

"The song of the Church and all that the Office comports of external worship, pleases them and draws them to God."

"We should keep the greatest possible love for the Prayer of the Church as the most precious of our possessions and inspire that love in those who follow us."

"If there were not the devotion of the Liturgy of the Hours, they would nourish themselves with works of piety of less value and fall into particular devotions, which cannot help them to live in Christ present in the world. July 19, 1842

The recitation of the Office leads MME to:

- "I tried to say my Office as being only the echo of the voice of Jesus Christ ... If you want to pray with Him and for Him, recite the Office well and unite yourself to His feelings. (1841 and 1844)
- I say my Office as with Our Lord. (1851)
- It is good from time to time to meditate on some elements of the Office in order to increase our devotion, for example on the hymns, the prayers, so that they are then repeated with a special fervor (1890)
- "Her spiritual life was nourished abundantly with the words of the Office, the psalms ... The pains and joys that the Church expresses in the Office resounded in the very depths of her soul. July 15, 1888

For Thérèse Emmanuel what did the prayer of the Office mean?

- Thérèse Emmanuel was the first superior of the Richmond Foundation (England). She had a great influence on the enthusiasm for the Office of the First Sisters. She had been raised at the New-Hall (Essex) monastery of the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulcher, who prayed the Office with great solemnity. Thus, she learned the love of the Office, the taste for liturgical ceremonies and a deep respect for the smallest details of the rubrics and movements of the Choir.
- She knew how to transmit to her Novices, she the first formator and she thus collaborated intimately with Marie Eugénie in the prayer of the Office.
- In her letters, she often speaks of it: "We have been praying the Office in choir since the 11th of August, the first Vespers were as solemn as we could wish for. Matins at midnight was a delight. The Office thus prayed in common gives our little community its religious atmosphere. "Even if we are few, we pray almost all the Office in choir. The Office gives us fervor and unites us more to you in Paris "(III 220)

6. Quotations from Marie Eugénie and Thérèse Emmanuel on the Meaning of the Liturgy and its Various Parts.

"The Office is the center of our life giving an ecclesial and universal note; it is a priority because of our duty of education. Education is our duty, the life of prayer, our attraction. "

"What Our Lord wants from us is that we cling to His Eucharist. Love bears a resemblance; if we habitually contemplate Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, we will find there the form of all the virtues practiced in the most humble and hidden way. TE Inst. II p. 53

"May our Lord living in the Blessed Sacrament be for us as Jesus on earth, Jesus in our life."

"Our Lord lives in the Blessed Sacrament for His Father and for souls"

"Religious women busy with education need to pray more than others"

"I am convinced more and more that everything is done at the foot Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament."

"Nothing keeps the religious spirit as does the Office"

"Our sisters will try to be hosts to his feet to imitate these two aspects of life and insert them into the active life. May silence, love, and adoration transform them into Jesus Christ so that they can bring Him to people ..."

"The Office inserts us into the Church, we participate in her liturgy by following its feasts and her worship. United, our souls acquire this habit and a deep love of the Church, much better than if we recited the Office in private. "

"What is important in the Liturgy is the Word of God. We have the Holy Scripture. The chanting of the Psalms, the inspired books. God communicates himself through the Word. The faithful must love and taste the Liturgy "Thérèse Emmanuel.

COMMON THREAD 1

Pierre Faure, S.J.

I heard the breath at the foundation of the Assumption and the strength of the conviction at its origins:

- “We are constituted by the liturgy.”
- “Without the liturgy, no Assumption.”
- “Without the liturgy, I wouldn’t be me.”
- “The liturgy structures our in most being.”
- “Liturgy makes us breathe in the breath of the Church with both lungs.”
- “It integrates together our contemplative life, our apostolic life, our personal life and our community life.”

I would have been able to make a litany of Assumption liturgy, like polyphony, where what is said by one group is completed by the other.

It seemed to me that this breath that unites and structures the congregation is extended in diverse languages and across important types of diversity almost without being modified by your ages, cultures or your many languages: just about everywhere, it’s the same strength, the same words: it is the contentment of your origins that dominates.

Little by little I am discovering the Assumption!

In our holy Catholic Church, there are plenty of congregations that are involved in education, but truly, the Assumption, with this insistence on the liturgy, has no equal.

A mischievous little question: you here, you are the delegates of your province; I don’t know how you were nominated, but you have been chosen because you love the liturgy: if we were to take a survey and all 1150 sisters were to respond freely to the question, “What is it that you love about the liturgy?” – would the consensus be more polyphonic, maybe?

Many groups have brought up routine as a difficulty.

I’ll add my reflection: it is an important spiritual question that has already been treated by many spiritual authors before us. The problem is there, and it’s not only because “I wasn’t well prepared,” or that “Psalm 51 (50) recurs every Friday.” In fact, if the routine affects the spiritual life so as to make it slow down and sputter out, it’s not the fault of the liturgy. It can be a question of *acedia*: a depression that is proper to the spiritual life, that makes it lose its strength. So, it is good to distinguish this question from more technical aspects of the liturgy; we must not accuse the liturgy of something that doesn’t come from it but comes instead from the spiritual life itself.

It’s necessary to distinguish the repetitiousness of the routine (for example, the 3rd week and then the 4th week and then it begins again...) [from something else]: liturgy that repeats itself shouldn’t be confused with lassitude, wear and tear, boredom with our spiritual life. Those difficulties ought to be treated in spiritual accompaniment.

COMMON THREAD 2 – A KIND OF INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND DAY

Pierre Faure, S.J.

My proposal for this morning, considering the theme of the day, is simply to help to live a good relationship between the Divine Office and the Eucharist; you live this bond and your faith permits you to live it.

I went to see in the General Presentation of the Liturgy of the Hours (n°12): The liturgy of the hours extends to the different moments of the day all that is contained in the Eucharistic mystery “center and summit” of the whole life of the Christian community. “The Eucharistic celebration itself finds an excellent preparation in the Liturgy of the Hours>”

The image that serves us here (and in liturgy, as in the Bible, it’s better to hold on to images rather than to ideas) is “the center and the summit.”

Vatican II liked this “center and summit” image very much, but [it liked] “*source* and summit” even more. The Church finds all of its strength there.

Four other texts:

* Ministry of Bishops N°30

* *Lumen Gentium* N°11

* *Sacrosanctum Concilium* N°10

* The Life of Priests N°5

“The liturgy is the summit to which all the action of the Church moves and the source of all Christian action. Thus the world receives its sanctification by Christ.” *The Roman Missal: N°16*

THE CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST

Father Jean-Claude Reichert

Introduction

In your international session on the liturgy, you wished to dedicate your first day to the celebration of the Eucharist, which makes perfect sense, since the first day is a Sunday.

The celebration of the Eucharist is the celebrated Eucharist; the liturgical action by which is completed the sacramental mystery of the Eucharist; the action in which we take part each time that the Eucharist is celebrated; an action that is not solely that of the priest, but that of the whole Church, at the heart of which the priest takes his own sacramental place. In choosing to dedicate your first day of the session to the celebration of the Eucharist, you wished, therefore, to look, not at the Eucharist in itself, but at the reality of our participation as people of God in the mystery of the Eucharist that is accomplished by the rites of the liturgy.

You put out an appeal for someone who is not “a liturgist” in the strict sense of the term. In effect, I am not a specialist on the technical questions that the accomplishment of the liturgical celebration poses. I don’t imagine, moreover, that you are waiting for that from me. I also don’t believe that you expect that I lay before you the significance of the Eucharist in a grand dogmatic theological fresco. You’ve called me to a liturgy session. Our material, then, will be liturgical and that’s easy to understand, because liturgical celebration of the Eucharist structures your days; because it is the source of your apostolic life; because it poses practical questions of organization to you; because it is knocked about by the circumstantial poverty in which we find ourselves thanks to the growing scarcity of available priests.

So here is the proposal that I am going to make to you. I invite you to look at the rites of the Eucharistic celebration, that is to say, what happens when the Church celebrates the Eucharist, whereby the liturgy makes us look at the attitudes or the gestures to which the celebration invites us, in short, the concrete reality of the Eucharistic liturgy. In doing that, we will look together at the act of faith that this celebration presents to us when we participate in it; the living faith that builds in us the celebration in which to participate.

Before, we didn’t speak like this. We said that we assisted at the “mass of the priest,” and we did that through all sorts of devotional acts that didn’t proceed from the celebration itself. Today, we say that the Eucharistic celebration instructs us, forms us. The liturgy “contains a great pedagogical value (*magnam continet populi fidelis eruditionem*)” says the Council, taking up in this comment the terms of the Council of Trent. The Eucharistic celebration forms us and educates us in the life of faith.

It seems to me that by looking with you at the Eucharistic man or woman that the liturgy builds in us, I have several opportunities to enter into your concern: when you ask yourselves how to inhabit the celebration of the Eucharist so that it doesn't become routine; when you ask how to reconcile the liturgy with the constraints of your apostolic life; and thus what place you give to it in your apostolic life, when you ask yourselves what relationship to have with the Eucharist when there is no possibility to participate in it each day because of the constraints of the apostolic life, I hope to contribute something to all that.

As we cannot, obviously, deal with everything in three hours, I will limit myself to three significant moments of the Eucharistic celebration: one of the opening rites, the rite by which we prepare to communicate, and the rite of the presentation of the gifts.

How Things Will Unfold:

1. A Rite of Opening

- a. The first rite of the Eucharistic celebration
- b. Invitation to a personal re-reading with two complementary texts

2. The Rite by Which We Prepare To Communicate

- a. Eventually short return of participants
- b. Intervention: In front of the sacrifice of Christ

3. The Rite of the Presentation of the Gifts

- a. Intervention: The Eucharistic offering
- b. Large sharing

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1. The First Rite of the Eucharistic Celebration: The Sign of the Cross

The grace of the gathering signified by the Sign of the Cross in the Liturgy

All celebrations of the Eucharist call for a gathering. Sometimes the assemblies are small and certain people think that to have a larger group of people would be desirable to mark a particular moment together, but the Eucharist is not meaningful because it gathers a certain number together. Of course, we have to decide to join a Eucharistic gathering. For many of our countries, this decision is no longer taken for granted; Christians consider that one can live one's faith without participating [in the Eucharist]; they say that they don't miss the Eucharistic celebration. But we say: what is the Christian life lacking if it lacks the Eucharistic celebration? Long ago such questions didn't come up; the Sunday obligation was set in stone for the Church.

As a young chaplain, I met young people at summer camps for teens of 17-18 years of age for whom going to mass was part of their family identity, and who didn't pose this question. Now, what is it that is produced in us, today, if we participate in a celebration? It is a question of faith; when we gather together: what is it that that we would miss if we didn't have this question; what would make it that its absence would make us cripple us for the life of faith? These are questions that we can't escape today.

Let's think about the testimony of young Christians stopped and questioned in Tunis in 2015: "Without Sunday, we cannot live our Christian life."

"What is it that is produced in us during the Eucharist so well that its absence would cripple us for the life of faith?" In 2005, in Bari (Italy) the 24th Italian Eucharistic Congress was held. Pope Benedict XVI was invited, and he called to mind the trial of the 49 Christians, arrested in Tunisia in 304, under the Emperor Diocletian, while they were celebrating the Eucharist. Interrogated by the proconsul, they responded that it was impossible for them to live without the Sunday Eucharistic gathering. « *Sine Dominico non possumus* ». "Without the Sunday Eucharist, we cannot live."

So what is it then in the Eucharistic celebration or gathering that we cannot live without?

Let us approach the first ritual gesture that the Eucharistic celebration has us make; n°50 of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal: "After the Entrance Song, the priest makes the sign of the Cross with all the assembly: it is the first of the opening rites."

It may be that we live in a formal manner among Catholics. We begin all our prayers with the sign of the Cross; the Protestants don't do that; for us, it seems normal to begin with the sign of the Cross.

Now, this gesture is the first act of the faith that the celebration presents us with when we participate; something of the faith is put into action, proclaimed to the world, when we make this gesture that comes from participation in the life of the Trinity. We proclaim that our participation comes from the Trinitarian life and not from ourselves: we proclaim that we are participants of the Trinitarian life and not only of a group that wants to get together.

We proclaim before the world that it is the activity of God that gathers us together. Together, we are a body because we have been admitted to the Trinitarian communion among the Father, the Son and the Spirit. It is not we who decide this, it is the action of God that produces it.

In the celebration we have a role in the sacrament, we participate in the activity of God, not only something beautiful or legitimate among us. We receive an action of God with respect to ourselves; we receive in the celebration a sanctifying grace that works on and transforms us.

This first act of the celebration is thus essential. We hardly ever reflect on the nature of how the celebration acts on those who live it. We reflect a lot on the manner, on the care, that is put into living the celebration, on its organization.

But it is rare that we reflect on that grace that the celebration produces in us; it's not only an act of prayer that we present to God, it is also a path to sanctification; thus, a place where the Christian life

is being built. The liturgy is the “opus Dei,” not a work *for* God, but the work of God *IN* us: it gathers us, makes something happen in us who gather; we are not at all an assembly that refers to a God who is himself outside of us; we could be a beautiful group living a real interior unity, but if this comes only from us, we remain completely outside of God.

Now, our communion does not come from us, it is what is signified by this first gesture: God himself admits us into the intimacy of his own divine life; he brings us into himself.

This grace of gathering builds us into an organic whole in faith.

In "The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People," (*Christi Fideles Laici*), written after the Synod on Vocations in the World, John Paul II spoke of this grace of gathering, in linking this reality that we live with John 15: 1-4: “I am the true vine...remain in me as I in you” there is the remain in me: this imperative addresses itself to our will, our desire...and Jesus continues: “as I in you,” meaning that your decision to wish to remain in me is not to be lived independently of the decision that I have decided to remain in you as I remain in my Father. These two realities have to be united; they proceed one from the other. And John Paul II asks us to listen to that and to take its measure. “These simple words reveal the mystery of communion that serves as the unifying bond between the Lord and his disciples, between Christ and the baptized: a living and life-giving communion through which Christians no longer belong to themselves but are the Lord's very own, as the branches are one with the vine. No. 18.

It is a living and life-giving communion: not only in our heads but regardless of the root of what we are going to live, these words carry us always to life-giving grace.

“The communion of Christians with Jesus has the communion of God as Trinity, namely, the unity of the Son to the Father in the gift of the Holy Spirit, as its model and source” (no.18) Thus, that which is produced in us when we enter into the celebration is our being received in God. It is that that gathers us.

The goal of this rite is enunciated in *The General Instruction to the Roman Missal*, No. 46:

[its] purpose is to ensure that the faithful who come together as one establish communion and dispose themselves to listen properly to God's word and to celebrate the Eucharist worthily.

Cf. Father de Lubac in 1952: “Such is the Church: she is filled with the Trinity.” The communion that we realize when we are gathered is “to be the Church: filled with the Trinity.”

A concrete example: there are people who put a lot of time into realizing that the very fact of coming into the chapel has them entering into a sacramental mystery; some have the tendency to live the liturgy as a personal affair, where one may participate as one wishes – rather than entering into this decision of God to gather us together in order to realize the communion that is the Church; the Church is not the sum total of our individualities.

In the third century, Tertullian (speaking about Baptism): “where the Three, Father, Son and Spirit are, there also the Church is to be found, she who is the Body of the Three. When we gather

together, we realize this communion among the Body, being the visible and tangible sign of the communion into which we are admitted. The assembly is a sacrament.

The visible body that we form is variegated, unlikely . . . our assembly is constituted through the decision made that quite different people to gather and it is that that is the sign of the internal communion of the Trinity.

In this assembly, so varied and largely imperfect, I can associate myself with people that nothing links me to. Now the sign of the Cross makes us say that we are thus a Community of faith and that our gathering will be given life by a grace that comes out of this celebration. It is a challenge to accept to enter into what the grace that comes to us from the Eucharist demands that we be. It is a daily challenge, for which the Eucharist is both source and summit, to thus form together the family of God. We have to work towards that.

There is a Eucharistic communion of which our assembly has a calling, and we have to be attentive to all without making a distinction between the faithful. Everyone has his or her place there. Now, we can make differences or even sort people into groups . . . because our Christian communities are impoverished in human resources, and thus one ends by counting on the same people all the time. And the more we become poor in people, the more that we tend to underline the “serviceable,” imperceptibly we are creating a model and devaluing those who are not of the same model.

The celebration is a source from which comes our horizon; we are the Church because God himself gathers us to make us participate in his own Trinitarian life. A communion that builds itself progressively by the participation in ministry. It remains true that this Eucharistic communion should find a concrete realization. It is necessary to give ourselves in order for this realization to come forth; it is necessary to give our consent to enter into this vocation. The grace that we receive is for transforming our gaze on each other and that takes time.

2. The Rite by Which We Prepare for Communion

“Before the sacrifice of Christ”

We turn now toward the end of the Eucharist: the priest says: “Behold the Lamb of God. . . We respond: “Lord, I am not worthy. . .” and the priest says this with the assembly.

“Behold”: a reality is shown to us, and in front of that reality, we, all together, speak of our reality.

The priest shows us the Body of Christ in front of the figure of the Lamb that was slain. And we respond by looking at ourselves: “I am not worthy” we accuse ourselves of not being worthy. But we speak of our unworthiness before the Lamb of God whose dignity we have just recognized when the priest presented the Lamb of God. We do not hide our unworthiness before the Lamb of God since it is he who takes away the sin of the world.

Already the priest has presented the Body of Christ to the assembly at the moment of the Consecration; having pronounced the word over the bread, he elevated the Body of Christ while saying silently (as if he were saying “behold”) and the assembly remains silent also in adoration.

Before communion there is no more time to present the Eucharistic miracle, it is not the moment for adoration, but at this moment, the grace that comes from the act by which Christ made actual the gift of himself in the Eucharistic bread is shown to us.

Let us approach with the beginning of Psalm 103 (102) in the Latin version inherited from the Greek psalter.

“Bless the Lord, o my soul...do not forget any of his compensations” (a word from the Greek psalter): this word designates a reality of exchange (for example a salary in exchange for work; there is a correlation between what one does and what one receives that is just and balanced; similarly, there is also a sanction after an error.) Compensation is often linked to merit: one receives compensation in function of what one is worthy to receive, for example, the Prodigal Son who thinks that he is not worthy and that it would be just to think of him as a hired hand: to receive in function of the dignity that one can demand. But between God and us, it’s different and the psalmist invites us to bless God: why?

Verse 3: bless because “he brings the sacrifice of propitiation for all your offenses.” It is God himself who takes from Him, who does not demand from us all that should be due him; he makes Himself the gift, the compensation that permits us to be saved. In delivering his body up for the many, Jesus has brought the sacrifice of propitiation that frees us from having to pay in return for our offenses.

It is God in Jesus himself, who has brought the sacrifice as a countermeasure of what we owe because of our unworthiness. And we respond: “I am not worthy” cf. the centurion or the head of the synagogue. The word that heals us was definitively pronounced by Jesus when he made Himself the sacrifice. And we proclaim that the grace of his sacrifice renders us “worthy to receive you.” The communion that we receive is not owed to us, but the dialogue before communion signifies that the grace of propitiation will always precede our unworthiness.

3. The Rite of the Presentation of the Gifts

“The Eucharistic offering”

The question is always the same: how does the celebration of the Eucharist build up our life of faith when we enters into the rites that it has us accomplish?

This celebration constructs our being as man or woman.

This morning: the assembly and the grace of propitiation.

Now we see a rite that is in the middle of the celebration. Instruction of the Roman Missal: “At the beginning of the Eucharistic liturgy, the gifts are brought forward.” Having the faithful bring up the bread and the wine is recommended. It is thus called the offering.

This morning at mass there was indeed a procession for the presentation of the gifts. This is a bodily ritual because the presentation of the gifts is normally accomplished by a procession, it is also an exchange between the priest and the assembly because there is a part that is done by faithful; the procession and what the priest does when he receives the gifts: it is an exchange like the ritual before communion, but here in the presentation of the gifts, the exchange is not a dialogue; each is situated in his or her own space and acts in that particular proper space: the procession leaves from the back of the nave of the church where the people are in order to go to the choir [sanctuary] where the priest is.

This movement is not purely decorative, one could say that it is to make things solemn. No, in fact, the procession describes the path of an interior path to which it conveys us. A procession is always a consenting to displace oneself in order to go elsewhere; physical displacement that describes an interior pathway to which we consent; by this process, we proclaim to the world a grace that springs from the Eucharist. We see how this procession builds up our life of faith in us, because we let ourselves be worked on by a grace that comes from the Eucharist.

Genesis 4: the Offering of Cain and Abel.

Two brothers present this offering to the Lord; and the Lord turns toward Abel which prompts Cain to anger and depression . . . and his pain will lead him to fratricide.

Why does the Lord turn his regard toward Abel and not toward Cain? The response is not in the Bible; thus, we search for explanations: Did Cain offer his second best fruits? How was the offering of Abel better? Because it was the best of the flock? No. It's never said that the offering had displeased God, but rather that God had turned his regard toward that of Abel and not toward that of Cain. Why?

In Christian tradition, Abel had made the true offering. It is written that God looked at Abel and his offering; the two are linked, the one who offers and the offering. The biblical account does not speak of the manner by which these two offerings were made; Cain gives the fruits of the earth and Abel offers a sheep from his flock; it is a gift; the offering of Cain is a religious act.

The offering of Cain and the offering of Abel don't have the same value. Abel offered a gift that committed him, and it is toward that offering that God turned his gaze; the Letter to the Hebrews takes up this notion. In approving the offering of Abel God has indicated the true character of the offering.

The offering of Cain is a cultic action to the Lord, Abel gave a present. The offering of Abel became typical for the rite that we are accomplishing. The gift is an act in which we commit ourselves: in Latin, “*oblata*.”

Consider this prayer over the offerings for the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

O God, who in the one perfect sacrifice
brought to completion varied offerings of the law,
accept, we pray, this sacrifice from your faithful servants
and make it holy, as you blessed the gifts of Abel,
so that what each has offered to the honor of your majesty
may benefit the salvation of all.
Through Christ our Lord.

We ask God to bless the unity between what we bring and ourselves who present it. Leaving the liturgy: St. Paul to the Christians of Rome: present yourselves as a true and entire offering” that our gift be mediated by what we bring; and that we ourselves be a living sacrifice....this is the right way to render something to the Lord – make of our own selves a gift.

What is this donation of ourselves? It is our Christian life that we present to the Lord because what we do and live is what we want to offer as present to the Lord.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church no. 901: the participation of the laity in the priesthood of Christ

901 "Hence the laity, dedicated as they are to Christ and anointed by the Holy Spirit, are marvelously called and prepared so that even richer fruits of the Spirit maybe produced in them. For all their works, prayers, and apostolic undertakings, family and married life, daily work, relaxation of mind and body, if they are accomplished in the Spirit - indeed even the hardships of life if patiently born - all these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. In the celebration of the Eucharist these may most fittingly be offered to the Father along with the body of the Lord. And so, worshipping everywhere by their holy actions, the laity consecrate the world itself to God, everywhere offering worship by the holiness of their lives."

All of this is done by a procession from the nave to the altar; the donation is lived in our bodies; it is really the faithful who carry the bread and the wine, because the physical displacement of the procession renders it real, we advance as offering; it is a usage to recommend. The offering of himself that Christ made is actualized at the altar; it is the place of the true offering, place of the definitive offering where we come to make our spiritual and material offering.

Cf. the Letter to the Hebrews

Our offering should be placed on the altar so that Christ may take it into his and may make of it a true offering. It is in the offering of Christ that our offering becomes a true offering. By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1368:

1368. The Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the Church. The Church which is the Body of Christ participates in the offering of her Head. With him, she herself is offered whole and entire. She unites

herself to his intercession with the Father for all men. In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value. Christ's sacrifice present on the altar makes it possible for all generations of Christians to be united with his offering.

The Sacrificial Memorial of Christ and His Body, the Church

The Eucharist is equally the sacrifice of the Church. The Church, which is the Body of Christ, participates in the offering of her Head. With Him, she is offered herself, completely. She unites herself to his intercession with the Father for all mankind. In the Eucharist, the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. The life of the faithful, their praise, their suffering, their prayer, their work – all are united to those of Christ and to his total offering, and they thus acquire a new value. The sacrifice of Christ present on the altar gives to all generations of Christians the possibility of being united to his offering. In participating in the offering of Christ, believers offer themselves.

Throughout the centuries, the Eucharist was centered on and practically reduced to transubstantiation. At the beginning of the 20th century, there was a beginning of understanding that the celebration of the Eucharist was also an act of the Church. The Church associated herself with the act of Christ and the act of Christ acted on the faithful.

From the grace of the offering of Christ comes the capacity to make of ourselves a true offering.

COMMON THREAD 3

Pierre Faure, S. J.

Two points, each with a little something extra:

1. The day before yesterday we heard about the origins of the Assumption, more precisely the central place that it has always given the liturgy.

Yesterday, we came closer to the source and summit of our life: the Eucharist, the celebration of the Pascal Mystery that Christ accomplishes in us, by taking all into his life.

Yesterday Father [Reichert] took all the little elements of the liturgy to help us discover that they are carriers of a very great action of Christ for us:

- The sign of the Cross at the start
- The procession
- What precedes communion

We see that a very small element can do a lot . . . if we have an open heart: the Sign of the Cross happens so quickly we hardly notice it!

The link among these elements, as Father said, is that the celebration is an action of God in our regard, and it builds up the faith in us; even we prepare our liturgies well, it is Christ who gives and gives himself to it.

To have then an attitude of welcome, of listening, of consent, as is said with respect to the exchange of the spouses in the sacrament of marriage, a sign of the greatest possible giving. To consent to what God is doing in us. For older ladies, it is to let go of the desire to do everything well; to consent to the work of God, to let themselves be loved . . . it's even more difficult for men!

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal uses the expression "dispose themselves"

(45): "so that all may dispose themselves to carry out the sacred action in a devout and fitting manner."

(46) "Their purpose is to ensure that the faithful who come together as one establish communion and dispose themselves to listen properly to God's word and to celebrate the Eucharist worthily."

In French, "dispose" is the contrary of "propose" . . . sometimes priests propose to us and often they say "don't do it" . . . in place of preparing us to dispose ourselves.

2. Yesterday we spoke of the offering, of the gift of self, of putting oneself into the gift of Christ; we thought of the sacrament of marriage and of religious consecration. One of you said: "during the Offertory, and the procession of gifts, I say again the formula of my vows," "I know of spouses who at that moment say again: I take you as spouse and I give myself to you." Yesterday, then, we were at the source, the center and the summit of the place where our religious life is harbored and brought into line with the Eucharist.

A little liturgical supplement: before Vatican II the Eucharistic Prayer, being in Latin, was the affair of the priest. Thus, the best creativity in France, thanks to the movement of *l'Action Catholique* was concentrated on the Offertory.

The reform from the Council put the heart of the offering into the Eucharistic Prayer and the word “offertory” hardly exists since, replace by “the presentation of gifts.” When the bread and the cup are elevated, the priest says “we present it to you,” and not “we offer it to you.” The central action of the offering in the liturgy is after the consecration and the anamnesis. Cf. General Instructions, No. 76 ff: the Church offers to the Father in the Holy Spirit.

The Church desires that the faithful not only offer. . .but that in addition they learn to offer themselves and be perfectly united from that moment on by the mediation of Christ with God and between them, so that at the end, God will be all in all. It is the sole place where the infinite of God is present; “The faithful are absorbed in the mediation of Christ (. . .) so that God may be all in all.” . . .”Remembering his death and his resurrection, we offer you. . . “

Seeing the diverse Eucharistic prayers, how they are expressed. Example: that of reconciliation: “Accept us also with your beloved Son. . .”

THE LITURGY: A BODILY EXPERIENCE

Sr Bénédicte Marie de la Croix, P.S.D.P.

Introduction: A Delicate Question

The liturgy is eminently bodily; it is nourished by gestures (the Sign of the Cross), by attitudes (kneeling, standing. . .) by movements (processions) and even by actions on the body (anointing with oil...). Why? What is the meaning? What is the impact on the relationship to God and on the construction of the community? Such are the questions that we are going to try to pose to ourselves this morning. But, first, it is important to situate the question.

The question of gestures in liturgy is a delicate question and sometimes even a problem. More than ten years of experience in formation in novitiates and in the preparatory year have made me aware that it is the first stumbling block that appears in community life and the place where the capacity to celebrate together is at stake, [the place where we learn] to hold ourselves as different before God and yet finally to live together.

The question is even more pressing today in a world that doesn't offer young people the possibility of interior structure. The search for identity, therefore, happens by identification with "models" that have a certain number of characteristic signs, gestures, or postures that help a person to exist and to situate himself or herself in a globalized world. Touching those signs becomes particularly sensitive for young people because when you do that, you are touching the very structure of the person and the world that she is built for.

But without going there just yet, we know how certain gestures remain sometimes themes for discussion – in fact, themes of division -- in our communities: communion in the hand or in the mouth, kneeling or not during the Eucharistic Prayer, opening of the hands during the Our Father. . .

If the scope of the liturgy, according to the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*), is the building up of "those who are within into a holy temple of the Lord, into a dwelling place for God in the Spirit, to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ," or, again, to be "a sign lifted up among the nations under which the scattered children of God may be gathered together, until there is one sheepfold and one shepherd" (SC 2), until "God is all in all" (SC 48), then the gestures and the attitudes should be a source of edification and not of division.

So, maybe it would be good to dig a little deeper into the meaning of the gestures and attitudes of the liturgy -- really, the meaning of the liturgy in its bodily dimension.

1. Some Reference Points for an Anthropology of the Liturgy

In the contemporary world, the question of the relationship to the body has become a bit problematic. It suffices to evoke certain current debates, they go from questions concerning medical ethics (organ donation, surrogate motherhood, cosmetic surgery....) to certain theories or social practices touching on sexuality, drug use, or even clothing. The body is sometimes reduced to

something purely technical as certain philosophical-scientific currents are trying to prove, like transhumanism, an international philosophical movement that advocates for the transformation of the human condition by developing and making widely available sophisticated technologies to greatly enhance human intellect and physiology. [Transhumanist thinkers study the potential benefits and dangers of emerging technologies that could overcome fundamental human limitations as well as the ethical limitations of using such technologies.]

In short, visibly, the contemporary person is not at ease with his body and lives a kind of fracturedness that is often destructive (cf. the suicides of young people, the requests for euthanasia).

It's in part to get out of this fracturedness that a whole current of reflection is seeking more unified approaches to human reality. That happens through modes of life that promote a greater respect for the body and its rhythms or through spiritualities that integrate certain bodily practices (yoga, martial arts, dance, and alternative medicine.)

But already since the beginning of the 20th century, contemporary philosophy and anthropology seek man in all his complexity by highlighting the symbolic dimension of the body and its function as an act of language. I'm thinking here of the work of Marcel Jousse (1886-1961) on the anthropology of gesture and, more recently, of Henri Meschonnic, concerning the place that body and experience have in phenomenology. I think, for example, of the work of Jean-Yves Lacoste: Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man (2004).

What does the Christian tradition have to say in this domain? It is frequently reproached for devaluing the order of corporeal realities in favor of spiritual realities. This understanding of the Christian tradition, which often rests on misunderstanding, remains very prominent in the representations that our contemporaries make of Christianity and of its anthropological and moral options. It is true that in certain epochs an overly dualist conception of the human person, opposing the body and the soul invited such criticism.

The question is not new. In the *Summa*, St. Thomas Aquinas poses the question: why gestures and bodily actions if it's a question of encountering God who is beyond all of that? He formulates his answer in the following "objection":

"The sacraments concern the cult and the reign of God, to which things of the senses are foreign. God is spirit says Our Lord in St. John, and those who adore him must adore in spirit and in truth. And Saint Paul: the Kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking." (Art 4, 2)

And his response clarifies: if God touches man in his body, if the liturgy is of the corporeal order, it is because the Wisdom of God adapts itself to man. In effect, "It is in the nature of man to come to a knowledge of intelligible things by means of sensible things." In other words, it is in the order of things that more spiritual realities pass by the body; it is, in effect, the way that God comes to us in order to save us.

The affirmation of Thomas, in total fidelity to the biblical tradition, is founded on the reality of the economy of revelation. In effect, if anthropology and theology are indissolubly linked, it is first of all because man is created in the image of God and then because it is in the created realities and in the action of humanity written in a story that God reveals himself, right up to taking on flesh in his Son; this confers on human words and actions, as the place of divine Revelation, an extraordinary dignity. In the fullness of time, Christ was made flesh, in his person, the accomplishment of the revelation of God, and that same fact, of the revelation about man, as *Dei Verbum* reminds us:

“To see Jesus is to see His Father (John 14: 9). For this reason Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making Himself present and manifesting Himself: through His words and deeds, His signs and wonders, but especially through His death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth. Moreover, He confirmed with divine testimony what revelation proclaimed, that God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to life eternal” (DV 1.4).

In Jesus Christ made flesh, the body becomes the place where God comes to encounter man to save him.

2. The Body, “Pathway of God”

Because the sacraments – and more widely, all the liturgy – are the prolongation of the saving action of Christ in the time of the Church (cf. SC 6 and 7), they intersect with the human being throughout his journey. The tradition has also forged the adage “*Sacramenta propter homines*”: the sacraments are “for men.” They reach the faithful at the heart of the human experience, in its marks that are birth and death, food and sex, sickness and conflict, the relationship with the cosmos and with history. One can think here of the anointing of the sick that reaches the sick person confronted by the fragility of life or again, of marriage, which elevates human love as a sign of the goodness of God for humanity (cf. Eph 5: 25-33). By these sacraments, all of human life becomes a place of encounter between God and men, a celebration of the covenant where man responds to the gift of God.

In the power of the Spirit that flows from the Paschal experience of Christ, the sacraments are, in a way, a new consideration of the created by the creative and saving Word (SC 2). (It is necessary, for example, to reread the great prayers of consecration of the liturgy over the water, the oil of the Holy Chrism . . . over the bread of the Eucharist). The sacramental action is situated in a prolongation of the creative act itself, by a new consideration of the body and of all created things, by giving to them their ultimate destination: their reality transfigured in eternity.

Thus, the human being only goes to God by the mediation of the created; the sacraments remind us of that fact.

The sacraments cannot be taken for granted. Why go in that church that’s not heated and where the music is so bad? The sacrament is in all that. A little assembly where nobody sings very well, a community where it’s difficult to adjust our voices, or the mannerisms of one of the community members irritates me....*That* is the place of God (and not the Mass in front of the television, nor the monastic liturgy that I dream of). Faith takes a body. The sacraments serve to remind us that faith

comes from the banal reality of a body, a history. It is a question of discovering that the Church is all that: this institution heavy with my own heaviness is the pathway toward God. At the end of the story, to be Christian is to learn to love the Church.

The sacraments constitute a “bumper” (something designed to be crashed into) against the gnostic risk of seeking God immediately by the spirit and thus having the illusion of being something other than what we are before God. The sacraments destroy all our nostalgic idols for an ideal liturgy, of immediate transparency, of a direct line to Christ and illuminist contact with the Spirit. And it’s there that there is a real conversion to make.

The sacraments tell us that far from being an obstacle against communication with God, the body is the same place where the truth of that communication happens. The body is “the pathway of God” in the double sense: pathway of God toward man and pathway of man toward God. The sacraments tell us that in the Christian plan, the most spiritual comes from the most corporeal (cf. the example of the Sacrament of Matrimony).

Finally, the liturgy and the sacraments mysteriously imply the life of the Kingdom to come in our bodies. Thus, “For Christians, Baptism makes of the body, the ‘Temple of the Holy Spirit.’” It has been given to the body to be touched by Christ in the sacred oils of Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders and the Sacrament of the Sick. It is nourished by the bread of life, the Holy Eucharist, the remedy of immortality; it is sanctified in the Sacrament of Matrimony so that humans beings, in this mutual gift of their bodies become, each for the other, another sign of the nearness of God.” In the funeral liturgy the respect given to the body witnesses that between the body we have here below and our resurrected body that will be in glory, there is a mysterious continuity that expresses well the Preface of the Dead:

*Indeed for your faithful, Lord,
life is changed not ended,
and, when this earthly dwelling turns to dust,
an eternal dwelling is made ready for them in heaven.*

(Preface of the Dead 1)

3. Liturgical Gestures: Memorial of the Saving Action of Christ

At the heart of each Eucharistic celebration, we recall the story of the Last Supper, a story where the gestures of Christ take on a major role:

*On the day before he was to suffer he took bread in his holy and venerable hands,
and with eyes raised to heaven to you, O God, his almighty Father, giving you thanks
he said the blessing, broke the bread and gave it to his disciples, saying:*

TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND EAT OF IT: FOR THIS IS MY BODY WHICH WILL BE GIVEN UP FOR YOU.

In a similar way, when supper was ended, he took this precious chalice in his holy and venerable hands, and once more giving you thanks, he said the blessing and gave the chalice to his disciples, saying:

TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND DRINK FROM IT: FOR THIS IS THE CHALICE OF MY BLOOD, THE BLOOD OF THE NEW AND ETERNAL COVENANT, WHICH WILL BE Poured OUT FOR YOU AND FOR MANY FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS. DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME. Eucharistic Prayer 1

The Eucharist is thus fundamentally remembrance of the gestures of Christ, remembrance, and not imitation: thus the priest does not break the host at the moment when he says “He broke it.” In celebrating the Eucharist, we do what Jesus asked us to do: “Do this in memory of me.” But our gestures are of a certain type, the echo of those done by Christ, rather than pure repetition. The “remembrance of the gesture” that is at the heart of Christian liturgical action, expresses thus our distance with respect to Christ. At the same time, the gestures that we make today are inscribed in a fundamental continuity with those that Jesus made long ago; in sharing the bread, Jesus signifies to us the meaning of his life and his death. Even if the gesture of the fraction rite with our Eucharists is in practice quite far from the concrete gesture of Christ, it is the same dynamic of life offered and death assumed that we signify in the ritual gesture that finds its source and support in the daily gesture of sharing bread.

Liturgical gestures thus are a lot more than a simple imitation: they introduce us into the mystery that Christ is the key for. Because they are rooted in the memory of the pascal mystery, they allow us to take part in the inseparable mystery of the death and resurrection by which God saves us today. The liturgy is an action in which the gestures and attitudes are the pathway by which the Church enters into the opus Dei, the work of God. In this regard, the liturgical gestures are of the same order as the sacraments (In the past, in theology, we spoke of “sacramental” to show the difference from the sacraments, all the while showing by the usage of the same root that they are of the same symbolic order.)

Certain liturgical gestures draw out by their form a pascal itinerary, with these two aspects of death and resurrection: it is notably the case with the profound bow that monks make when chanting the Trinitarian doxology at the end of each psalm at the Office. There is a time of descent, and then a time of ascent. The Sign of the Cross, notably when this gesture is made with holy water upon entering a church, is a pascal memory par excellence. In effect, it sends us back to the founding experience of our Christian life: by Baptism, in effect, we have been plunged into both the death and the resurrection of Christ, to become sons of God, saved by Christ (Rom 6). In signing ourselves with the water, we remember our Baptism so that the gift of the Holy Spirit that was given us may be renewed and always more and more efficacious in our life. Likewise, the great prostration on Good Friday or the foot washing on Holy Thursday.

4. The Status of Liturgical Gestures and Attitudes

Before trying to define the liturgical gesture, it is important to recall that the body is not only a biological reality but also inseparably the place of relationship, of mediation. The corporeal aspect of the liturgy takes place, then, in a relational universe that links relationship to others and relationship to God. The body has an essential place there, not so much as means of expression than as the very place where God comes to encounter man to save him. To hold oneself in truth before God in prayer implies that we be there as body and soul.

The liturgy, because it is an action where the corporeal dimension has an eminent place, is a major venue where Christianity proposes a Christian wisdom of the body that seeks to reunite reason and body, a wisdom that has its roots in the biblical tradition. The Christian liturgy is a place of seeking unification between reason and body. For the liturgy permits man to truly make, fully, a “gesture that speaks” and it is that intimate connection between gesture and word that confers on it the capacity to be a place of salvation for the body.

However, it does not suffice to say that the liturgical gesture is language. It is still more necessary that it enters in symphony with the liturgical action. It is why it must be taken seriously. It is astonishing to see so many sketchy genuflections and skimpy signs of the cross, or unformed processions: in all this there are certainly plenty more fear – maybe the fear of not being “right” or even more fear of what the neighbors might say – than of simple not caring.

Let’s try to sum up what the corporeal attitudes and gestures of the liturgy are:

Human gestures

We make many gestures in daily life: routine or utilitarian gestures, like, for example, taking the keys to open or close the front door of an apartment. There are gestures that belong to the order of communication: shaking hands, giving the finger, etc. In addition, there are automatic gestures – reflexes, really: to protect yourself from a sudden aggression, to make your disapproval known or simply to hide your embarrassment. From a certain point of view, the liturgical gesture will be one gesture among others, but because it enters into an ensemble of signs that have their own proper particularity, it constitutes a special category of human gestures.

Liturgical gestures are rooted in human culture but also engage the person in his total reality and his deep coherence. It is first of all a personal gesture in the sense that it carries the mark of the one who makes it. Thus, the liturgical gesture is neither theatrical nor purely exterior. In the course of the celebration of a religious profession, the movement by which the future professed (or the future priest in the ordination ritual) comes forward at the call of his name by responding: “*You have called me, Lord, here I am,*” is a veritable engagement of his whole being.

At the same time, we shouldn’t kid ourselves: accepting our differences, honoring them because the gesture has something that is very personal and even very intimate of each one, demands a real attention if we don’t want our liturgical gestures and attitudes to be simply the expression of our own originality, indeed, of our own willingness to put ourselves on the margin of the assembly.

The strict rules that regulated the gestures in the old liturgy had the advantage of resolving the delicate question of our extreme diversity with respect to expression of gesture. That said, a military attitude that seeks to precisely regulate all liturgical gestures can be a mask that gives to our assemblies a style and a flavor quite far from what is good for an assembly of prayer.

Because the liturgical reform has considerably reduced the rubrics that regulated the attitudes of the celebrant and the faithful long ago down to the smallest detail, many think that Vatican II advocated a return to natural gestures, to a free expression of prayer. But that's not the case. What the Constitution for the Liturgy demands is an attention "to the practice received from the Roman Rite as well as the spiritual wellbeing of the people of God, more than to its personal tastes and its own judgment." Thus in the measure that we accept the absence of a strict codification, we have to ceaselessly be on guard that our liturgical gestures do not become the expressions of our ailments, or worse of our refusal to be there. This vigilance is a responsibility of each one, but without forgetting that we are all blind concerning ourselves . . . it is much easier to see the splinter of bungling in our neighbor's eye than the plank of stiffness in our own. We can go further: our way of being in the liturgy is a good revealer of the truth of our spiritual life.

Symbolic gestures

Certainly, liturgical gestures are human gestures and as such a language that we have to modestly learn, as we learned from our parents all those of daily life. But they are more than just ordinary quotidian gestures. They do not seek, first of all, an immediate efficacy: the procession of gifts, for example, uselessly increases the time needed to prepare the altar, but it highlights the gesture of Christ who "took the bread" and "took the cup" as well as the participation of the faithful in the offering and the fruits of the Eucharistic sacrifice.

Not that they don't have a utilitarian function like the majority of our daily gestures, but because the liturgical gesture is within the ritual context, it assumes a weight and a depth that eludes us. The liturgical gesture is always symbolic in the sense that, coming out of ordinary experience (a procession is first of all a walk towards a goal), it confers on this experience a meaning that goes beyond it even as it completely assumes it; the communion procession is very much a walk toward a goal (in this sense it assumes a character that is completely utilitarian), but it is also the symbol of the people of God who leave their country of slavery to go to an encounter with their Lord, that is to say, to enter into the Promised Land.

They begin, in effect, a reality that goes infinitely beyond their simple immediate value; thus, the sign of peace is not only a gesture of friendship offered to nearest neighbors, it expresses, at the very same moment of the sacramental communion, the communion of all the baptized in the unique Body of Christ, as well as all the reconciliations that we have to make in order to be full participants.

One current difficulty is that traditional Christian symbolism is no longer understood or even perceived by a good number of our contemporaries. One is tempted sometimes to help by giving explanations in the middle of the liturgy. But that temptation risks giving the liturgy a didactic aspect that can quickly become a source of boredom. More deeply, the symbol then becomes a subject to

know. It is not enough to *know the meaning* of such a gesture. It is necessary above all to *inhabit* the gesture so that it be an expression of presence before God.

Because it is symbolic, the ritual gesture is quite different from what we think of today through the notion of “bodily expression.” This invites notably a certain reserve that the Fathers developed, in particular with respect to what concerns liturgical chant, which is opposed to ostentation like the feverish search for the aesthetic.

Gestures that are efficacious, liturgical gestures are not purely figurative nor solely expressive, they inform (*Informare*, in Latin, means “give a form to”) those who make them. During the celebrated meeting that Charles de Foucauld had with l’Abbe Huvelin in the confessional of the church of St. Augustine, [the priest] told the agnostic to kneel: one knows how this simple gesture allowed the future Blessed to break through his pride to get to the truth of his journey.

The liturgical gesture will be then a place of encounter in many forms: with myself, because it gives me awareness of my being once more, with others, because it is confession of faith before the assembly, with God because as Peguy says: “All that is spiritual is fleshly.” The sacraments are the gestures by which God gives himself to man so that man becomes carrier of God. A true encounter does not leave us untouched: it makes us aware and it transforms us. The sacramental encounter is thus an encounter taken to the maximum. It transforms the partners: God is made “human” in Christ whose sacraments renew the saving gestures. Man is, as our Eastern brothers say, “divinized” by the Spirit that assumes a body through the sacramental gestures.

Efficacious gestures, liturgical gestures are not only formators of our own prayer, but they also work to build up the body of the community that celebrates and that prays. They should be also “a sign of the unity of the members of the Christian community assemble in the sacred liturgy.” In an epoch marked by individualism and the “right” to be different, the gesture or the attitude can sometimes constitute a way of standing out from the rest of the assembly. The gesture or the attitude can thus make a lot of noise and even be transformed into a cry. Far from being an affirmation of identity or, a fusion into uniformity, like certain military demonstration, the bodily practices engage a real ethic of respect and not only a code of obedience to the liturgy. And this ethic is at the service of a living together not only in the liturgy but also outside the liturgy. In this, liturgical practice is a form of education (Lat. *Educere*, to draw out). Even more, as the Apostle Paul suggests in the First Letter to the Corinthians, “let all happen in a way that builds up, in dignity and order”: the harmony of gestures should be the sign of the reality of the Church, the Body of Christ “built up in charity.” Finally, the liturgy is a remedy against individualism. Participation in the liturgy requires the sacrifice of the “me” that always seeks to be at the center of things.

5. The principal liturgical attitudes

As I said earlier, if the liturgical reform considerably lightened the codification of gestures, it did not, however, promote a return to a free expression of prayer. This lightening is more an invitation to inhabit gestures and attitudes more deeply (and in all of that the Missal of 1970 is much more demanding than the Missal of Saint Pius V). The General Instruction of the Roman Missal gives many

instructions for gestures and attitudes, in order “that all the celebration manifest a beautiful and noble simplicity, that all the true meaning of these diverse parts be perceived and that the participation of all be encouraged.” It becomes absolutely necessary, today, therefore, to return these Christian gestures and attitudes in the liturgy their rightful place, as expression and school of ecclesial prayer; for that, a catechesis of liturgical gestures is necessary for the whole Christian people.

During a colloquy of the Institute of Liturgy, for which the theme was “Becoming Christian Through the Liturgy,” Fr. François Cassingena-Trévedy, a monk of Ligugé, in a conference about the meaning of liturgical gesture in the Fathers of the Church, noted the structuring dimension for the faith of liturgical gestures in a world still bathed in paganism. The Fathers have much to teach us.

In the Fathers, he said, the vocabulary of gesture found in the texts on Christian prayer describes a spirituality. The gestures are designated as “posture” or configuration of man at prayer. The liturgical language of gesture is not to be sought in psychological reasons, nor in the observances of society, nor in the performative ceremonial as in ancient pagan religion, but rather in the Baptismal condition of the people and of the new man that the liturgical condition prefigures. The whole man is raised up as an uninterrupted liturgical gesture: “O Christian, recognize your dignity.”

For the first Christians, there was a distrust of overly exuberant pagan gesture. The fundamental gesture of the Christian is what carries him to offer his being in living sacrifice. (cf. Rom 12) The Christian is existentially a “gesture of oblation.” The supreme rite of the cult of God is thus praise rising toward God from the lips of a just man. The liturgy is fundamentally an offering.

The Fathers appear to be exegetes and mystagogues who care about the understanding of liturgical gestures that need to be understood in order to be done, or, more who must be first done in order to be understood. The gesture has the grace to introduce into the intelligence the liturgical action. The Fathers had understood that experience has a step up on the didactic moment. One *lives* before one *understands*. It is necessary that gestures be done and done many times in order for them to be intelligible.

As a bodily act, [the liturgical gesture] does not ask to be merely understood. It asks for an education, an entering into a movement, really, a therapy. It asks to be totally separated from irreverence, routine, usury. . The reasonable explanation of the gesture inspires its just measure. The truth of the faith puts it into its rightful place. The education for truth of the liturgical gesture speaks to the relevance of all Christian existence.

The attitudes that liturgy gives us are anchored, for the most part, in the biblical tradition; they are the inheritance of the prayer of generations of believers. Some examples:

Standing: the most fundamental liturgical attitude.

It is first of all the classical position for prayer in the Old Testament. (Cf. 1 Sam 1: 26)

An expression of respect, it is the appropriate attitude when we address ourselves to God (in private prayer, in the Eucharistic prayer. . .) or when he addresses *us*: thus, we see the Israelites listening to the

Word of God (Ex 20: 21; 38: 10; Neh 8: 5; Dan 10: 11) or ourselves, standing during the proclamation of the Gospel.

It is the position of the one who is there to attest or witness (e.g. the godparent at the celebration of Baptism), to respond to an interrogation (during Baptism, a religious profession or at ordination) or to confess one's faith or express a commitment.

To be standing is, most fundamentally, the pascal attitude par excellence, because in his resurrection, Christ "raises" us and renders to us the dignity of sons of God. It is why the ancient discipline and that of the Eastern Church today forbids kneeling on Sunday and during the 50 days of Easter.

It is also the attitude of those who keep vigil in waiting for the Coming of the Lord (cf. Mal 3:2; cf also the meaning of the Hebrews eating the Passover, standing, in their haste before leaving Egypt).

It is in the "*statio*" [*translator note*: In Christian monastic practice, there is something known as *statio*. This is often meant to denote the moment between moments, or the pause between those times when you are doing things. <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/practices/practices/view/26852/statio>] that the generations of Christian recognize the gesture par excellence. One stands first of all in the liturgy. This position has a confessional and apologetic value in the measure where it contrasts with the servile attitudes of the pagans. The "stational" liturgy goes so far as to mobilize the entire body of the community in the great urban centers. We should return to the liturgy of *statio* today. It's necessary to move on it.

Sitting: the position of prolonged listening (during readings, the psalms, the homily): the Child Jesus in the Temple was seated among the doctors. Mary, seated at the feet of the Lord, listened to his word. It is normally also the position of the one who teaches (cf. Lk 4: 20) and who presides: it is why the bishop has a particular seat, a *cathedra* (which gives us the word cathedral) from which he presides and speaks.

Kneeling: because this position connects us to the earth (humus), this attitude is one of humility and penance. According to St. Basil, to kneel is to show by action that sin throws us to the ground." For the Hebrews, the knees symbolized strength. To bend the knee was thus to bend one's strength before the living God and to recognize that all power comes from him.

It is also the attitude of the individual prayer, humble and confident, implying an interior disposition of obedience, a desire to conform one's will to that of God. Thus the prayer of Christ as he approaches the Passion: "And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done" (Lk 22: 41-42).

The kneeling of the candidate at Ordination or during the Religious Profession implies all that.

Kneeling is finally and above all a gesture of adoration. Thus the Apostle Paul who "bends the knee in the presence of the Father" (Eph 3: 14). The fundamental text, from this point of view, is Philippians 2: 6-11:

Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This is the meaning of kneeling before the cross of the Savior exposed to our eyes on Good Friday. On the one hand, adoration before the infinite and humiliated love of Christ, and on the other, recognition of his kingship over everything acquired by his victory on the cross. Our attitude of adoration in prayer should be charged with all of that.

The bow: a sign of adoration and veneration (before the Blessed Sacrament, at the moment of the doxologies, at the mention of the Incarnation of the Son of God in the Nicæan Creed and during the Angelus.)

In days gone by, the deacon invited the faithful to bow their heads before the final benediction of the mass.

It is also a sign of profound recollection or supplication: this bow is marked, in monastic liturgy, before the oraisons and for certain prayers of petition (In Roman Canon 1 at the moment of supplication: “we beg you, Lord, that this offering be carried by your angel to your altar in heaven”).

Stretching out (extending) the hands:

The term “extended hands” or “stretch out the hands” appears frequently in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal.

Open arms raised toward heaven is the most ancient prayer gesture of Christianity.

Transmitted from the beginning of the ages, this gesture is in all cultures as an expression of non-violence, a sign of peace and of openness to the other. It is mentioned quite frequently in the psalms: “I stretch out my hands toward you” (Ps 142: 6) “All of my life I am going to bless your name, my hands outstretched in invoking your name” (Ps 62: 5). The Christians added a Christological value: arms raised to heaven evoke for them the arms of the Crucified who confers a new profundity to the original prayer gesture. This interpretation appears from the first century in that Judeo-Christian work that originated in Syria, very close to apostolic times, entitled The Odes of Solomon:

I stretched out my hands and approached my Lord: For the stretching of my hands is
His sign: My expansion is the outspread tree which was set up on the way of the
Righteous One. (Ode 42: 1-2)

I stretched out my hands and sanctified my Lord: For the extension of my hands is
His sign: And my expansion is the upright tree [or cross]. (Ode 27)

When we pray, we unite ourselves to Christ on the cross; we are ourselves this sign of the cross. Now, the sign of the cross connects the two dimensions of prayer: the vertical concerning the relationship with God, of adoration; the horizontal of the stretched out arms of the Crucified that opens to all and the overwhelming embrace by which he wishes to draw all into his love. (Jn 12: 32).

We could extend our list of gestures and attitudes that are multiplied in the liturgy and can be combined with each other. It would be necessary to speak of processions, of different movements of the arms (for exposition, for incensing...), of liturgy vestments.

Let's hold on to the essential: liturgical gestures introduce the liturgical mystery for which Christ is the key. Because they are rooted in the memory of the pascal mystery, they make us participate in the mystery of death and life by which God saves us today.

Conclusion

Attitude is worthy to be taken seriously because it engages all of a man. Like gesture, attitude says more than a word; it brings things into focus and that is why it is of such importance in liturgy. If it can be without treason, a manner of composing oneself, even of being at prayer, it is what permits us to hold ourselves truly before God. There is a coherence between the exterior attitude and the interior attitude that the liturgy invites us to. Is it possible, for example, to listen with attention to the Word of God being proclaimed if the body is slouched in its seat? Is it possible to preside over the assembly while crossing one's legs or to participate in prayer while remaining in the position of spectator who looks all around to see whatever's happening?

Liturgical prayer, because it demands an investment of the whole being, gives us a way to hold ourselves before God in the truth of what we are, body, heart, spirit, connected with a place, a time, a space, in relationship with others (whom we must know how to listen to, with whom we must adjust our voice...) It reminds us that prayer is not only an affair of the intellect, of "things to say" to God – which is what we often reduce it to. It is all the dimensions of existence – body (often with its burdens), heart, memory, postures, gestures, and objects around us – that have to participate in the prayer, to be exposed before God. Thus, the voice, the breath, the posture of the body have a stake in the prayer.

This is true most particularly in the prayer of the psalms. Psalmody that uses inhaling and exhaling, the balancing of phrases, repetition, rhythm of words, sonority, makes us have an experience of prayer that is not uniquely of the order of discourse addressed to God and the work of the intellect.

Thus, an authentic liturgical life, because it calls for a global participation of the whole being, implies an ascesis that is very real and that is played out at the very heart of the liturgy:

To sing, for example, to sing correctly and well, demands a real effort, a mutual listening, a presence to oneself and to others that is particularly difficult. It would be an illusion to imagine that liturgical chant is just a simple ornament of our celebrations, destined to honor the aesthetic needs of the participants. Liturgical song is also an exercise, an exercise that implies a real freedom, because it is song for God. One can say that "the art of celebrating" is not only reserved to priests. It is the work of the whole assembly and thus of each participant in the liturgy, whoever he or she is.

In the liturgy, to take gestures and attitudes seriously means to permit the participants to be truly human, that is to say, beings who are not forced to do what they do, but who engage themselves in an act; active participation is verified in the quality of the gestures and attitudes. Through the bodily economy that it proposes, the liturgy offers us a privileged pathway toward a reconciliation of our being. In the Eucharistic memorial, Christ teaches us the inestimable value of the gesture by which man is engaged completely. *"He took the bread"*: all of the life of Jesus was moving toward this gesture, the highest gesture ever made by humanity. We can never finish contemplating the simplicity and intensity of that gesture. In taking the bread, Jesus grasps his entire life: it is his last free gesture of offering to the Father, for our salvation, before his hands are tied and nailed to the cross. It is the immense gesture that is realized in each Eucharist.

"All of liturgical action moves toward a touch: *"He took the bread"* ; we are going to take this bread also. We must stop a moment at this touch. It is an astonishing touch; think of the ways in which artists have been interested in the powerful meaning of this gesture. Between the bread and the hand that takes it, there are infinite space and infinite time. All of history, all of the time of salvation goes toward this moment when he took the bread. It is the time that the Transcendent One had to have so as to approach us in a total loss of himself; it is that that we are remembering. And all of the life of Jesus tends toward this moment when he took the bread. From an existential point of view, for Jesus this is the instant when he takes his destiny in his hands. Jesus takes up the word: *"This is my body"* the central and immense word of the liturgy. Jesus takes up the word, he takes up the bread and his life in his hands. The gesture that Jesus makes of taking the bread is underlying the interior gesture of Jesus who takes himself to give himself. A moment of extraordinary gravity. Our liturgies should make us feel or at least respect that moment. There is a distracted way to take the bread. If we perceived this extraordinary moment, we would do it differently. If one isn't distracted in the liturgy, one will see the infinite space and times between the bread and the hand that touches: this moment when Jesus makes his leap into his Passover."

(Père François Cassingena-Trévedy, OSB)

COMMON THREAD 4

Pierre Faure, S.J.

We have considered first of all the heart of the liturgy. Yesterday we looked at the body at the heart of the liturgy.

In the Christian regime, “the most spiritual touches us by the most bodily, beginning with the Eucharistic communion” (L.M. Chauvet).

We have realized that the Christian liturgy is indissolubly corporeal and communitarian, that it is a profound element of Christianity because Christ is both man and God, because God has taken flesh.

Now, there are two bodies in the liturgy: my own, and also the body that we form together as Body of Christ: my body has its attitudes, which move, it has effects, sometimes it betrays me and that which we form as Body of Christ; we are members of that Body as its organs. It is a large, deep mystery that we can never fully understand.

This mystery is to be lived in depth, but on the surface it can have its tensions, its frictions concerning the bodily attitudes of others, from the diversities that render unity difficult. What we have learned yesterday was just and kindly, which shows the maturity of the Assumption that is here. It is good to speak of these things, e.g. “Why is Sr. X always standing up?” . . . It’s good to talk among ourselves without coming to decisions that are imposed on everybody and can break relationships.

This afternoon we plunged into the corporeal life; cf. the expressions of suffering in the Way of the Cross of Mexico, which for me, a European, would seem to be a bit morbid; but creative in the Philippines, at least according to Sr. Fe Emmanuel!

In the groups, very good conversation by continent, with a sort of ardor; and certain issues that we hadn’t touched as yet were spoken about. I heard examples concerning children, who are touched by what concerns the body in the liturgy.

And, in certain countries, non-Christians are attracted by some of our celebrations because of bodily things even if they can’t take part in the content. It is a mystery where something is happening.

Spirituality and routine:

One our masters in liturgy was saying that finding a happy routine can be like finding a happy sobriety. For routine, there is surely a path that permits finding a routine that is sufficiently happy so that you’re not grumpy.

Rest or work?

*Somebody said: “Down with noise” -- something that can be developed. A good question to pose: are we going to prayer to rest? God works on us in the liturgy, so in the liturgy, it’s necessary to still be working ourselves! Or does our sleep prolong our prayer? Finding the means to speak of this among ourselves. Yes, there is rest in prayer, but it is good to speak of it.

THE EXPERIENCE OF RECONCILIATION IN THE PERSONAL AND COMMUNITARIAN DIMENSIONS OF OUR LIFE

Manuel Grandin, S.J.

Program for the Morning

1. Introduction to some dimensions of the question
2. Two questions (5 minutes personal time + 10 minutes with 2 neighbors)
 - What songs of reconciliation come to my mind? Songs from my childhood or communion? Because it is in the liturgy and in song that we receive our first words of faith and prayer.
 - What words come to me when someone speaks to me of reconciliation?
3. A slide presentation in 4 points: songs, the sacrament, forgiveness in community and Etty Hillesum.
4. Two questions (by language groups):
 - What experiences of reconciliation have I lived in community and in my religious life (that I would like to share)
 - What cultural "specificities" (gestures, words_ do we have to speak of reconciliation?

Each group writes a conviction or an impression for each of these two questions, to share in the large group.

5. Summary, exchanges and finish with a psalm

Limits: I am neither a liturgist nor a biblical scholar (very few biblical citations here). I am a young "pastoralist," an heir of several cultures (Martinique, France, the Company of Jesus, and Chile).

INTRODUCTION

In our mixed lives, in a world where evil makes a lot of noise all around us and in us, how to perceive, how to welcome the pardon already offered by God, how live from the blessing of God? The link between reconciliation and blessing. Blessing and forgiveness are first in our existence. The bad (evil) makes more noise than the promise of life received well before our birth. The parable of the good seed and the weeds.

The bad (that which causes pain) exists in history and in our lives. Our lives are intermingled, made from light and darkness. We are aware of the occurrences of the bad in history, in the events and in our countries that are so different. There are the situations where the question: "Why the bad?" hits us.

But is the question of evil not also posed in our families and in our communities? How and why is it so difficult to live together as sisters and also with our brothers and sister who are not in community with us? This question is a reality at a time that is:

- *intergenerational*: heirs of our ancestors (celebration for the memory of our slave ancestors), of our parents and grandparents, of the sisters who preceded us and those who will come after us, faced with our “children,” celebration of memory for my slave ancestors.

-- *men/women*: sad reality of our cultures: in the Church, sign of the “original sin”

-- *intercultural*: international congregation; sometimes a European superiority complex concerning other continents?

-- *social*: between the different parts of society: what are our ghettos?

-- *interreligious*: what dialogue is possible between religions and with those who have no religion?

SLIDE SHOW

a/ It is in liturgy and music that we receive our first words of the faith and of prayer

A song of my childhood (“Be reconciled” – John Littleton), a calm and energetic rhythm, gospel, and choir, intimate: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aoXITtNtv1k>

Be reconciled/Let’s reconcile/ Now
Reconcile yourself/Let’s be reconciled/Now
Let yourself be reconciled with God who is Light/

Let yourself be reconciled with the whole of life
In a world that’s ungrateful and full of agitation/
Let’s open our hearts and live in reconciliation.

Be reconciled /Let’s reconcile/Now
So each day will be a jubilee /That each day will be a feast for loving
Reconciliation/Between nations
Between families/Between brothers and sisters of the same blood.

Be reconciled, you leaders of our countries/Be reconciled to make your conflicts go
away
Be guides struggling more and more for justice /For the oppressed, the abused, the
forgotten, the rejected.
Let’s reconcile with the whole Universe/That our World may be brought to unity

b/The sacrament of spiritual growth and healing

In all our crises and in places where something causes pain, two invitations:

Continue to look at the Christ who has come without making any noise (contrary to the bad, the good never makes noise), who joins us where "it hurts", who came down to the lowest of the low things that man can do to man, to mark forever by his presence those places where blessing seems to be absent. It is the response of faith so fragile, even traversed by doubt; the faith that puts us into relationship with God.

The other response, which comes from it, is the response of our lives, of our choices, of our attitudes. When blessing isn't a given, when it's hard for us to feel blessing about our lives, then it's time to choose: choose to believe in blessing, choose to seek it . . . and ask for the grace to welcome it. And sometimes, when one doesn't perceive it, choose to offer it to others! It's the response of our lives, through which God can continue to offer his blessing to the world. The need to be vessels of reconciliation in order to offer the blessing of God to the world and to those who surround us.

What helps us to develop these two attitudes is the gift of the gospel tradition that favors this attachment to Christ and this response to our lives:

The sacrament, the importance of passing through a ritual, through something outside ourselves, through the words and gestures of Jesus: "Your sins are forgiven" and "go, your faith has saved you."

How do we go to this sacrament? In a confident way, or servile, obsessed, frightened, blasé, etc.? Among all the sacraments, lived in the midst of the Christian assembly, it is the sacrament of intimacy par excellence; at the same time it fundamentally touches the communitarian dimension of our existence. A sacrament to ask for without ceasing, an interior call and a liturgical time that is right.

From ***The Catechism of the Catholic Church*** 2.2.2.4. 1.

What Is This Sacrament Called?

1423 It is called the sacrament of conversion because it makes sacramentally present Jesus' call to conversion, the first step in returning to the Father from whom one has strayed by sin.

It is called the sacrament of Penance, since it consecrates the Christian sinner's personal and ecclesial steps of conversion, penance, and satisfaction.

1424 It is called the sacrament of confession, since the disclosure or confession of sins to a priest is an essential element of this sacrament. In a profound sense it is also a "confession" - acknowledgment and praise - of the holiness of God and of his mercy toward sinful man.

It is called the sacrament of forgiveness, since by the priest's sacramental absolution God grants the penitent "pardon and peace."

It is called the sacrament of Reconciliation, because it imparts to the sinner the love of God who reconciles: "Be reconciled to God." He who lives by God's merciful love is ready to respond to the Lord's call: "Go; first be reconciled to your brother."

Audience of Pope Francis, 19 Feb. 2014: *The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a Sacrament that Heals.*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Through the Sacraments of Christian Initiation — Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist — man receives new life in Christ. Now, we all know that we carry this life “in earthen vessels” (2 Cor 4:7), we are still subject to temptation, suffering, and death and, because of sin, we may even lose this new life. That is why the Lord Jesus willed that the Church continue his saving work even to her own members, especially through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick, which can be united under the heading of “Sacraments of Healing”. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a Sacrament of healing. When I go to confession, it is in order to be healed, to heal my soul, to heal my heart and to be healed of some wrongdoing. The biblical icon which best expresses them in their deep bond is the episode of the forgiving and healing of the paralytic, where the Lord Jesus is revealed at the same time as the physician of souls and of bodies (cf. Mk 2:1-12; Mt 9:1-8; Lk 5:17-26).

1. The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation flows directly from the Paschal Mystery. In fact, on the evening of Easter the Lord appeared to the disciples, who were locked in the Upper Room, and after addressing them with the greeting, “Peace be with you!” he breathed on them and said: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven” (Jn 20:21-23). This passage reveals to us the most profound dynamic contained in this Sacrament.

First, the fact that the forgiveness of our sins is not something we can give ourselves. I cannot say: I forgive my sins. Forgiveness is asked for, is asked of another, and in Confession we ask for forgiveness from Jesus. Forgiveness is not the fruit of our own efforts but rather a gift, it is a gift of the Holy Spirit who fills us with the wellspring of mercy and of grace that flows unceasingly from the open heart of the Crucified and Risen Christ. Secondly, it reminds us that we can truly be at peace only if we allow ourselves to be reconciled, in the Lord Jesus, with the Father and with the brethren. And we have all felt this in our hearts, when we have gone to confession with a soul weighed down and with a little sadness; and when we receive Jesus’ forgiveness we feel at peace, with that peace of soul which is so beautiful, and which only Jesus can give, only Him.

2. Over time, the celebration of this Sacrament has passed from a public form — because at first it was made publicly — to a personal one, to the confidential form of Confession. This however does not entail losing the ecclesial matrix that constitutes its vital context. In fact, the Christian community is the place where the Spirit is made present, who renews hearts in the love of God and makes all of the brethren one thing in Christ Jesus. That is why it is not enough to ask the Lord for forgiveness in one’s own mind and heart, but why instead it is necessary humbly and trustingly to confess one’s sins to a minister of the Church. In the celebration of this Sacrament, the priest represents not only God but also the whole community, who sees itself in the weakness of each of its members, who listens and is moved by his repentance, and who is reconciled with him, which cheers him up and accompanies him on the path of conversion and human and Christian growth. One might say: I confess only to God. Yes, you can say to God “forgive me” and say your sins, but our sins are also committed against the brethren, and against the Church. That is why it is necessary to ask pardon of the Church, and of the brethren in the person of the priest. “But Father, I am ashamed ...” Shame is also good, it is healthy to feel a little shame, because being ashamed is salutary. In my country when a person feels no shame, we say that he is “shameless”; a *“sin verguenza”*. But shame too does good, because it makes us more humble, and the

priest receives this confession with love and tenderness and forgives us on God's behalf. Also from a human point of view, in order to unburden oneself, it is good to talk with a brother and tell the priest these things which are weighing so much on my heart. And one feels that one is unburdening oneself before God, with the Church, with his brother. Do not be afraid of Confession! When one is in line to go to Confession, one feels all these things, even shame, but then when one finishes Confession one leaves free, grand, beautiful, forgiven, candid, happy. This is the beauty of Confession! I would like to ask you — but don't say it aloud, everyone respond in his heart: when was the last time you made your confession? Everyone think about it ... Two days, two weeks, two years, twenty years, forty years? Everyone count, everyone ask: 'when was the last time I went to confession?' And if much time has passed, do not lose another day. Go, the priest will be good. Jesus is there, and Jesus is more benevolent than priests, Jesus receives you, he receives you with so much love. Be courageous and go to Confession!

3. Dear friends, celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation means being enfolded in a warm embrace: it is the embrace of the Father's infinite mercy. Let us recall that beautiful, beautiful parable of the son who left his home with the money of his inheritance. He wasted all the money and then, when he had nothing left, he decided to return home, not as a son but as a servant. His heart was filled with so much guilt and shame. The surprise came when he began to speak, to ask for forgiveness, his father did not let him speak, he embraced him, he kissed him, and he began to make merry. But I am telling you: each time we go to confession, God embraces us. God rejoices! Let us go forward on this road. May God bless you!

* * *

Why then ask for pardon in community? A book can help us to understand the reasons for this step: Community and Growth (Paulist Press, 2nd ed. 1989) by Jean Vanier, founder of the community of l'Arche. [In the original French, « La communauté, lieu du pardon et de la fête »]

a) A community comes about when people are no longer hiding from one another, no longer pretending or proving their value to another. Barriers have come down and they can live together an experience of communion (p. 24). *Reconciliation, to go beyond jealousy, competition, excessive need for recognition.*

b) One of the roles of community life is precisely to keep us walking in hope, to help us to accept ourselves as we are and others as they are . . . the hope of a community is founded on the acceptance and love of ourselves and others as we really are and on the patience and trust which is essential for growth (p. 40). *Reconciliation, to grow and become adults.*

c) To live in community is to discover and love the secret of what is unique in ourselves. This is how we become free. Then we no longer live according to the desires of others, or by an image of ourselves; we become free, free to love others as they are and not as we would like them to be (p. 42). *Reconciliation, to gain in trust and freedom.*

d) Each member of a community who grows in love and wisdom helps the growth of the whole community. Each person who refuses to grow, or is afraid to go forward, inhibits the community's growth. All the members of a community are responsible for their own growth and that of the community as a whole.

Human growth is to do with integrating our capacity for action with our heart. Too often, action springs from fear of relationships, of our own vulnerability, or of love; it comes from fear of dependence, of sexuality and of our own deep and hidden self. Action is too often a flight or a desire to prove something.

When we are at peace, when we have accepted our own deep wounds and weakness, when we are in touch with our heart and capacity for tenderness, then actions flow from our true selves, and become a source of growth (p 131). *Reconciliation, for going beyond fear.*

e) It is always good for individuals, communities, and indeed nations, to remember that their present situation is the result of the thousands of gestures of love or hate that came before. This obliges us to remember that the community of tomorrow is being born of our fidelity to the present. We are all links in the great chain of generations which makes up humanity. The fact that our lives are not long in the sum of time give us a true perspective on our community, and the place of each of us in it. We discover that we are the same time very insignificant and very important, because each of our actions is preparing the humanity of tomorrow; it is a tiny contribution to the construction of the huge and glorious final humanity (p. 152). *Reconciliation, for preparing the future.*

f) It is easy to be generous for a few months or even years. But to be continually present to others, and not only present but nourishing, to keep going in a fidelity which is reborn each morning, demands a discipline of body and spirit. We need a disciplined spiritual and intellectual nourishment (p 180). *Reconciliation, for enduring in love.*

c/ A feminine figure: Etty Hillesum

By her life, a woman can help us to believe that reconciliation with history is possible and to put it into practice for ourselves. Her name was Etty Hillesum (cf. An Interrupted Life and Letters from Westerbork, NY: Pocket Books, Washington Square Press, 1981).

Etty Hillesum was a young Jewish woman who lived in Amsterdam during World War II. She was what one might call a “liberated” woman: intellectually free, politically free, and adventures...this sometimes “disorderly” life was turned upside down by the experience of a liberation and of a deeply spiritual liberty. She had an experience of God, of God present in her, of God present to suffering humanity. She described herself as “a young woman who didn’t know how to kneel,” a young woman who became someone who carried the vocation of “helping God,” someone who received the grace of gratitude in the darkest of situations.

She knew what was waiting for her and for her people; she knew the work of death and extermination that was being pursued in Europe. She asked to work at Westerbork [a small Jewish transit camp in World War II, located near the village of Westerbork in the rural northeastern Netherlands]. She confronted reality without resignation or discouragement; she experienced the beauty and the goodness of life: “I find life beautiful, worthy to be lived and rich in meaning. Despite everything.”

What happened to Etty?

- She discovered the life of God present in herself.

In her diary, she speaks of the necessity of what she calls “recollection,” the need to return to the place of God in herself, where she discovers herself “exempt from rancor” “with so much strength and love [in herself].

“My life is just a perpetual listening to inside myself, to others, to God. And when I say that I listen within, in reality, it’s more the God in me that is listening. What is essential and deep in me listens to the essence and the depth of the other. God listens to God.”

- She knows that the presence of God will not be taken away from her and that she can live that [presence] anywhere. She knows that she can kneel anywhere and when she cannot do it physically, she can always do it interiorly. She can “carry” God everywhere.

“What counts is to carry you, intact and preserved, everywhere with me and to remain faithful to you and against all, as I have always promised you.”

“I am grateful, my God, that you have made life so beautiful, just where I find myself.”

Her feeling of gratitude roots itself there: “I am above all grateful to not experience rancor or hate, but to feel in myself a great acceptance that is quite a different thing from resignation, and a form of understanding of our epoch, as strange as that might appear!

And this feeling of gratitude leads to the gifts, the gift of self.

You have made me so rich, my God, please let me share out Your beauty with open hands. My life has become an uninterrupted dialogue with You, oh God, one great dialogue. Sometimes when I stand in some corner of the camp, my feet planted on Your earth, my eyes raised towards Your Heaven, tears sometimes run down my face, tears of deep emotion and gratitude. At night, too, when I lie in my bed and rest in You, oh God, tears of gratitude run down my face, and that is my prayer” (Letters from Westerbork, 18 August 1943).

- She sees in this a way to fight against the bad. To fight against the bad means first of all not to add hatred to hatred. With respect to member of the camp administration, a dominating, hateful person who was “a perfect torturer and a model persecutor,” she affirms that “hatred will not lead us to anything.” She says that does not hate this person but rather that she pities him; she sees in him an unsatisfied child of three; she had learned that he had tried to commit suicide several times.
- “Hatred leads to nothing”: “don’t add hatred to hatred.” “It is the only solution, really the only one, I don’t see any other issue; that each one of us return to himself or herself and eradicate and destroy in himself or herself all that he or she wants to destroy in others.” It is a battle. To enter into it, we have to believe that Christ goes ahead of us into our battles. More: that Christ fights for us, with us. More: that Christ is already the victor! (cf. Jn 16: 33).

“To be honest, I don’t believe at all in this pretended wickedness. I would like to touch that man in his anguish, to seek out its origins and to undertake on him a kind of battle, to send him back to his own interior domain – it’s all that we can do for him in a time like ours. Let’s be convinced that the least atom of hatred that we add to this world means that we’ve rendered it more inhospitable than it already was.”

- Etty sees in that a way to lessen the suffering, to carry it like a blessing to those she encounters. The last phrase of her journal: “We should be willing to act as a balm for all wounds.” The care that we take of each other is like a response to evil.

Conclusion: Reconciliation, Another Name for the Blessing Offered by God. Image of Balm.

The blessing of God is like a balm, like a perfumed oil, that God invites us to receive and to offer. It sends us back to the parable of the Good Samaritan. The care that we take of each other is a response to evil.

A return to the contemplation of Christ, in the way that he makes himself close to us, to our mixed up lives. He is both the Samaritan who doesn't stop because of the “impurity” of the injured traveler and he is also the wounded man, descending to the lowest of our wounds. He invites us thus to let ourselves be approached by him who will bandage up our wounds. And to approach the suffering people in whom he is present ourselves.

That's what Psalm 133 (132) tells us:

How good and how pleasant it is,
when brothers live in unity!

It is like precious oil upon the head
running down upon the beard,
running down upon Aaron's beard,
upon the collar of his robes.

It is like the dew of Hermon which falls
on the heights of Zion.
For there the Lord gives his blessing,
life forever.

It is there that the Lord sends blessing -- life forever.

It is the blessing of fraternity. Let's dare to become blessing for each other!

Let's look for, welcome, and offer the blessing of God on our own mixed up lives!

Balm: let God do us good. More: let ourselves be attracted by God. Cf. The Song of Songs: “Draw me: we will run after thee to the odor of thy ointments (1:3)

And asking for grace to rejoice with the joy of God, to rejoice over the joy of others: it is the remedy of all remedies! It takes from us all rancor, all jealousy; it decenters ourselves from ourselves and opens us to something greater for us. It does the work of resurrection in us.

To be continued!

TEXTS

Matthew 13, 24-30; 1 Kings 19, 8-13

Etienne **GRIEU**, SJ, « La vie mêlée, lieu de la révélation chrétienne », Projet n°296, janvier 2007.

“In our religion, there is nothing pure. Nothing that we can oppose in a nice, tidy way to something “impure” that would be, itself, radically unable to receive the visit of God. Astonishing? Not at all. The natural place of Christian revelation is in the mixed life: the life where all is mixed up, where you don’t understand a whole lot, where you are frequently disappointed, where you never get away from misunderstandings and tensions. Jesus, the Galilean, lived in that kind of milieu like a fish in water and he knew how to recognize it as a gift of the Father.

The divine life is really another thing, for Christians, it’s like a bit of Heaven fell to earth. Like the biblical story, this life passes by men, including their thirsts, their groping, and their errors. Nothing amazing, then, that the “mixed up life” should be a place of preferences. To feel the promise of a reconciliation by opening your hands, it is necessary to have clenched your fists before; to give yourself over to a joyful word, you have to know what the weight of silence can be; to hear the calls as a promise, you have to know the temptation to remain deaf. In the icon of the resurrection, we see Christ, who, with a big hit from his shoulder no doubt, has broken down the gates of the place of the dead. It is thus that he opens in humanity a passage toward the Father; by bursting through the bars and the chains. So, all that divides, all that separates us, all that opposes us, all of that which is unjust or wounding can be seen as what calls for the passage of God. To hold on in these difficult places is to carry yourself to a meeting in a strange land, and signify by simple waiting that here, an encounter has to happen.

Reasoning in these terms leads to a broadening of the spectrum of what underlies the commitment of believers. When I take the life of my neighborhood, my town, my workplace seriously, when I give my time to an association or to a union, it is not only to be clear with myself and make my conscience feel happy.

Far from being a simple question of coherence or ethics, one can discern there a meeting on the order of the “sacramental,” a rendezvous with the One who knows how to find a way in the places where humanity complicates everything. If I have understood all that, then, when I am in church before the altar, what I will celebrate takes on a completely different look. The Eucharist could be received as the living sign of an open road to the heart of the worst closures.

Etty **HILLESUM**, An Interrupted Life. NY: Washington Square Press/Pocket Books, 1981.

“Dear God, these are anxious times. Tonight for the first time I lay in the dark with burning eyes as scene after scene of suffering passed before me. I shall promise you one thing, God, just one very small thing: I shall never burden my today with cares about my tomorrow, although that takes some practice. Each day is sufficient unto itself. I shall try to help You, God, to stop my strength ebbing away, though I cannot vouch for it in advance. . . All that we can manage these days and all that really matters: that we safeguard that little piece of You, God, in ourselves. And perhaps in others as well.” (p. 187)

“We should be willing to act as a balm for all wounds.” (p. 243)

COMMON THREAD 5

Pierre Faure, S.J.

A comment on what we have experienced in the celebration of reconciliation. What happened was “embedded” within the communion of the religious life of the Assumption. It can’t be directly translated or transposed to the life of your parishes.

What’s the big difference?

* you all know each other,

* you are professionals of interiority,

* what is decisive for the fruitfulness of the celebration is that the labor has been profound, now, you have this disposition.

But these elements are rarely or not at all present in the lives of the students and parishioners where you are sent.

Another reflection: the liturgy always uses “*exteriora*” which aim to build and impregnate the “*interiora*”. But in some types of celebrations it is difficult to obtain this movement. With the young it is about everything that is exterior giving a bit of the interior (this is also what happens with the Way of the Cross in Mexico). The liturgy with its signs and symbols is thus led to nourish the “*interiora*”.

Regarding mercy and the sacrament: we have experienced a *non-sacramental* celebration of reconciliation, a negative qualifier that shows up too often in our Church; we only have one-to-one confession with the priest or nothing at all...But the rite of reconciliation foresees other categories such as the one we have experienced. The form in which we practiced reconciliation yesterday gave us an access to the Heart of God’s tenderness in an easier, more varied, longer, freer way than we can experience in the Sacrament of Reconciliation which is too fast, not free enough, not varied enough.

It is our task in the mission to pass on this other dimension that we experience in an atmosphere of hope. These other forms are important for the very diverse Christians of our parishes. Regarding this Sacrament, more than any of the others, we hear believers say: “never again [will I accept] what I have experienced in Confession!”

A MORE UNIVERSAL PRAYER

Pierre Faure, S.J.

What Are We Talking About?

- Of prayers of petition that we make in the Eucharistic celebration and in the Liturgy of the Hours, as well as intercessions and supplications that we make in our most personal and most solitary prayer ...
- The aim this morning is to enter better into the question of this prayer of petition, to better understand its foundations and its place in the liturgy and in our personal prayer.

Petition and Praise

If, for the sake of reflection and clarity, we have chosen to consider above all the prayer of petition, as distinguished from the prayer of praise, we must immediately affirm that we cannot separate or oppose petition and praise, because the psalms do not do it (and they are for us the referent of prayer) nor does the liturgy (it associates petition and praise in a flexible and subtle way).

Father Paul Beauchamp, Jesuit exegete, says this very well:

“There is an elementary grammar of prayer. We will retain two principles. The first is that praise is the beginning and the end of all prayer. The second is that praise and supplication are the two elements which, on their own, suffice to describe the totality of prayer.... In the grammar of prayer, praise and supplication form an association as flexible as that which puts together the words of a sentence. There is a link between these two elements that makes it better to understand what prayer is. Likewise, prayer is transformed from this association and produces new forms.”

The General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours (GILH) takes up this association of praise and of intercessions in numbers 179, 181, 182. However, in some prayer groups, praise takes up so much space that one wonders if one can still beg God to listen to our poor petitions. At the other extreme, we sometimes meet people who are so absorbed by petitions, intercessions, and novenas that we want to propose that they also give thanks to God for His wonders! ... We see here a vast field for spiritual reflection on prayer and for personal spiritual accompaniment.

Our purpose is limited to the Liturgy.

The Eucharistic Liturgy

Because the Eucharistic Liturgy is “source and summit of the Christian life”, the Church explains best what she does in and through the prayer of petition. We possess the most ancient and strongest examples of prayer of petition or the “Prayer of the Faithful”.

1. General Instruction of the Roman Missal (3rd edition 2002), nos. 69, 70, 71.

In these three numbers we find the following:

-- Instruction on the foundation of the Universal Prayer or Prayer of the Faithful, principal prayer of petition in the Eucharistic Celebration,

-- The framework and the rules for the implementation of this prayer.

The Foundation

The people, “exercising the office of their Baptismal priesthood” [69]. This expression, known from *Lumen Gentium*, is unique in the Instruction of the Roman Missal. It speaks of the importance the Church attaches to the Prayer of the Faithful, and the responsibility entrusted to them. *Lumen Gentium* 10 specifies: “The faithful, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist. They likewise exercise that priesthood in receiving the sacraments, in prayer and thanksgiving, in the witness of a holy life, and by self-denial and active charity.” This means that the faithful, gathered for prayer, constitute together the Body of Christ who prays to the Father for the salvation of the world, just as the priest, at the head of the Assembly over which he presides, exercises his ministry “in the role of Christ.”

An old adage of theology enlightens these somewhat abstract notions: “Only one is a priest, all are priests, some are priests”.

- *only one is a priest*: certainly, Christ, only intercessor between God and men.
- *all are priests*: gathered together for the liturgy, the baptized faithful are, here and now, Christ who prays for the salvation of all; it is the common priesthood, exercised particularly in the Prayer of the Faithful at the heart of the Eucharistic Celebration.
- *some are priests*: that is, ordained priests, so that Christ be recognized as the only Priest, and to preside over the assembly of the faithful, the Body of Christ.

The common priesthood of the faithful is acquired through Baptism, which is why the catechumens cannot pray the Prayer of the Faithful. They are not yet “the faithful of Christ” and therefore do not have “competence in Christ” to carry his prayer before the Father. That is why, in the ancient Church, and still today, the adult catechumens must leave the Assembly at the end of the Liturgy of the Word.

The text of No. 69 of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (**GIRM**) was modified in the 3rd edition of 2002 by adding: “In the Prayer of the Faithful, the people respond in a certain way to the word of God which they have welcomed in faith...” I believe that this expression wants to clarify that the universal prayer is a Christian prayer which is written and prayed in the Christian faith, listening to the word of God. Among the inhabitants of the earth, there are many ways to pray. The Christian way is particular. It always responds to a God who speaks, through his Son and also through the events of the whole of personal and collective history, in the “signs of the times.” Today, in France, we see many liturgy leaders who have understood that this new indication of the GIRM teaches that the Sunday Universal Prayer should be a response to the Sunday’s biblical readings. Thus, they have begun to choose expressions from each of the readings of the day to draw the prayer intentions from!!! I think that this is a very narrow and nearsighted view of this number. The prayers thus drafted become artificial, having the letter but not the spirit ...

The Implementation

Numbers 69 and 70 of the GIRM indicate well the themes of the intentions that should habitually be in the Prayers of the Faithful. These are collective intentions, which have to do with the life and the salvation of humanity as well as of the local community. It has been said that the most important thing is to read the newspaper to write the intentions of the Universal Prayer. But more profoundly one must ask oneself what the prayer of Christ is here and now. Those who write the Universal Prayer must

therefore prayerfully situate themselves in the articulation of their faith in Christ in the situations, the needs and the events of the world around them. The same applies to the intentions of the intercessions in the Liturgy of the Hours. (GILH n° 187).

Let's not forget the advice given in GIRM No. 71, which aims to correct the flaws that have arisen in the Universal Prayers since their restoration by Second Vatican Council: "The intentions announced should be sober, composed freely but prudently, and be succinct, and they should express the prayer of the entire community." It could not be better said...

The liturgical action of this prayer is fundamentally and truly collective. One can say that it is "the peak moment" for the Church. The assembled people pray standing (with an invocation or in silence), the priest presides over the prayer, introducing and concluding it, while the deacon or another person pronounces the prayer intentions.

2. Two Ancient Examples, Close to the Origins

The reading -- or the discovery -- of these very ancient yet very contemporary prayers, is intended to be a model for us to get some fresh ideas from the original movement that prompted these prayers. Therein we find riches that the Roman Liturgy has gradually lost...

A. Litany of Pope Saint Gelasius (Prescribed to be sung for the Universal Church).

[See the text below]

This prayer of the 5th century was introduced into the Liturgy of the Hours in French, in two parts, for both the morning and evening prayer of Thursday Week 4. It was put to music by Father Gelineau in 1953 (B 19), long before the Second Vatican Council.

Four main qualities to notice in this prayer:

- The introduction is addressed to the Father, the Son and the Spirit, each of Whom has a qualifier. The specific Christian is there, from the introduction itself, which is precisely an echo of the Word of God received in faith.
- Twelve intentions out of thirteen pray for a specific category of people, and one for the good weather conditions so necessary for a predominantly rural society.
- Four verbs are used as synonyms of "pray": invoke, implore, petition, and beg. The action of praying is of great richness and delicacy of expression that is notably expressed through these different verbs.
- The greatest expressive richness is found in the attributes and qualifiers of the Divine Persons invoked, which are different for each intention. Whoever knows God can use the terms chosen to qualify Him, to name Him. It is also a Christian specificity. Why did it get lost in the intentions of the prayer that we rewrite or recopy in specialized journals?

B. The Great Prayers of Good Friday [see the text below]

While the use of the Universal Prayer in the Eucharistic Celebration was gradually lost in the Roman Liturgy, the celebration of the Cross on Good Friday has preserved, throughout the centuries, this great prayer of 10 intentions.

These prayers are placed after the homily following the narration of the Passion according to St John, and before the adoration of the Cross. The entry into the Paschal Mystery is taking place, and the Church, in her proximity to Christ Crucified, feels that this unique moment of the Liturgical Year is particularly favorable to “present to God the prayers for the salvation of all”.

A certain solemnity and depth is given to these prayers by their $\frac{3}{4}$ time rhythm: for each intention, the deacon or another person announces the intention for which the Church asks the people to pray, then time is given for each one to pray in silence, and finally, the Presider of the Assembly addresses himself to the “Eternal and All-powerful God” to proclaim aloud the prayer presented by all.

The ten intentions of this prayer are a good example of the balance and the strength of the prayer of the Church. One hears therein both her charity and her responsibility towards her members and for the whole of humanity. It remains a great example for us to form, in the Church and in ourselves, a more universal prayer

The importance of silence that interiorizes. Let us give silence space in our prayers.

TEXTS

General Instruction of the Roman Missal (excerpts)

The Prayer of the Faithful

69. In the Prayer of the Faithful, the people respond in a certain way to the word of God which they have welcomed in faith and, exercising the office of their Baptismal priesthood, offer prayers to God for the salvation of all. It is fitting that such a prayer be included, as a rule, in Masses celebrated with a congregation, so that petitions will be offered for the holy Church, for civil authorities, for those weighed down by various needs, for all men and women, and for the salvation of the whole world. [67]

70. As a rule, the series of intentions is to be:

- a) for the needs of the Church;
- b) for public authorities and the salvation of the whole world;
- c) for those burdened by any kind of difficulty;
- d) for the local community.

Nevertheless, in a particular celebration, such as Confirmation, Marriage, or a Funeral, the series of intentions may reflect more closely the particular occasion.

71. It is for the priest celebrant to direct this prayer from the chair. He himself begins it with a brief introduction, by which he invites the faithful to pray, and likewise he concludes it with a prayer. The

intentions announced should be sober, be composed freely but prudently, and be succinct, and they should express the prayer of the entire community.

The intentions are announced from the ambo or from another suitable place, by the deacon or by a cantor, a lector, or one of the lay faithful. [68]

The people, however, stand and give expression to their prayer either by an invocation said together after each intention or by praying in silence.

Notes:

[67] Cf. Const. lit., n. 53.

[68] Cf. S. Cong. of Rites, Instr. Inter Oecumenici, n. 56: DC 1435 (1964), 1369

Litany of Pope Saint Gelasius († 496)

Let us pray with faith to the Father All-powerful, let us pray to Jesus, the Only Son, let us pray to the Spirit of God.

1. For the spotless Church of the Living God, spread throughout the world, we ask for the riches of divine goodness.

R. /: Lord, hear us and have mercy!

2. For the consecrated ministers of the Lord, for the people who adore God in truth, let us beg Christ, our Lord.

R. /: Lord, hear us and have mercy!

3. For those who faithfully proclaim the Word, let us ask for the infinite Wisdom of the Word of God.

4. For virgins in mind and body for the sake of the Kingdom of God, for those who toil on the path of the perfect life, let us pray to Him who gives the Spirit.

5. For those who govern the peoples, so that justice and right may reign, let us ask for God's strength.

6. For the happy alternation of the seasons, for the blessings of rain and wind, let us invoke the Lord who governs the world.

7. For those whom the Father draws to His Son and who are preparing for Baptism, let us beg the goodness of Almighty God.

8. For those held captive by human weakness and frailty, by the spirit of envy and hatred, by the many errors of the world, let us implore the tenderness of the Redeemer.

9. For those who are absent, for prisoners, for the weak who are oppressed, the just who are persecuted, we beg Jesus, the Savior.
10. For divided Christians, for the sons of Israel, for the Muslims, and the peoples of all religions, let us invoke the Lord of Truth.
11. For the workers of the Gospel, for those who serve their brothers with love, let us pray the God of Mercy.
12. For the repose of the deceased, let us invoke the Lord of spirits and the judge of all flesh.
13. For the brothers and sisters gathered here in the same faith, let us invoke the Lord of Glory.

Good Friday Universal Prayer

1. For the Church

Let us pray, dearly beloved, for the holy Church of God, that our God and Lord be pleased to give her peace, to guard her and to unite her throughout the whole world and grant that, leading our life in tranquility and quiet, we may glorify God the Father almighty.

Prayer in silence. Then the Priest says:

Almighty ever-living God, who in Christ revealed Your glory to all the nations, watch over the works of Your mercy, that Your Church, spread throughout the world, may persevere with steadfast faith in confessing Your name. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

2. For the Pope

Let us pray also for our most Holy Father Pope N., that our God and Lord, who chose him for the Order of Bishops, may keep him safe and unharmed for the Lord's holy Church, to govern the holy People of God.

Almighty ever-living God, by whose decree all things are founded, look with favor on our prayers and in Your kindness protect the Pope chosen for us, that, under him, the Christian people, governed by You their maker, may grow in merit by reason of their faith. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

3. For the clergy and the faithful

Let us pray also for our Bishop N., for all Bishops, Priests, and Deacons of the Church and for the whole of the faithful people.

Almighty ever-living God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is sanctified and governed, hear our humble prayer for Your ministers that, by the gift of Your grace, all may serve You faithfully. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

4. For Catechumens

Let us pray also for (our) catechumens, that our God and Lord may open wide the ears of their inmost hearts and unlock the gates of His mercy, that, having received forgiveness of all their sins through the waters of rebirth, they, too, may be one with Christ Jesus our Lord.

Almighty ever-living God, Who make Your Church ever fruitful with new offspring, increase the faith and understanding of (our) catechumens, that, reborn in the font of Baptism, they may be added to the number of Your adopted children. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

5. For the unity of Christians

Let us pray also for all our brothers and sisters who believe in Christ, that our God and Lord may be pleased, as they live the truth, to gather them together and keep them in his one Church.

Almighty ever-living God, Who gather what is scattered and keep together what You have gathered, look kindly on the flock of Your Son, that those whom one Baptism has consecrated may be joined together by integrity of faith and united in the bond of charity. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

6. For the Jewish people

Let us pray also for the Jewish people, to whom the Lord our God spoke first, that He may grant them to advance in love of His name and in faithfulness to His covenant.

Almighty ever-living God, Who bestowed Your promises on Abraham and his descendants, hear graciously the prayers of Your Church, that the people You first made Your own may attain the fullness of redemption. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

7. For those who do not believe in Christ

Let us pray also for those who do not believe in Christ that, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, they, too, may enter on the way of salvation.

Almighty ever-living God, grant to those who do not confess Christ that, by walking before you with a sincere heart, they may find the truth and that we ourselves, being constant in mutual love and striving to understand more fully the mystery of Your life, may be made more perfect witnesses to Your love in the world. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

8. For those who do not believe in God

Let us pray also for those who do not acknowledge God that, following what is right in sincerity of heart, they may find the way to God himself.

Almighty ever-living God, Who created all people to seek You always by desiring You and, by finding You, come to rest, grant, we pray, that, despite every harmful obstacle, all may recognize the signs of Your Fatherly love and the witness of the good works done by those who believe in You, and so in gladness confess You, the one true God and Father of our human race. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

9. For those in public office

Let us pray also for those in public office, that our God and Lord may direct their minds and hearts according to his will for the true peace and freedom of all.

Almighty ever-living God, in Whose hand lies every human heart and the rights of peoples, look with favor, we pray, on those who govern with authority over us, that throughout the whole world, the prosperity of peoples, the assurance of peace, and freedom of religion may through your gift be made secure. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

10. For those in tribulation

Let us pray, dearly beloved, to God the Father almighty, that He may cleanse the world of all errors, banish disease, drive out hunger, unlock prisons, loosen fetters, granting to travelers safety, to pilgrims return, health to the sick, and salvation to the dying.

Almighty ever-living God, comfort of mourners, strength of all who toil, may the prayers of those who cry out in any tribulation come before You, that all may rejoice, because in their hour of need Your mercy was at hand. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

FOUR SISTERS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCE OF ADORATION

What does Adoration mean in your life? Do you encounter difficulties?

SOLANGE IMMACULÉE KUETCHE MAGNE, RA (CENTRAL AFRICA)

The time of adoration for me is always the best appointment time of the day. The best appointment because the One who summoned me precedes me; He is there and it is He Who welcomes me, Who sustains me; Who gives meaning and content to all my actions, my encounters and my reflections.

Adoration is the source: from it I draw joy, faith, strength, courage, passion and zeal for my life in community and in my apostolate. I also draw comfort, consolation and encouragement in times of distress, disappointment and discouragement. In short, in my moments of spiritual dryness.

Adoration is a free and fruitful encounter with the Lord. Fruitful because I never leave adoration as when I entered it. I always leave renewed, ready to start again; ready to continue on the way when I have been discouraged, tired. Ready to dare relating in community with my Sisters and especially when there is tension.

Adoration is the only moment of the day when, in all sincerity, I can tell the Lord borrowing the words of Adana:

"Jesus behold me before You,
Simply in silence,
Nothing is more important to me
Than to live in Your presence."

Adoration is the place where I express to the Lord my joys, my pains, my sufferings (sometimes with tears in my eyes); my dreams and my search for life. It is at this moment that I offer him the world with its exploits and vicissitudes, its disasters.

Before the Lord present in the most Blessed Sacrament, I become aware that my life has a meaning and a culmination. This sense and this culmination come from the One for Whom and with Whom I am there. I receive myself from Him and my life depends on Him.

It sometimes happens that I have to face some difficulties like fatigue, distraction... To return to prayer, I take the Word of God or a number of our Rule of Life. Regarding the apostolate, I offer it to Him with all the people involved; I let Him do what He wants and I continue my journey.

Adoration is an appointment not to be missed.

HÉLÈNE ROUGÉE, RA (FRANCE)

I place myself before God and in Him. Mother Marie Eugenie: "Everything is done at the feet of the Blessed Sacrament".

Sometimes I was too preoccupied with the sick, as if I were the only one who could do something for them... In an act of faith, handing them over to God, I also put again all that I had done, as during the Mass, at the Offertory, offering the world. At a second moment, I was telling God my trust in what He was doing, what He can do beyond what I can do... I took my right place and gave God His right place. Adoration is inseparable from the Eucharist, I contemplate God in the world, I contemplate His life present in our lives.

ANGELES CARPIO MURILLO, RA (ECUADOR-CHILE)

As children, my mother would take us to the parish celebrations: the processions of the Blessed Sacrament, a large crowd, flowers, incense, adoration, bells, songs... All this was important in my family. It was easy for me to enter into the practice of adoration of the Assumption.

At first I missed the flowers, the incense, the songs of the people... today I live adoration as a gratuitous moment, an experience that grants me the newness of the encounter with the Lord. A detachment: to physically settle down so as not to be distracted and internally, to strip myself so as to enter empty (of emotions, of feelings) in this experience of encountering the Lord. Great silence in me, more clarity in my thoughts, my relationships... It is an experience of trust, like a child, experience of one who enters his family, in the hands of God. He gives me the grace I need. Adoration represents God's faithfulness to mankind through me-God is the same, he is always present, yesterday, today...

A danger that I encounter is to let myself be taken by activism and fatigue, by the routine, where I do not experience anything...

"It is by looking Him that one learns to love" and "adorers of the rights of God" (MME/RV)

SALY THOMAS KUNNATHOOR, RA (INDIA)

Adoration is for me a moment of intimacy with the Lord, as a disciple at the feet of his master. For me it is the prayer of "simple presence to God". I savor the encounter, I sit with my Lord in silence, in solitude, I present all the worries, the concerns of humanity. I prostrate myself and give myself to the Lord. The silent prayer illuminates my heart; it receives instruction/direction and inspiration. An inner transformation happens. To focus my attention I often pronounce the name of Jesus that irradiates the divine power in me. In the Indian tradition, adoration is the highest degree of love. During adoration, the refrains prayed in the Church come back to mind. I use the same words: I adore you...

Adoration purifies my body, my mind, my soul. I am different when I leave the Adoration, mysterious change... Adoration helps me to recognize each other as my brother.

Adoration begins at 3:00 pm, the warmest hour. Our chapel is open to students and some pray by singing... making silence with the noise.

COMMON THREAD 6

Pierre Faure, S.J.

Yesterday I was the speaker to help us go back to the foundations of the Universal Prayer and especially the Prayer of Petition. Since the Council fifty years ago, when the Universal Prayer was restored, we see that we have to look at the things that we had not really explored, to ask questions that we had not asked. It was a little like that with the presentation of the gifts. Continue reflecting in this way on other axes, so as to take a look at, revisit or and make some foundations of the liturgy better understood.

Adoration is part of your heritage; I have heard the relish, the interest, the fecundity and also the difficulties that are real but that do not outweigh the fruitfulness. These are difficulties of implementation, not a calling into question. The difficulties of implementation point to a fairly important issue: is our heart ready to enter into this time? If not, then we suppress it...

A remark of a liturgist:

I am amazed that almost no one has pronounced the expression "Eucharistic Adoration" but instead you say "Adoration." Yet Eucharistic Adoration or exposition of the Blessed Sacrament is in the Ritual of the Eucharist outside the mass. This is something that you practice. Eucharistic Adoration is an extension of the Eucharistic experience and a preparation for the following Eucharist. It is about allowing oneself to be acted upon by the Eucharist that is exposed.

There can be a trivialization of Adoration when it is removed from its Eucharistic foundation. In a Catholic setting, what one adores is the real Presence. I heard "I offer sick persons... my work... the difficulties of life": that is good, but for this it is not necessary to expose the Blessed Sacrament.

A quote from Paul Beauchamp: "We read the word and eat the bread; but Revelation 10:10 and Ezekiel 3:1 say we eat the word...so then we must be able to read the bread!". Perhaps this is a new way of describing Eucharistic adoration which would be to "read the bread" (by analogy, it is also said: "the eye listens").

Two comments regarding time:

* We have a problem of time, of schedule. Be that as it may, coming to Adoration is changing speed: it is an essential human disposition, to enter into a deep and long length of time, that of maturations and conversions. It is God's time because God is never in turmoil, he is in profound time. The fact that the older Sisters sleep is a very good sign... because it's another time!

* Ecology of time: in the first preparatory meeting for this Session with the team, we told ourselves that it would be interesting to reread a part of *Laudato Si* regarding time. It is necessary to save not only water, the frogs, the climate, but also time... for we are in a humanity that wastes it, upsets it, scatters it, loses it (the opposite of salvation is to "waste its time"). Changing gears is our minimal but effective contribution to save this time whose Author we know! And that is what awaits us in eternity. Let us remember the Sabbath -- where production is stopped, where God Himself stops and rests.

Laudato Si, n ° 155: an integral ecology implies devoting a little time to rediscover the serene harmony with creation, to reflect on our lifestyle and our ideals, to contemplate the Creator, Who lives among us and in what surrounds us , whose presence "must not be manufactured, but discovered, unveiled".

SILENCE, PRIMARY CONDITION OF EVERY SACRED ACTION

Father Pierre de Béthune, O.S.B.

I. THE PLACE OF SILENCE IN THE LITURGY (From notes taken during the Conference)

The 'conditions of the Liturgical Life' evoked in the program (gestures, silence, songs, etc.) are not only a welcome backdrop at the service of 'content' which alone would be decisive; they are integral parts of the liturgy. They are the 'environment' in the interactive sense of 'milieu'.

1. The Testimony of Romano Guardini, in his book *The Mass* written in 1938 (published in 1956):

Quotes from pp. 20ff: "We want to take silence seriously. (...) But if someone asked me where the liturgical life begins, I would answer: with the learning of silence. Without it, everything lacks seriousness and remains vain. (...) Silence opens the inner source from which the Word springs forth."

p. 34: "The liturgy becomes possible only from recollection..." a recollected soul is the first thing to possess if you really want to celebrate the liturgy. But this recollection does not come all alone; it must, like silence, be the object of a desire and an exercise."

2. 'Active Participation'

CF. Constitution of the Vatican Council II Sacrosanctum Concilium, no. 30, stresses the importance of sacred silence and gestures. "To promote active participation, the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons, and songs, as well as by actions, gestures, and bodily attitudes. And at the proper times all should observe a reverent silence..."

For the application of this reform an intellectual mentality prevailed: 'to participate in the liturgy, it is necessary to understand everything'. The liturgy then became a discourse. It is the mentality expressed by Boileau: "what is conceived well is clearly stated..." But that's not enough. The rule of St. Benedict (Chapter 19) attests that there is another approach: "let our hearts accord with our voice". It is the expression (here of the voice, by the song) that determines our inner attitude. The disappointment of some faithful today may come from a missing dimension of silence. Now the liturgical prayer is a discourse that does not stop (cf. the Eucharistic prayers). So there has been too much emphasis on active participation and silence has been suppressed.

Good understanding still needs to be 'carried' by a favorable environment

3. The Liturgical Environment

List these elements: importance of an engaged assembly, gestures, rhythm of the celebration, silences, songs, music, places, 'recollection'... And feeling the environment, the people who come to the celebration!

We need recollection: we gather....

A sacred climate: a special requirement today. But what is the sacred? There are two ways to mark the sacred:

- The sacred manifested by distance, separation: the Holy of Holies, the Sanctuary: the Mass celebrated at the back of the Church and the priest turned towards the East.

- The sacred ' by intensity ': the bread broken, the word given, the place of the sacred objects... It is rather this kind of sacred that we have desired in our liturgies of today.

In the new liturgy, the priest must simultaneously be present to God and present to the assembly (it is not easy)

In the liturgy there are times when one must do this or that liturgical action; or understand, intervene, express oneself... There are times when one must "do" nothing, but simply welcome, be silent, listen. And the two together: one IS. Beyond doing and not doing: BEING: "I am only prayer" (PS. 108).

Silence in the liturgy is not an interruption, a dwelling on an image. It must permeate the whole liturgy, experience it, qualify it. It can happen if it is inhabited. Silence is worth what it's worth in all of life.

If our life is dispersed, so too will our silence be....

In our monastery we start the Office by lighting the candles. Then we remain five minutes in silence, before singing the opening of the Office.

II. TRUST SILENCE

Silence is discreet, modest and fragile (see an assembly of 100 people and only one can destroy it by coughing!). There are sometimes words that are friends of silence, let us try! See the attention that St. Benedict gives it.

Like poetry, it only exists when it is total, complete, perfect, "the greatest silence".

Saint Benedict in Chapter 6 of his Rule ("Concerning Silence") recommends: "one ought sometimes to abstain from speaking good for the sake of keeping silence".

You should not only keep quiet when you have spoken enough but speak only when you have kept silence enough!

1. Three Levels of Silence

First, a useful silence: a functional silence at the service of the word and which disappears when the word comes.

Second, a fertile silence (like good soil that allows the seed to develop): a biotope [Translator: biotope = the region of a habitat associated with a particular ecological community.] favorable to the meaning, where the Word can develop. It is like a sound box of a violin or a guitar that gives all its value to the music. "It is at night that we see the furthest." Sometimes the light must disappear so that we can hear important things that we would not hear.

Third, a fruitful silence: when it assures a contact with God, silence is the creator of meaning. This silence participates in the fecundity of words; it does not only promote them. Cf. 1 Kings 19: Elijah at the Horeb finally hears "a light silent sound" (Chouraqui's translation). In this case silence has a voice, silence has a message: a revealing silence.

Moltmann, p. 357: "As He makes himself present to Elijah at Horeb in suspension and silence, so God is present in the silence of the Sabbath. The works of creation show God somehow indirectly as the God who rests in His glory. Creation can be seen as the revelation of the God's works, but only the silence of the Sabbath is the immediate revelation of God Himself."

Thus in the order of creation the word precedes the being, but in God being precedes the Word.

2. Silence and Speech

The true word comes from silence. It is important to see the right relationship: silence and speech are not opposites, not exclusive. The true word is open to silence which itself is more or less eloquent.

Especially in the religious realm, words must always be close to the mystery: they come from it and introduce it. There are silent gestures that speak more than a discourse. For example, Chancellor Brandt kneeling in Warsaw before the monument to the insurgents in 1961 (two minutes, under the rain).

3. Education for Silence

People are gifted for silence but you have to listen to it, educate for it. The ability to hear silence must be developed, otherwise it remains atrophied.

It is by praying that one learns to pray; it is by respecting silence that it can take flesh in us. It teaches us then to talk about God's things more easily.

4. The Current Problem of Transmitting the Message of Faith

The knowledge of God can only be realized at the level of the heart (cf. Pascal); it is the educated silence that allows Him to enter. For lack of depth the young plant withers. We must educate the children in silence. Otherwise the words transmitted bounce off like over pebbles, without penetrating them.

Conclusion

It is not useful to multiply the silences in the liturgy, but trust the silence, develop it in prayer and throughout life: it will be an inhabited silence. So, especially in the liturgy, it will not only be an interruption of the action, but what intensifies and internalizes it.

III. SILENCE AMONG OTHER RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

(From the recorded Conference)

The liturgy needs an 'environment' to attain its full development; silence also needs an 'environment' to endure in our lives, especially our religious life. It must be lived out with other renunciations -- sobriety, vigilance, celibacy, obedience, etc. -- which are also fundamental elements for the conditions of the sacred, for the consecrated life. All the elements in religious life have to rely on each other... It is possible to ask diocesan priests what happens if their celibacy is not framed by silence, poverty, and other renunciations...

Of course, religious life is not made only of renunciations, but the latter are not only important and meaningful, but essential to the truth of the commitment.

But they are often misunderstood or even rejected today. These are "don'ts" that affect the fundamental areas of human life that allow man to fulfil himself. But they can also become punishments and abuses, and they can be the expression of pathologies.

Here is the list:

Silence	not speak,	gagging	mutism
Fasting	not eat	starve	anorexia
Keep watch	not sleep	torture	insomnia
Celibacy	not marry	sterilize	impotence
Solitude	not communicate	isolate	misanthropy
Obedience	act alone	subjugate	infantilism
Poverty	not possess	giving up	pauperize/misery

Prevent someone from talking, getting married, acting alone... may seem inhuman. These renunciations often appear to be morbid. Today they appear as temporary therapeutic practices: e.g., fasting for weight loss... instead of fasting in the positive sense. But these practices are in fact immemorial and universal practices, they are found in wisdom, religions, shamanism, etc. In some cultures they are understood and valued. This is no longer the case for us. It was easy to fast during Lent when everyone was doing it but now... Ramadan is easier because we see others doing it.

Why are they considered aberrant?

* Because they are associated with punishments, violent external constraints more or less sadomasochistic.

"Why shut yourself up in a cloister??"

* Or associated with pathologies, inner constraints

Do not possess = pauperize... Do not marry = be powerless

* Or associated with contempt of the body (not having a home = becoming wanderers...), to dualistic ideologies more or less suicidal. Example: Tibetan monks who sleep in crates so as to not really sleep...

* Or associated with pharisaism.

Let us be aware of all these risks from which we are not spared and that we could have in our personal histories.

So what sense can we find, what motivations for these renunciations? Our contemporaries expect us to live them perfectly, but these practices have no worth in themselves. They only hold if we make them for God. These renunciations are an integral part of religious life, without them our life of prayer, community, will not hold. We choose them freely.

What for? For God: "Your love is better than life. "Psalm 63 (62)

Because these practices are an integral part of the consecrated life, of the proclamation of the Kingdom, of our service of prayer of praise and intercession, of our community life. Their foundation is the experience that "God alone suffices" (St Teresa of Avila).

In a consecrated life, we will be judged on Love: it is love that counts, and for it to be just there must be no return on oneself. It is in fact the fundamental renunciation to one's own ego. Sooner or later in the spiritual life one is challenged to live these difficult renunciations, to arrive at detachment, to the inner silence that allows us to move forward.

These different renunciations allow us

- to endure: "love is patient" (1 Cor 13)
- to face the required difficult passages
- to embrace the contradictions of a 'silent heart' (Rule of St Benedict)

If we cannot go through some contradictions, even injustices, we will not endure. These experiences of the fecundity of celibacy, the fecundity of silence etc. make us advance in trust.

IV. SILENCE LIVED 'LITURGICALLY'

To locate the silences, and other practices in our lives well, we must locate them in our liturgical life. Indeed, if the liturgy needs silence to be true, silence needs the liturgy to find all its meaning.

A practice of silence that is not done in a liturgical framework of prayer risks exposing itself to the crossing over exposed in the previous chapter.

So live it in a life imbued with liturgy, as it is given to you to live it in your Congregation.

There are many 'entries' in the liturgical life (example through the feast of Christmas and the spirituality of the Child Jesus...), but whatever our favorite entry, we are all called to go through a certain process: the path of the Christian Paschal mystery that the Liturgy deploys during the Triduum.

1. Holy Thursday

We celebrate how Jesus offers Himself in advance, like bread that is broken. This is where our vows are inscribed: an unconditional gift for an unknown future, which can be lived as a journey with Christ; our parchment is deposited on the altar during the profession.

But on this same Holy Thursday the liturgy also celebrates the 'washing of the feet'. Consecration to God is always incarnate in a concrete and humble service. Cf. your own Rule with its sections on humility and joy after the chapters on the vows.

2. Good Friday

Life sometimes makes us go through a Good Friday experience. Never forget that this leads to Easter two days later. We have to go there and see the place of death, the experience of death in our lives. Not having a skull on the work table but living a trusting familiarity with death like St. Francis: "praise be to our sister death," because there is no opposition between death and life. The limitations, old age, the contradictions, the losses, the death of our will: "Whoever loses his life because of me shall find it." A song says: "*Media vita in morte vivimus*" (in the middle of life we are in death).

We can then make of this lived loss an offering: "and Jesus kept silence," the Gospel tells us. "Into your hands I commend my spirit." Learn to divest yourself of words, food, sex, etc. and discover the fertility of this silence, of this abandonment, of this loss, of this aging... Fecundity that engenders new life: that is why we venerate the Cross "through which joy came into this world."

3. Holy Saturday

It is not a question of experiencing everything, but one day one experiences Holy Thursday, another day Holy Saturday... or Easter...

Holy Saturday is a day of silence par excellence. An 'a-liturgical' day, that is, without liturgy.

Sooner or later we go through the experience of finding ourselves dumb in the face of incomprehensible situations, without explanation, without any justification... and yet we continue to walk. It is the experience of no-sense, the experience of emptiness: "it is good to wait in silence for the Lord's deliverance" (Lam 3:26).

CF. Mt 19:12: choice of celibacy, then "understand who can" is the Greek word: (χωρειν) make room!

Holy Saturday is the day of the experience of emptiness (where Buddhism can help us). See PS 46:11 "Be still and know that I am God!" Be still to realize that God is God = live the Sabbath, doing nothing. It is the experience of the Sabbath: not doing anything, not even worship. Cease "producing" anything, whatever it may be, to "realize" that God is God. The last word of the Triduum is not suffering but silence.

4. Easter Sunday

The experience of a new life received, even if sometimes it is intertwined.

The Christian faith: to know that God never abandons His child, but gives him a new existence where he receives a hundredfold, even in death.

See in your Rule the chapter on Joy.

We could also have taken the liturgical experience of Pentecost to regain these fruitful renunciations.

Conclusion:

At the end of this liturgical journey, the different renunciations, the words not spoken, the abandonments, the losses, etc. appear as the removal of what enveloped our true nature as children of God, his image in us. Our real life can then flourish in communion. As you can see from the great witnesses, the test is that what we do for our brothers and sisters is liberating and totally free of any self-seeking.

We can give testimony that this path is liberating, that at the end we come to a spiritual freedom called JOY. It is an experience that frees those we meet.

SHARING IN ASSEMBLY

- It is a great challenge in our culture to rediscover silence, to be educated to silence.
- The monks of Clerlande have put the 'station' after the beginning of the Office: it is a brilliant solution!
- Seek ways to favor the silence of the environment in our communities, in our pastoral work. We have to help each other. Support the communities that live in the often noisy "frontiers".
- How do we learn silence? By keeping silence, finding the means of silence that are pleasing to us: taking these means will help us to continue living silence!
- A word carried in silence is a word of life. Each person has this capacity for silence but one must be educated to it.
- We are touched by the link between silence, renunciations and our consecration.
- The good fortune of our silent environment: allows our brothers and sisters of the frontiers to come to spaces of true silence....
- Experience the gap between a full active life and the return to the community where I would like to live silence, but the older Sisters who stayed in the house expect me to talk!!
- How do we integrate silence on the days of mission during Holy Week??? (Missions: when some Sisters or communities leave to animate the liturgy and the catechesis during these Holy Days, in far distant parishes).

Father Pierre de Béthune: It is certainly possible to live this dimension of silence at other moments of the year outside of these liturgical days;

- We have a responsibility to "educate to silence"; the last word of the Paschal cycle is not suffering but silence that engenders life": how can the true word be really born from silence?
- Silence and other practices of renunciation: it is true that we easily privilege giving witness, service, prayer ... what place do we still give to practices of renunciation and penance that disappear from our lives or become passing therapies?
- Fr Pierre: a real challenge for us is presented as discernment between what must be thrown and what must be kept. We are obliged to throw something (for example, the word penance); for that, continue to meditate on the Gospel to remain in the Spirit of Jesus who also said: "repent and believe in the Gospel." This is often translated as "do penance". No, it is the conversion which leads to the Gospel and it is more demanding on the level of charity, etc.
- Holy Saturday renunciation and "Sabbath practices" to acknowledge that God is God?
- Fr P dB: yes, silence can be a revelation of God because God's image is in us, in our deepest nature; in separating our lives from everything that clutters it this image appears; the Sabbatical practices contribute to the detachment so that the image of God may shine in us. Give God His place and leave moralizations
- Relationship between silence and full attention?

- Fr P dB: In the Rule of St Benedict it is question of a respectful attention to the simplest things of daily life. That facilitates the Real Presence and liberates the return to oneself: when one hears an order, there must be no interval with the execution of the command because during the interval one risks going back to self and so lack in freedom...great wisdom this of not allowing an interval in which the "I" can take over.
- Example of Buddhist sisters: Fr P dB: yes, you underscore the place of active silence "mindfulness" in English. It is an art (cf. the tea ceremony of Japan). There is no contradiction, then, between external action and silence: an activity can become impregnated with silence.

COMMON THREAD 7

Pierre Faure, S.J.

REGARDING THE PSALMS

Yesterday we heard many proposals and questions on ways of singing, more technical questions, and things to be seen and dialogued about according to each country and each culture.

Another basic question came up: there are psalms that call for violence or others that pray against man: thus against the Gospel ... these questions did not come up when one sang in Latin, but now that we pray in our languages, what can we do?

The liturgy of the Church has “excluded” three psalms: 58(57), 83(82), 109(108). They are not “bad psalms”; all of Israel and Jesus prayed them. What then? When one prays “against,” one prays against the millions of figures of evil, not against the persons themselves: I do not pray against my Superior or against my mother-in-law...nor Donald Trump! “Lord, break their jaws...!” There is no one I know there but the thousand faces that the adversary takes of human nature.

At Taizé for the canticle of Moses they sing “He conquered death, he rose” and not “horse and rider he cast into the sea...” in the psalter they have also put in certain psalms some phrases between brackets because of their severity. Just the same, these texts are significant because they remind us that the combat between the forces of evil and God is real and very present today. What, then, is important pastorally, is to be very vigilant regarding persons who pray in your chapels or assemblies: can they understand if they see this type of text? If they say “no,” modify them.

Paul Beauchamp wrote a short document called “Violence in the Psalms,” where he notes that the men and women of the New Testament, be they of Jewish or Greek origin, took the whole Psalter in their prayer...we cannot do better than they did..

We can, obviously, change the psalms proposed by the Office: cf. GILH 247 and 252. Sometimes, to pray better, we can keep only one psalm by praying it in a different manner, more lengthily. Reread the postscript of the TOB psalter which presents the essential questions on the psalms well

The main reason for praying the psalms is that Christ prayed them.

SILENCE

I have not heard this, but it came strongly to my heart and mind.

I heard a great contemporary pianist saying: “I am going to prepare a new recording. I will go live near the sea and I will meditate: I need a lot of silence for this recording”. So he chose to set himself apart so as to give the best of himself to achieve this great work.

I know an artist near Vannes, who has a big workshop and goes through a spiritual process with Oriental methods: every morning when going to work, she demands to be alone. She sometimes listens to a piece of music that helps her to begin, or she sometimes reads Master Eckhart or Lao Tzu...

Thus people engaged in the production of a great work manifest a need for silence and recollection and they take the means. We also see some great sportsmen who take an instant of profound concentration in silence just before an important event.

We are seekers of God and so we too have to look for our means to make silence: our God is a God who speaks and we seek Him in silence to listen to Him.

The practice of silence at the service of others:

In listening during spiritual accompaniment entering into the habit of silence in prayer is necessary when a person whom we accompany does not speak.

We can ourselves render great service in silence when we are near persons who are suffering and who need that one simply be there.

Silence can help us to really keep the secret confided to us. It is very astute, in community, to know when to speak or when one must say nothing. Danger of indiscretions: it is significant of a Sister who has not acquired the sense of silence in prayer.

Thank you for the celebration; the moments in groups may have seemed more difficult for some: discussion is not appropriate in the celebration; sharing yes.

THE OFFICE OF READINGS

We have spoken lengthily on this.

This Office does not sanctify time as do Lauds and Vespers. It is true that it is adjustable. It is the Office where we “chew on” the Word.

Currently, monks and nuns are reflecting on the meaning of this Office and on when to say it because of the health of those who have a hard time keeping the rhythm. For you also it is good to continue to talk about it and to help each other in the Congregation. That depends on the age of the Sisters, on the apostolic conditions.

The question is not to suppress it or not, but to adjust it and to find its right place.

The debate is also: how to connect apostolic mission and prayer in choir. This is a longstanding question, the question of fitting in mission-contemplation. It already was a question for Jesus who prayed at night...and for his community: “Come apart to rest a while” ...

THE PRACTICE OF THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS IN HISTORY

Father Creômenes Maciel, S.J.

THE OFFICE IN EASTERN CHRISTIANITY

1. The First Three Centuries

Regarding the schedule:

☞ The sources on the first three centuries are dissimilar and diversified. It is difficult to affirm that there was one same practice and schedule everywhere.

☞ With the Egyptians one finds a timetable close to the practice of the Jews and the Essenes: morning-noon-evening-night, in addition to a prayer before meals. The sources put the emphasis on pray always!

☞ In North Africa one prays at sunrise, at the third, sixth and ninth hour and upon withdrawing for the night.

☞ No source mentions only the morning and the evening as being the Christian hours of prayer.

Regarding content:

☞ The Office is composed of non-Scriptural hymns, of psalms, of Biblical hymns, of responses, of the lighting of the evening lamp, of prayers, of Scripture reading, of catechesis (sermon, homily).

Regarding meaning:

☞ From sunrise to sunset, the Church recalls the passage (Passover) of Jesus from death to life.

☞ *The Didache* (50-70) asks its readers to pray three times a day. *The First Letter of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians* (90, Rome) asks them to pray at determined times and hours. *The Apostolic Tradition* (215, by Hippolytus in Rome?) informs us about private prayer as soon as one gets up, during the morning instruction in community, as well as on prayer at the third hour at home, on spiritual reading (if there is no instruction), on the sixth and ninth hours, on the agape, before sleeping, on prayer as a couple, on the importance of not being too lazy to pray, during the night.

☞ The oriented prayer (turning towards the East) is confirmed by Clement (215, Alexandria, Egypt, North Africa), Origen (254, Alexandria, Tyre, Egypt, North Africa) and Tertullian (220, Carthage, Tunisia, North Africa). It is linked with Christ, Sun of Justice and Light of the World and with eschatological expectation. The Passion is recalled in the sixth and ninth hour of the day, Pentecost at the third hour and the memorial of the eschatological expectation (Tertullian and Cyprian, 258, Carthage, Tunisia, North Africa) as well as the vigil of the young girls awaiting the coming of the bridegroom, during night prayer.

☞ We do not precisely know whether this was a “liturgical” prayer or a private prayer or even something between the two. The question for this period is even anachronistic. We suppose that the

fact of praying in private or in group did not depend on the nature of the prayer, but on persons who could meet together at the time of prayer. The main thing was to pray! When the persons could gather together, they did so, because it is in the nature of the Church to be assembled. But whether alone or in a group, the prayer remained the same, except for the agape and the Eucharist which, because of their very nature, could only be celebrated in community.

2. The Fourth Century

2.1. The appearance of the Cathedral Office

Regarding the schedule:

☞ From the second half of the 4th century, apart from Egypt where the description is not clear, we see a specific program in Palestine, in Syria, in Asia Minor during two privileged moments: morning (Lauds) and evening (Vespers).

Regarding the content:

☞ The Offices are composed of popular elements like the psalms with antiphons and responses, chosen in view of the hour and done with the people, the ritual of light, of incense, the processions, the intercessory prayers for the needs of the people ...

☞ During the week: Lauds with the morning Psalms and Canticles, including Ps 63 (62), the Gloria, the intercessions, the blessing and the dismissal of the assembly. Vespers with the hymn to the light and the lighting of the lamps, the evening psalmody with Ps 141 (140), the incensing, the hymns and antiphons, the intercessions, the blessing and the dismissal of the assembly.

☞ On Sundays there is the Vigil of the Resurrection: three antiphons with prayers, the intercessions, the incense, the Gospel, the blessing and the dismissal of the assembly; the Eucharistic celebration.

Regarding the meaning:

☞ Lauds was the Office of thanksgiving and of praise for the new day and the salvation in Jesus Christ; it consecrated the beginning of the new day.

☞ Vespers was the Christian way of ending the day by thanking God for all the graces received during the day, by asking for His forgiveness for the faults committed, and in begging for the grace of an untroubled and sinless night.

☞ The fundamental symbol of the two Offices was the light.

2.2. The Egyptian Monastic Office in the 4th century

☞ There were two moments of prayer in assembly (*synaxe*) per day: early in the morning and in the evening. These were calm Offices so as to favor meditation of the Scriptures: the most important being praying all the time. The Office consisted of psalms, prayers and Biblical texts, with gestures and bodily attitudes: prostrations, kneeling, etc.

2.3. The Urban Monastic Office in the East/Orient

☞ In Palestine, in Antioch, in Cappadocia... at the end of the 4th century: the Little Hours are integrated into the *synaxes*. The Office makes a synthesis between the Monastic usage and the Cathedral usage of morning and evening prayer; Compline was added as a “duplicate” of Vespers of the Cathedral Office.

CONCLUSION

- The Monastic Offices did not have any specific relationship with the time of the day, but they stimulated the monk's uninterrupted prayer. The psalmody was continuous, following the numbering of the psalter. Each psalm was followed by a prostration for private prayer and ended with a Collect. Biblical readings conclude the *synaxis* (assembly).
- The Offices of the Cathedral type developed the symbolism of the sun (morning) and of the lamp (evening). There was a connection with the time of the celebration. The hymns, the psalms, the symbols were chosen to adapt to the hour.

For deepening

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LITURGICAL LABORATORY

Initial Rites – Divine Office

Father Creômenes Maciel, S.J.

I. 1ST STAGE: RELAXATION AND WARM-UP

1.1 Breath

Standing, arms along the body, inhale and exhale, inflate and deflate the tummy (repeat several times).

Do several breathing and stretching exercises (head, arms, whole body).

Establish a link with the Holy Spirit (breath), Divine Life which is given to us and which circulates in us.

1.2 Relaxation

Lying on the ground or sitting, close your eyes, breathe deeply several times, paying attention to your own breathing.

Have a real contact with the ground, feel the ground.

Relax/loosen each part of the body starting with the feet, using mainly the time of expiration.

Eventually sing a refrain linked to the act, like, for example: "I abandon myself to you, I entrust myself into your hands, Lord ..."

Another possibility: imagine a very beautiful, restful place; a beach, the forest, for example. Feel the pleasure of the sound of the waves, of the warmth of the sun on your skin, the tranquility of the moment.

Slowly, as if one were waking up, stretch each part of the body, gladly, until you get up. Move your arms and legs.

1.3 Warm-up

1.3.1 Walk, occupy and feel the space

Walk, run, slow down, "measure" the room, go in all the directions, move the arms also while walking as if one were drunk.

Walk on your heels, then on the tip of your feet, on the outer side of the feet, on the inner side, and finally with your soles totally on the ground, normally. (This is a way of being aware of our feet, of massaging them by activating the whole body).

1.3.2. *Meet to form a Body-Community*

Look – allow yourself to be looked at by the others, walk around the room while looking at each other as if it were the first time you see them, discovering them, asking yourself “Who is this person? How can I describe her? admiring the person, contemplating her/him (Lord, how do You see this person?).

Touch, shake each other’s hand, respectfully, in silence.

Regroup to form a single body. Or, with the eyes closed, walk towards the center until you meet other persons by trying to form this unique body, communitarian. Open your eyes at the end.

Or, at the beginning, everyone is at one end of the room, on the edges of the room, and the eyes closed, singing something, the group, through the song, experiences the formation of the body by coming together.

II. 2ND STAGE: AWARENESS, IMPROVISATION

Starting from the daily gestures, the social or religious rites corresponding to the rites we want to work on. After having assumed the attitude of the people, after having become a body, we pay attention to the unity between acting, thinking and feeling, that is, between action, sense and feeling, in other words, to the unity between the body, the mind and the heart.

A/ What do we see?

B/ What does this mean?

C/ What do I feel?

A/ The Arrival – The People and the Sacred Space

2.1 Sing a pilgrimage song.

2.2 Whisper about the body attitudes of people regarding the sacred and the people gathered in the Church. The entrance into a sacred space, establish a relationship with the images, observe the gestures, the looks, the contacts with other persons present, silent prayer.

2.3 A person interprets the attitudes.

2.4 The group comments after each presentation (What did we see? What is expressed by that? How? What is the relationship between the bodily gestures, the senses, the meaning, and the inner attitude?)

2.5 Together, act out a popular celebration, such as the procession of the Cross on Good Friday for example, with the music, the corresponding hymn or another similar rite.

2.6 Observations...

B/ The Welcome In Our Houses

2.1 Hymn "My beloved is coming ..."

2.2 Share with your neighbor on the way one arrives at a house and the way one is welcomed. Then mimic.

2.3 Some interpret the attitudes while others observe them.

2.4 The group comments after each presentation (What did we see? What does that mean? Relationship between gestures, theological sense and inner attitude).

C/ How People Usually Arrive At a Celebration

2.1 Gathering Song

2.2 Share with your neighbor on the way in which the persons normally arrive at the place of celebration and how they establish a relationship with others. Another possibility: spread out pictures of persons with an attitude in relation to the sacred space, or pass them around. Comment: What is expressed: How?

2.3 Some interpret / take on the attitudes while others observe.

2.4 Comments from the group after each presentation (What did we see? What does that mean? Relationship between gestures, meaning and inner attitude).

III. 3RD STAGE: ATTITUDES AND GESTURES OF THE BODY IN THE ENTRANCE AND WELCOME RITES

3.1 Brief dialogue on the initial entry rites: meaning, purpose, structure, basic elements... eventually consult the liturgical books, the official documents or other texts.

3.2 Analysis of the sequence, for example: entrance, hymn, space occupancy, the sign of the Cross, the greeting, prayer, amen, or one other sequence.

3.3 After having drawn up the plan of the part of the rite worked on, having divide it, analyze the rite chosen. Eventually apply the analysis of the rite of Sr Ione Buyst, OSB. Allocate the roles: Head of the team, hymns, cross, candles; the other participants will be in the assembly.

3.4 Experiment or divide it in different ways.

3.5 Observation, comments, dialogues on what has been achieved.

3.6 Another group must then perform this sequence.

3.7 New observations and comments.

IV. 4TH STAGE: DIALOGUE ON THREE POINTS

Deepen more systematically the analysis of the elements of the rite carried out, the question of unity among these points:

- the body gestures, the attitudes;
- the meaning, the theological, liturgical significance;
- the inner attitude.

V. 5TH STAGE: EVALUATION OF THE LITURGICAL LABORATORY

Were the objective attained? What has been important for each participant? What were the most beneficial moments for me, which spoke more to me? Those which inspired me the least? What were the difficulties encountered?

Materials required:

Table, towel, candles, matches, cross, Bible, Missal, recorder, music (CD), colored fabrics, aromatic herbs, song sheets, the Divine Office books of the community, flowers, a table for writing.

MESSAGE FROM THE SISTERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL LITURGY SESSION TO THE CONGREGATION

Auteuil, 13 November 2016

Dear Sisters,

In this year of the Bicentennial, the International Liturgy Session gathered us at Auteuil. We were about fifty from the 19 Provinces and Region of the Congregation. The presence of the two new Provinces of Madagascar and France Notre Dame expanded the joy of this moment.

"In you we find our home" Ps 87 (86)

This title was developed day after day: "The Paschal Mystery ... Engenders Reconciliation... Opens To Intercession and to Adoration."

We discussed the conditions as well as the different aspects of our liturgy: silence, Office of Readings, inculturation... We listened to each other, to our experiences, to our cultures, through our sharing in groups and the witnessing of several among us. Six outside facilitators came to enrich us with their taste for and their experience of the liturgy.

We are happy to share with you some fruits from this Session.

The liturgy is a legacy of the Church received from Marie Eugénie and Thérèse Emmanuel. We feel the responsibility to maintain this legacy, to update it and to pass it on. The liturgy unifies our life. It touches all its dimensions: community life, apostolic service and life of prayer. We believe in the pedagogical and evangelizing value of the liturgy. It is in the liturgy, in the Eucharistic Celebration, the Adoration and the Divine Office that we enter into the divine dynamics of the work of Salvation... During this Session we became more sensitive to the significant role of the liturgical environment which involved gestures, postures, silence, space, symbols, music, as well as the service of the sacristan. We experienced a renewal in our way of living the liturgy. We looked more deeply into the small gestures that make up our liturgies and we perceived their profound meaning. Our liturgical life builds up the unity of community life in charity and in reconciliation.

After all we received, we want to continue our formation on the personal and communitarian level. Our desire to live the liturgy in a creative manner is confronted with challenges. We see the need of a process of discernment in what concerns our rhythm of life and the use of the media. We live in a reality mixed with strengths and weaknesses. In the course of a liturgical celebration, we named our shadows and we humbly opened ourselves to the other's gaze. In accepting ourselves mutually as Sisters, we experienced reconciliation with ourselves, our wounded world and creation.

We are very grateful for what we have experienced together. The experience we shared created communion among us in our diversity, through our differences...

In the context of the Bicentennial, we ask Marie Eugénie and Thérèse Emmanuel to accompany us in the task of passing on what we have received. May we be faithful to our heritage for the extension of the Kingdom.

Your Sisters in the Session