

Beginning to look to a renewal and deepening of how we celebrate Sunday Mass

One of the challenges when we are called to renewal — called to be more evidently and effectively Church — is that we cannot always picture what that might be like and what benefit it might offer.

This may especially be the case with regard to Catholic Liturgy, and most importantly the Catholic Mass.

The vision of how Mass should be celebrated by the Church is given in the introductory section of the Roman Missal. It is a vision that has been renewed and deepened in response to the teaching of Vatican Council II. It is a vision that is rich and engaging — and many people would be surprised at what it says. Yes: surprised: even though that vision has been in place for 50 years now!!

Our ability to engage with that vision is sometimes hampered by influences that come from other places that can be antagonistic or counter to that vision. Two influences in particular need acknowledging.

- The first comes from understandings and habits based on the previous, Tridentine, form of the Mass. In contrast to the vision presented in the current Missal the previous form of Mass had, in practice and over time, become of way of prayer that focused on the action of the clergy and from which the rest of the congregation became more or less detached. It was this form that the Church revised following Vatican II. The books changed, but often our practices changed much less than we might think.
- The second comes from the impact of the worship practices of non-Catholic, non-Orthodox Christians. When, following the Council, the Catholic Church adopted a vernacular liturgy it would often look for inspiration and resources in other Christian communities long familiar with using, for example, English in worship. In some cases what was borrowed enriched Catholic worship, but sometimes what others did was somewhat in tension with the nature of sacramental worship. At the time this may not have been recognised, or was thought of

as a tolerable and temporary fix while working to get other things in place. Some of those ‘temporary fixes’ are sadly still in place. (It is important to say that the tension is not that this or that is Catholic in origin, more to do with distinctive forms of worship. Outside of sacramental worship, there is little ‘tension’ between Catholic and Protestant forms.)

Archbishop Bernard has invited our Archdiocese — including our parish — to work for the renewal of how we celebrate and worship. He urges us to an

invigorating and deepening (of) our worship and sacramental celebrations so that we share in and reflect the divine life of the Trinity - encouraging others to join us in praying to our Heavenly Father.

Our response needs to begin with a look at what we presently do and why; and also at what we are invited to do – and why; and at how we can move forward to doing things in the very best way we can.

To that end it is helpful to try and get in place a clear vision of what, with regard to Mass, the Church invites us to.

Over 25 years ago Archbishop Mahony of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles attempted a verbal description of what Sunday Mass might look like if a community were to celebrate faithfully according to what is hoped for and written about in the Missal and Lectionary.

There is much more to being Church than ‘just’ Sunday Mass. But Mass is sacramentally the summit and source of Christian life. It is the place where we most surely encounter the risen Christ and where we most evidently see the Church that is his Body. It is Christ’s gift to us, essential to our Christian flourishing.

Have a read in the pages that follow of what Archbishop Mahony had to say. His ‘vision’ itself begins on page 9 of the document, but the introduction which precedes it is well worth a read too.

Fr. Allen

Acknowledgements

This resource has been produced for use in the parish of St Nicholas Boldmere. Our Parish is part of the Archdiocese of Birmingham: Registered Charity No. 234216

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Gather Faithfully Together

A Guide for Sunday Mass

Cardinal Roger Mahony
Archbishop of Los Angeles

Feast of Our Lady of the Angels
September 4, 1997

Introduction

Peace be with you!

In the early years of the Church, a bishop in Syria wrote a little instruction book for himself and other bishops. Here is one crucial task he set for bishops:

Exhort the people to be faithful to the assembly of the Church. Let them not fail to attend, but let them gather faithfully together. Let no one deprive the Church by staying away; if they do, they deprive the Body of Christ of one of its members!

Didascalia, chapter 13

We are centuries later, oceans apart. We are separated from that Christian Church in third-century Syria by theologies and technologies. But what we have in common surmounts all that: we the Church assemble on the Lord's Day, and that assembly, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, speaks and listens to the Word of God, makes holy and is made holy by its Eucharistic praying and the sacred banquet of Holy Communion.

My hope is to fulfill what this bishop saw as every bishop's responsibility. As bishop of this Church of Los Angeles, I exhort you to enter into reflection with me on the Eucharist we celebrate each Sunday in our parishes.

The Jubilee Year

Through this Letter, I want to set the direction for the way we Los Angeles Catholics approach the Jubilee Year 2000. We will have this one central work to do: to carry forward the renewal of Sunday Liturgy with vigor and joy (cf. John 16:22-24, 17:13).

At the start it must be clear: This will not be one task among many. It will be *the* task of these next three years. Further, I do not see it as the narrow responsibility of the Office for Worship or the liturgy and music leaders in each parish. The tasks I set forth here are meant to unite the above persons with so many others in religious education, initiation, youth ministry, justice and outreach, and above all, the entire assembly that is this great Archdiocese and that is incarnate in the parish assemblies Sunday by Sunday.

We have been called by our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, to make the year 2000 a Jubilee Year. Jubilee is a time to acknowledge and celebrate that things need not be what they have been, that the future need not repeat the past. Jubilee is sorting out what of that past must be forgiven or set aside, and what of the past is worthy to be grasped and handed on, built upon, made our own and given to our children. It is a time when the generation now on earth pauses, repents, gives thanks, goes forward.

The Vision of the Second Vatican Council

Among the finest graces of the just-ending century I would name the Second Vatican Council. Have we yet, more than 30 years after the Council, begun to absorb what the Holy Spirit did there? Have we understood the way in which that amazing gathering grappled with how the Gospel could be proclaimed and lived in the coming generations? Those of us who experienced the Council and believe it to have been such a grace to our times must ponder how broad and wise were its works, and be proud to take our tasks today from its vision.

Yes, it was a revolutionary grace, a brave moment, a Pentecost for our time. Yes, such moments are traumatic. Did the bishops of the Council know how hard renewal would be? Perhaps if they had, they would not have had the courage to begin, and to think and act in such bold ways! But they did have the courage and the vision. The prophets of this century prepare us to live in the next.

I, along with the vast majority of the People of God, stand in awe of the Council's work. I give thanks that the bishops of the world gathered around those two great popes, John XXIII and Paul VI, and said that Gospel joy is ours and the promise of Jesus is ours; and that it is better to evangelize and love this world than to hide from, ignore, or condemn it.

Pope John Paul II, in calling us to the Jubilee Year, praises the Second Vatican Council and says this:

The best preparation for the new millennium can only be expressed in a renewed commitment to apply, as faithfully as possible, the teachings of Vatican II to the life of every individual and of the whole Church.

Tertio Millennio Adveniente: Apostolic Letter for the Jubilee of the Year 2000, #20)

My hope is that we can fulfill this mandate in our Archdiocese by a singular and concentrated effort to strengthen Sunday Liturgy. Lacking that effort, we have no center, no identity as the Body of Christ. With that effort, the renewal of every aspect of our Church life becomes possible.

Pastoral care will see that the liturgy is not isolated from the rest of Christian life: for the faithful are invited daily to continue their common liturgical practice in daily private prayer; this spiritual discipline gives new vigor to the witness of the faith lived by Christians each

day, and also to the fraternal service of the poor and to one's neighbor in general.

March 8, 1997, Address to the French Bishops

Oscar Romero, the late Archbishop of San Salvador, spoke in a homily of these same foundational things. Moments before his death, he talked about Eucharist as the vital center of all that the Church does. His martyrdom itself seems to be in these words:

This holy Mass, this Eucharist, is clearly an act of faith. This body broken and blood shed for human beings encouraged us to give our body and blood up to suffering and pain, as Christ did -- not for self, but to bring justice and peace to our people.

Homily, March 24, 1980

Liturgical renewal must demonstrate how liturgy creates such Christians and such a Church, and how the ever-struggling Church makes its liturgy. Romero knew it was about life, sacrifice, and praise from the Church.

Such renewal has taken us many years, with numerous successes and some problems. So difficult have been these first efforts that some seem ready to declare it a failure, an embarrassing mistake of Vatican II. Others would say we have come as far as was intended, so let us hear no more of liturgical renewal. And yet others call this task meaningless in light of the great need for the Church to throw itself into causes of justice and peace.

Yet it seems to me that only now are we getting glimpses of that wondrous experience when a parish lives by that full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy by all the faithful. The situation is unfortunately uneven. Only in some parishes have we seen the sustained effort from well-prepared leaders to work over many years toward a Sunday Liturgy that is for the people of that parish the nourishment they need, the deeds of Word and Eucharist they cherish. But there are beginnings here, and these cause us both to rejoice and to focus on what can be learned.

Start with Sunday Eucharist

The Jubilee Year calls out to us to take those gifts the Spirit raised up in the Church at Vatican II. Take them with the wisdom gained these last three decades. Come into the new Millennium doing Gospel deeds throughout all realms of human life because a compelling and contemplative celebrating of Eucharist is our doing and God's, Sunday after Sunday.

At the head of our calendar stands Sunday, still called by us the Lord's Day, the First Day of creation, the Day when Christ defeated death and the Spirit blew upon the disciples. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, hereafter, CCC; CCC: 2174-2175) It is above all the day when we assemble. Saint Justin tried to explain to the non-Christians in Rome what Christians were all about:

On the day called Sunday there is a meeting in one place of those who live in cities or the country, and the mem-

oirs of the apostles or the writing of the prophets are read as long as time permits. Then we all stand up together and offer prayers. And when we have finished the prayer, bread is brought, and wine and water, and the president similarly sends up prayers and thanksgivings to the best of his ability, and the congregation assents, saying the Amen; the distribution and reception of the consecrated elements by each one takes place and they are sent to the absent by the deacons. . . . We all hold this common gathering on Sunday, since it is the first day, on which God transforming darkness and matter made the universe, and Jesus Christ our Savior rose from the dead on the same day.

Apology, second century, 67:3-5,7

To celebrate Sunday Eucharist the followers of Jesus risked their lives in some times and places. Such was the gathering, such was the praise of God given there, such was the need to assemble the Church and make the Eucharist! In our day, the obstacles are perhaps greater than hostile emperors. What will it take to reclaim this day and its holiness? None of us know that, but we know that we do not live without our Lord's Day and its assembly. The vigor of that assembly, its beauty and its liveliness, its quiet and its passion, are what I want to address in this Letter.

I will focus on the Sunday Eucharist, but I do so knowing that the ritual life of the Church does and must extend far beyond that gathering on the Lord's Day. I will focus on what we need to do in these next few years. I must recognize at the start what the Council itself recognized in paragraph 14 of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. This immense renewal of the liturgy of the Church can be done only when those who are primarily responsible for the parish liturgy are themselves persons "imbued with the spirit of the liturgy."

I believe this to be true, but I also recognize that the summons to renewal came because liturgical practice in the Church had, in many ways, ceased to be a source for such rich formation. The condition, "imbued with the spirit of the liturgy," was realistic, but it was far easier said than done. Where was the liturgical practice that would form such pastors in the spirit of the liturgy? It was a long task the Council set in motion and much of it rests now, as it did then, in the hands of those pastors. How are they to be formed by the liturgy and so live from it and lead their parishes toward a vital, joyous liturgy?

The second part of this Letter is addressed to priests and to all others who bear leadership responsibility for the liturgy. We have learned in these years since Vatican II that the renewal of parish liturgy does not happen without the support, hard work, and constant learning and evaluation by those who preside -- the priests of the Archdiocese. They are not the only ones responsible, but they are essential. With thanks for all they have done and are doing, I invite them to join me in this entire reflection and active renewal.

Tensions

The obstacles to such a renewal of our parish Sunday Liturgy could paralyze us, could keep us from even beginning. I want to name some of these and discuss one of them. I would like to see them as challenges that keep us attentive and honest in this work, as creative tensions that call forth creative responses.

- ***Solemnity and Community.***

Liturgy calls forth reverence. The beauty of its aesthetics, its signs of solemnity and choreography of ministries, its poetry and its silences, lift us in awe before the mystery of God. Yet, liturgy is to be festive. It is about the communion and radical equality of the Baptized, their union in the Lord, their friendly sharing of ministry and life. It builds community by breaking open the meaning of God's Word for our everyday lives, and by gathering us as a family around the Lord's Table. We do not choose between solemnity and festivity, between reverence and community. The vertical and the horizontal dimensions of liturgy must be held together to work for us.

- ***External Form and Internal Transformation.***

The external form of liturgy is a communication. It teaches and forms the assembly. The order of actions and the use of symbols challenge and invite us into the truths of the faith and the spiritual Tradition we have received. Yet, liturgy is alive. It must have flesh and blood and spirit. It flows from our deep conversion to the Lord and our joy of knowing him. It must speak to this people, here and now. We do not need more mechanical implementation in response to liturgical directives any more than we need a liturgy that seems to be of the presider's own making. We need a faithfulness to the official directives and common forms, but a faithfulness that is imbued with the Spirit, and that opens this Sunday assembly to the riches of Eucharistic faith.

- ***Unity and Diversity.***

We are one. Our Catholic faith will not allow the distinction "us" versus "them." On Sunday we gather in one Lord, one faith, one Baptism. Yet, we are many. When we gather, it is also to witness to the universality of our faith, evident in the many parts that make up the one Body. We celebrate the diverse experiences, cultures, and charisms that assemble around the one table. Because of the uniqueness of our local Church in this regard, we must say more.

The Challenge and Blessing of Many Cultures

The liturgy not only can but must build on what is suitable in the culture of a people. In our Archdiocese we Catholics come from many cultures with many different gifts. The Lord has brought us all together and we are called to be fully Christ together. In population, we are predominately from

Spanish-speaking cultures, with all their own diversity. But we embrace many Asian and Pacific Island cultures as well as the diversity various African and European cultures that have had their own development on this continent. And there is cultural richness within cultural richness.

This is a difficult challenge. Yes, we want liturgy with sounds and gestures that flow from the religious soul of a people, whether Vietnamese or Mexican, Native American or African American. Yet we have a Catholic soul. We are in need of witnessing to that soul, of being in assemblies where the vision of Paul comes alive, where the Vietnamese, the Mexican, Native American and African American stand side by side around the table singing one thanksgiving to God. And although that thanksgiving may have the rhythm of one particular culture, all will join with their hearts. Before we are anything else -- any sex, ethnicity, nationality or citizenship -- we need to be the Body of Christ, sisters and brothers by our Baptism. Every one of us needs to know by heart some of the music, vocabulary, movement, and ways of thinking and feeling that are not of our own background. The larger society we are a part of needs this witness.

We have to accomplish two results: to let the prevalent liturgy take on the pace, sounds, and shape that other cultures bring; and to strive in our parishes to witness that in this Church there is finally no longer this people or that people, but one single assembly in Christ Jesus. (CCC:1207)

Either task would be difficult; together they seem daunting. We can be discouraged and do neither, or we can be excited by the challenge. But imagine liturgies where the economic and racial segregations of our society are overcome. The language of Pentecost, many languages speaking God's praise at the same time, is our language and our heritage. It goes far beyond vocabulary. It is God made manifest in the gifts of every people. (CCC: 1204)

Catholics speak this Pentecost language. This is no melting pot. This is communion. Communion means life together. Communion means we share and share alike, yet each person comes to that Communion in the full stature of his or her culture.

This striving for catholicity extends beyond ethnicity: the Sunday assembly should bring together men, women and children of all ages. It should be the one experience in our lives when we will not be sorted out by education level, skin color, intelligence, politics, sexual orientation, wealth or lack of it, or any other human condition. If the assembly is the basic symbol when the liturgy is celebrated (CCC: 1188), the comfortable homogeneity promoted by so many in this nation has no place. Homogeneity and comfort are not Gospel values.

I want to warn against an excessive "inculturation" that is destroying our liturgy. In the past generation, we have introduced into the liturgy some practices and attitudes from North American society that have no place there. For example: the hurried pace, the tyranny of the clock, the inattention to the arts, the casual tone of a presider, the "what can I get out of it?" approach of the consumer, the "entertain me" attitude of a nation

of television watchers. All these are the wrong sort of inculturation. Their prevalence shows how difficult it is to seek what in the culture offers a true correspondence with the spirit of the liturgy.

I hope that what follows ... will be read in light of this tension. We have obligations: to explore inculturation in our many ethnic traditions, to strive for a broad catholicity in the makeup of our parishes, and to be critical of those ways in which the mainstream culture has at times deformed the liturgy and robbed it of its power.

An Invitation

All this sounds difficult, but I believe there is a starting point: Sunday Mass. That is what the remainder of this Letter speaks about. From these years of experience with the renewal of the liturgy, we know many practices and principles that can be applied now, in all our parishes, to the worthy celebration of Sunday Mass. That application is to be our work, even if other work must be put aside over these years that take us to the Jubilee Year. What we accomplish together will shape the Church of our Archdiocese in the new Millennium. With much catechesis and preparation in our parishes, what we will have in place by the year 2000 will grow stronger and deeper in the first decade of the new millennium...

Liturgical renewal is a matter of passion, of catching some glimpse of the way strong Sunday Liturgy makes strong Catholics, and of how these Catholics make their Sunday Liturgy. (CCC: 1324) That, I believe, is the insight and the determination needed, whatever the ethnic composition of the parish. It is good news.

Sunday Mass, 2000

I am going to share with you my vision of a parish Sunday Eucharist.

It is a summer Sunday in the Jubilee Year 2000, 30 minutes before the 10 a.m. Mass at Our Lady of the Angels parish. Already, several members of the choir are talking together and trying bits of music with the director and the cantor. Soon the first usher to arrive is tidying up the entrance way and removing any bulletins left in the assembly's area at the last Mass. The sacristan has placed the bread and wine on a covered table near the entrance. Servers, lectors and communion ministers begin to arrive and go about their necessary preparations. By now the early comers are here, some kneeling in prayer or sitting quietly. Others stop in the Blessed Sacrament chapel; others light candles in the alcove that holds an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. As 10:00 nears, more people stop to write in the parish's Book of Intercessions.

The Entrance of the Assembly

In houses and apartments all through the neighborhood, the true entrance procession of this Mass has been in full swing, sometimes calm, sometimes hectic. Sunday clothes are being put on. Many families are finishing breakfast, conscious of the one-hour fast. Here and there are adults who choose to fast altogether until taking Holy Communion. Some households make a conscious effort to keep the morning quiet: no radio or television, and the Sunday papers wait until later in the day.

In a surprisingly large number of households, but still a tiny minority, the Sunday Scriptures have already been read aloud together on Friday or Saturday evening. Others met during the week in Spanish-speaking or English-speaking prayer groups where the Lectionary's Sunday readings were pondered. Teenagers spent part of the regular youth group meeting reading these Scriptures.

When we think about preparing for liturgy, we usually think of the ministers -- the choir rehearsing, the lectors engaging their readings all through the week, the homilist spending some time every day of the week until it all comes together on Saturday, those who care for the sacred space keeping it clean and beautiful. But the liturgy is the work of the whole assembly, and here we begin to see that many take this seriously. Many have prepared themselves to come together today and participate fully in this Eucharist.

So this is the entrance procession, coming from all directions, made up of all ages, several races, a variety of economic circumstances and political outlooks -- and speaking at least three first languages! But they are all in a great procession, the Church assembling in the house of the Church. "We shall go up with joy," "*Que alegría cuando me dijeron vamos a la casa del Señor*", or as we used to pray from Psalm 43, "*Introibo ad altare Dei.*" On the way to that altar of God, most of these people pass by the large Baptismal Font and take water from it, perhaps remembering their own Baptism. They enter

their liturgy marked with the water of baptism, marked with the cross of Christ whose Body we became in those waters. (CCC: 1267)

At 9:45 the choir is assembled and a brief but serious rehearsal begins, firming up what was practiced last Wednesday evening. This warm-up of voices lasts until just a few minutes before the liturgy is to begin; toward the end many in the now two-thirds full church join in singing. By now the presider is vested and stands with servers and lectors near the main entrance, adding to the welcome of the ushers. The ushers, knowing the church will be full, are doing their best to fill the pews nearest the altar first. They make special efforts to see that parents with very small infants get places in the first rows (where there are more comfortable chairs).

Likewise, the ushers invite any who would find the communion procession difficult to take places in those areas throughout the assembly space with room for wheelchairs. The ushers point out to any newcomers with pre-school children that child care is available, or they are welcome to have their children with them (it is surely not appropriate to have them in a separate room). The sacristan has invited the gift-bearers to bring the bread and wine forward at the proper time and is now going over the “checklist for Sunday Mass” before joining the assembly. Sponsors and catechumens find each other and fill in the first few rows of one section of the church.

Although people go out of their way to greet one another and be gracious, it is never done in such a way that you feel one person is the host and another is the guest. Everyone is at home.

At one minute before 10 o'clock, the cantor greets the assembly and asks them to give some brief attention to the hymn that will be used as a recessional today. As they conclude this little rehearsal, the cantor announces the hymnal number of the procession song, then stands quietly for a moment before gesturing for everyone to rise as the instrumentalists begin to lead everyone into singing a hymn of praise that seems to build verse by verse. The procession of servers with cross and candles, lectors (one of them with the Lectionary held high), and presider waits at the edge of the assembly until the second verse begins, then moves slowly forward. By that time, each minister, including the presider, is singing.

At Our Lady of the Angels, the renovation put people on three sides of the area where the altar and the ambo are, so most members of the assembly are able to participate more fully with the other members of the assembly. For a year now it has been the custom, once the entrance song begins, for the people on either side of the aisle in the long central part of the church to turn toward the aisle until the procession has passed. In fact, they are turning toward each other, becoming conscious of each other's presence as the church begins its liturgy. The peace greeting, when it comes later on, will somehow seal this communion, this sense of being not individuals, but the assembled Church offering its praise, thanks, lament and intercession before God.

As the singing continues, the presider greets the altar with a kiss. At the chair, he continues to sing with the assembly. When the singing ends, all

make the Sign of the Cross: we do all that we do in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Looking at the assembly, the presider then exchanges the greeting. In two or three well-prepared sentences he invites -- maybe exhorts is a better word -- the assembly to enter well into this liturgy. He is careful not to speak in any way that would imply it is his liturgy, or that the people assembled are guests. Nothing he says makes trivial what is about to be done here.

The rites by which the community assembles are quite simple during these Sundays in Ordinary Time compared with how the parish begins its liturgy during the seasons of Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter. Year-round, however, these rites conclude when the presider calls everyone to prayer: “*Oremus/Let us pray.*” And then, in response, silence. This silence is long enough to settle into, and like song, creates the Church. The presider has been praying this opening prayer all week by himself, and now he speaks it in a clear and understandable proclamation. The loud “Amen” says that the assembly has heard.

When the people at Our Lady of the Angels sit down, there is usually a sense that in all these moments -- from the alarm clock to this Amen -- the Spirit has brought them somewhere: into the worship space they call the “church,” and even more into the Church itself, into the assembly that will here pray not as so many individuals, but as the Body of Christ.

The Liturgy of the Word

All the readers of Scripture know what they are there to do. They know that these readings could be read privately by each individual, but that this public reading is quite different. For two years now there have been no booklets for the assembly to follow the reading, although by the front doors there are Sunday Missals for the hearing impaired and for those whose language is different from the one used at this Mass. The assembly gives all its attention to the lector.

These lectors have been struggling with the assigned Scripture for the past few days. Their manner and understanding may vary, but they open this Lectionary and read knowing that this church is full of people hungry for the Word of God.

The lectors have taken the time to hear anew old words, to let the images of Scripture reflect against and mingle with their lives. Each has found something to cherish in a reading, something to be passionate about. But they also know how to communicate their passion without calling attention to themselves. The assembly is hearing God’s Word. You can tell that the main activity going on during these readings is good listening. And what a treasure that is! The liturgy -- God’s word proclaimed and God’s word listened to -- is being carried by the assembly and they mean it when they say, “Thanks be to God/*Demos gracias a Dios.*” Every Sunday the Sacred Scriptures have been opened and read aloud. God’s Word proclaimed and listened to will be the foundation for all else that this Church does. (*Lectionary, Introduction: 1 & 10; or General Instruction of the Roman Missal: 8*)

Silence follows the first and second readings at Our Lady of the Angels, and again after the homily, lasting about a minute. People are used to it, and know what to do with it. They will tell you: Let that reading echo in your head, cling to a word or a phrase, savor it, stand under it. It becomes a very still time. Babies fuss, but people are not distracted.

The psalm after the first reading is almost an extension of this silence. No one gets out a book because the parish uses a repertoire of perhaps a dozen psalms -- and each year they learn one or two more -- where all can sing the refrain by heart. The cantor at this Mass, like the other cantors at Our Lady of the Angels, knows that people want to hear the words. Good articulation is as important as a good voice. Sometimes the homilists have borne the psalm, and especially the refrain, into the homily. Sometimes the texts appear in the parish bulletin with the suggestion that these psalms be prayed at home. In these ways and more (seasonal evening prayer, for example), the people of Our Lady of the Angels are coming to know the Church's oldest prayer book, the Psalter.

Another reader comes forward for the second Scripture and again silence follows. There is nothing half-hearted about the procession that now begins: The alleluia is singing to move with, to process with; it takes candle-bearing servers, incense bearer, and book-bearing presider through the assembly and to the place of proclamation.

A regular churchgoer usually knows within a sentence or two whether the homilist worked hard enough on the homily. This Sunday and every Sunday at Our Lady of the Angels, the expectation is that not only did the preacher work on this homily, but so did the ten or so people who meet every week on, say, Monday evenings to read, pray with and talk about the Scriptures for the coming weeks. The homilists are committed to being there and lectors often come as well. Sometimes these Monday night meetings give yesterday's homily a review. Noticeable progress has been made since this practice began, although some weeks are better than others. Two years ago the parish staff, parish council and homilists made a pact: homilists would give adequate time to preparing the homily (including the Monday night meeting), and the staff and council would find ways to assume other parish and pastoral duties and responsibilities, thus freeing up the priests.

Something else is evident this morning: The habit of listening calls forth a preacher's best. And this assembly knows how to listen.

Listening is not an isolated moment. It is a way of life. It means openness to the Lord's voice not only in the Scriptures but in the events of our daily lives and in the experience of our brothers and sisters. It is not just my listening but our listening together for the Lord's word to the community.

Fulfilled in Your Hearing, #20

Although there is no set time for a homily's length, about ten to twelve minutes on this Sunday in Ordinary Time seems best for both homilists and

listeners. And the homilists know it takes time to prepare a well-focused ten- to twelve-minute homily.

After a minute or so of silence, after the homily, five catechumens (who hope to be called to Baptism next Easter) and seven candidates (who on Easter will be welcomed into full communion) are dismissed to continue studying the Scriptures. Two catechists go with them. The assembly sees these people week after week for a year or more. They are very much a part of this parish community.

The Creed is a loud, almost mighty sound, chant-like. Few need the text as the rhythm carries it along. Then the Liturgy of the Word comes to its conclusion in prayerful intercession. No longer is there a dull reading of bland texts with a weak “Lord, hear our prayer/*Te lo pedimos Señor*” after each. Today the cantor chants the intercessions. The texts are short and strong. Only a few are written new each week, and these echo some image or notion from the day’s Scriptures and the week’s news. The assembly is engaged in this rhythmic exchange with the cantor. One would have to believe that these people regularly pray in their homes for the world and the Church, for the sick and the dead. The back and forth of cantor and assembly shows that this parish is standing together before the Lord and demanding to be heard.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

Everyone sits down to recollect themselves and to focus their attention on the table of the Lord, which is now reverently prepared with the plate of bread, the cup and a large flagon of wine. Nothing distracts from the power of the bread and wine in their simple vessels. Last Sunday the choir sang, but today all keep silent as the table is prepared. Ushers pass baskets. More than once over the past years the homilists have talked about almsgiving in the Catholic tradition, for both the Church and the poor. These have been homilies, not “money talks,” when the Scriptures or something else in the day’s liturgy suggested that the assembly consider its mission, its responsibilities, and what it means to trust God. The parish bulletin regularly prints financial information to support both aspects of the parish’s mission, caring for the poor and for the Church. Writing a check or coming up with cash is a vital liturgical deed in the root meaning of liturgy, a work done by people on behalf of the larger community. (CCC: 1070)

Selected members of the assembly then bring the gifts of the assembly in procession to the presider who receives them in thanksgiving as the personal sacrificial offerings of the people of God. (CCC: 1350, 1351)

After the Prayer over the Gifts, the Eucharistic Prayer begins. Here we are at the center of Catholic praying and that center is Eucharistic. The presider gives the ancient summons to “lift up your hearts” and to give the Lord praise and thanks. The dialogue is chanted -- strongly, loudly, and back and forth to make clear that what is about to happen needs the full and active participation of everyone. The presider’s posture and gestures invoke such participation, the way his voice does in dialogue and proclamation.

This participation in the Eucharistic Prayer has been the greatest change at Our Lady of the Angels. The parish always worked for good singing and good lectors. But the Eucharistic Prayer was a kind of orphan. People said, "We lift them up to the Lord," and sang the "Holy, Holy." But for years no one could have told you anything about the Eucharistic Prayer except that "the priest does the consecration." Now the parishioners can talk about the experience of standing and singing God's praise together; they can see how much their lives need to be filled with thanksgiving; and they recognize that their presence to one another at this table witnesses to the breadth of the Church in place and in time, a holy communion. They can talk about solidarity with one another across all dividing lines. They can talk about sacrifice and the mystery of Christ's passion, death and resurrection that is remembered and realized here in a powerful shaping of their own lives. Above all, they can talk about the way the Holy Spirit is invoked to transform these gifts and themselves. And so they are talking about the presence of Christ in the simple gifts of bread and wine, and in the mystery that is this Church. (CCC: 1352-1354)

Great mystery is conveyed in the faces and postures, singing and silence, gesture and word. Everyone is attentive, bodies engaged as much as hearts. It is clearly the central moment of this Lord's Day gathering. Over the altar and the gifts of bread and wine, all God's saving deeds are remembered, all is held up in praise of God, all is asked of God. The Catholic sensibility to sacrament, to the presence of God, is never more joyous, never more challenging. We need to take care in our thinking and in our language: When we say "Eucharist," we mean this whole action of presider and assembly. That is the Eucharist whose grace and powerful mystery can transform us and, in us, the world. (CCC: 1368)

The presider chants most of the Prayer and the refrains are the same most Sundays of the year, sung to music capable of carrying the liturgy week after week. The exchange between presider and assembly is seamless, as proclamation and acclamation are woven together. The Prayer takes only four or five minutes, but in its intensity it is clearly the center of this Sunday gathering. As was said long ago, the Church makes the Eucharist and the Eucharist makes the Church. And that is what we take part in on a Sunday morning. No wonder that when the great "Amen" is concluded, one can sense a collective sigh, a deep breath.

The chanting of the Our Father then carries the assembly toward Holy Communion. The peace greeting is not long or protracted, but it is anything but perfunctory. People seem to look each other in the eye. They clasp hands firmly or embrace. As the presider raises a large piece of the consecrated bread to break it, the cantor begins the litany "Lamb of God/*Cordero de Dios*" that will carry us until the bread is all broken, the consecrated wine all poured into the communion cups, "God's holy gifts for God's holy people."

Holy Communion is a procession at Our Lady of the Angels, a practice parishioners have worked hard to bring about. Two years ago, row by row, from the front to the back, people lined up for communion. During Eastertime the homilists talked -- and after Mass so did many people -- about

what the Communion time means. The key was unfolding the wonder and thanksgiving Catholics feel toward the Body of Christ -- the consecrated bread and wine, and the Church. Both have the same name. What does it mean when the Body of Christ comes forward to receive the Body of Christ? The sense of a Church in procession has somehow replaced the feeling of individuals lining up. For example, the first to come forward are no longer those in the front pew; rather, the people in the back pews begin the procession so that the whole room seems to be surrounded by a procession of people. Here is a Church partaking of the sacred banquet.

The invitation to Communion, "This is the Lamb of God," and the assembly's response are followed immediately by the beginning of the Communion procession song. At this point, the procession is moving -- that is, the ministers of Communion are at the Communion stations beginning the Communion of the assembly.

The ordinary and extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist this Sunday represent the diversity of the community: women and men, young and old, of different races, backgrounds and circumstances. They are in no hurry and neither is the assembly. Yet there seem to be enough of them that the procession can keep moving while each individual is treated with reverence: Ministers look each person in the eye and say, without rushing, "The Body of Christ/*El Cuerpo de Cristo*," "The Blood of Christ/*La Sangre de Cristo*." Each person has time to respond, "Amen." The ministers, also without hurrying, then place the Body of Christ in the hand or on the tongue, and give over the Blood of Christ.

The song that is sung throughout is good for processing: No one needs to carry the printed words because only six or seven songs are used at communion throughout the year. They fit the movement and the moment. Each is sung often enough to be familiar, and each has a melody and words that flourish with repetition. This Sunday's single Communion song continues until presider and assembly sit down after all have taken Holy Communion.

It took some years before most of the assembly received the Blood of Christ as well as the Body of Christ. Perhaps the spirit of invitation did it, a spirit that recognizes how this drink from the cup of consecrated wine is needed by each of us in our thirst, how this drinking complements the eating of the consecrated bread. Eventually the assembly began to hear the simple words: "Take this, all of you, and drink from it. . . ."

Perhaps because the assembly at Our Lady of the Angels has clearly discovered how to make the Eucharistic Prayer so conscious and intense, the whole of their Communion Rite is compelling -- from the Lord's Prayer to the silent and still time after all have received. People are intent on the hard work of liturgy, caught up in singing, procession and even silence. To be with them is to know deeply that we are the Body and Blood of Christ. To be with them is to learn how to be in this world with reverence, with a love of God that is incarnate in how we speak to others, how we move amidst the holiness of matter and of time.

We must capture again the great power of silence within our Sunday liturgies. Too often the impression has been given that properly celebrated liturgy must be filled with sounds: prayer, song, speech--regarding silence as a vacuum to be avoided at all costs. But we have come to learn that we all need the gift of silence throughout liturgy in order to help us enter more fully and deeply into the mystery of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The silence and the stillness in the church become a wondrous mixture of personal and communal prayer.

Above all, Our Lady of the Angels has learned that the steady experience of a participatory ritual can carry the Church Sunday to Sunday. People do not want to be entertained and passive. They want to become energized in the hard but delightful work of liturgy, praising and thanking God, remembering the liberating deeds of God, interceding for all the world. These desires are most clear when people enter into the spirit of the Eucharistic Prayer and share in the Paschal Banquet. What a witness to the Spirit-inspired work of Vatican II!

Taking Leave

At Our Lady of the Angels this Sunday the announcements are a transition from the final quiet and peace of the Communion to the sending forth. The various activities of the week are announced, then all stand and the presider prays the blessing and the dismissal. A concluding song leads to much visiting and to the procession out. I mean the true procession of this Church: one, two, and five at a time going back to neighborhoods and homes, roles and jobs, studies and waiting. But Sunday by Sunday the world is here being transformed in Christ!

Visiting Our Lady of the Angeles Parish

I have tried to describe what makes Our Lady of the Angels parish breathe and exercise its life in Christ. The description had to be detailed to give the whole content. I have not outlined how I want liturgy to look in every parish of our Archdiocese three years from now. Look first for the texture. The details are important because care for details matters greatly in liturgy, but these are the details of Our Lady of the Angels. The details at your parish will differ -- but each parish should intend to have this beauty and intensity each Sunday.

From Here to There

“How could I survive without Sunday Mass in my parish? I have to be there with my parish on Sundays. I am needed!” That must be what Sunday obligation is about for us, and that is what I hope Catholic life can be like as we urgently process in this renewal.

I want to kindle a passion for a vital Sunday Liturgy in every parish of our Archdiocese.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Roger Condit Mahony". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.