

A Place for Everybody: Liturgy and Irreplaceability

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Sometimes you want to go
Where everybody knows your name,
And they're always glad you came.
You want to be where you can see our troubles are all the same.
You want to go where everybody knows your name.¹

Judy Hart Angelo and Gary Portnoy

Do you ever think of Church when you hear the “Cheers” theme song? I do. Not that I know many parishes where everybody knows everybody’s name or where they’re always glad to see me. But one thing I am sure of is that our troubles are all the same and that we do want to be in a place and among a people where everyone counts, where I matter, where you would be missed if you didn’t show up.

It can appear that in liturgy, especially the Mass, only some people count (Father, the cantor, the reader, the special minister of the eucharist) and only a few people have names (not Sam or Woodie or Diane or Carla but “John Paul our Pope, Roger our Bishop”) or have something important to do. It can appear that the rest of us don’t really matter, are not really noticed (so not really missed if we happen not to come), and do not have vital roles, indispensable roles because we are irreplaceable people.

But these appearances are far from the ideal of the restored liturgy, especially the Mass, that the Bishops of the Second Vatican Council called for and the post-conciliar experts (mostly priests but some lay people) carried out.

This very human desire — to matter, to count, even in some sense to star — is one that God the Spirit stirs up in each one of us. This desire is a summons from the heart of the Trinity to move closer together, to overcome our differences and our indifference and to form friendships, families, and — yes — Church. St. Paul describes this desire in terms of indispensableness and I call it irreplaceability.

This essay, drawn from years of teaching ecclesiology with the help of Louis Bouyer’s *The Church of God*,² is about irreplaceability and the ways in which this is expressed in liturgy. This essay is about the theology of being a member of the assembly, a catechumen, a sinner, a musician, a deacon, a priest. This essay will illuminate the meaning the oldest greeting of the liturgy (“The Lord be with you.” “And also with you.”), remind about the significance of the silences after the the presider’s words, “let us pray,” and reinvigorate the great rediscovery of the Mass of Paul VI, the General Intercessions. It will also suggest an answer to any abuse of power by the ordained, real or imagined, and to the role of women in the eucharistic celebration.

Irreplaceability

Now the body is not one member, it is many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” would it then no longer belong to the body? . . . If all the members were alike, where would the body be? There are, indeed, many different members, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I do not need you” . . . Even

those members of the body which seem less important are in fact indispensable. . . . God has so constructed the body . . . that all the members may be concerned for one another. (I Cor 12:14-25)

When St. Paul set about describing most Christian realities, he usually adopted old ideas and gave them new meaning (like *koinonia* to talk about community) or found rarely used terms and made them bywords (like *agape* to talk about love). But when he was pressed to come up with a word to describe how irreplaceable we all are to each other, he had to invent one: membership.³ The passage just quoted from his first letter to the very divided and stratified Christian community at Corinth gives us some idea of what he meant.

Like most Christian ideas, this word has lost some of its original meaning and value. My wallet is filled with membership cards (Fedco, KCET, KCRW, LA County Art Museum, to name just a few) but I am a number to all of these organizations. The one organism to which all of us baptized belong irreplaceably is the Church . . . and yet many of us think and experience ourselves as just a number even in Church.

How far this is from the present, hidden reality of the Church and from the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem! Straining to renew this reality only fifty or so years after Paul popularized it, the author of the Book of Revelation makes these promises in Christ's name to the "victor" in the struggle of Christian life: "I will give you a white stone upon which is written your new name, to be known only to you alone" [2:17]; "I will never erase your name from the book of the living but will speak up for you in the presence of my Father and his angels" [3:5]; and "I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God and you will never leave it" [3:12]. The trick is to make this future reality a present, obvious actuality in the Church today so that people will actually have at least a taste of their

uniqueness, their "un-eraseability," and their irremovability. Giving people this taste is the intent of the oft-quoted but still poorly understood slogan, "full, conscious, and active participation of all the faithful in liturgical celebrations," of the great reform document, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (SC14).

The Way Things Were . . . Recently

What needed reform? The Order of Mass under which most of us grew up focussed on the priest (I was tempted to use the word, "presider," but that presumes an assembly) and did not mention the people.⁴ The people attended Mass, went to Mass, assisted at Mass, loved the Mass; but the celebrant was Father and we watched.

The famous Archbishop Sheen "starred" in the thirty photographs of the popular 50's-era devotional book written by Daniel-Rops called *This Is the Mass*.⁵ The great Canadian photographer Yousuf Karsh posed the archbishop at every stage of the preconiliar Mass. During the Mass of the Catechumens and during the Mass of the Faithful, Archbishop Sheen was seen praying, reading, washing his hands, preparing the chalice, receiving communion, reading the last gospel. However, not only was there the complete absence of catechumens, but also in just five of the thirty photographs did one other person appear: one other person, the altarboy — and he 'starred' only in Plate XXVIII: receiving "The Communion of the Faithful." Despite the book's title and its author's good intentions, That Was NOT the Mass. And that was what needed renewal.

The Way Things Were . . . Back at Square One

The effort of liturgical renewal has not quite been an exercise in archeology: finding out the way things were and then just turning back the clock. Thanks to Ansgar Chupungco, we all know that the reform of the liturgy has two phases: the restoration of the simple, sober, but deeply passionate Roman rite and its reinculturation into the various cultures which have received or are receiving evangelization.⁶ Chupungco the optimist says that we are just at the beginning of the second phase. But am I alone in thinking that we are in some ways at the beginning of the restoration? To be sure, we have renewed rites but do we have renewed understanding and renewed experience?

Turning back the clock can, however, be a helpful exercise. I have been helped greatly by reading the first letter of the fourth pope, St. Clement, to those same Corinthians who gave St. Paul such heartaches. The younger generation of Corinthians — sure of their own gifts from the Spirit, jealous of others' authority, and convinced that their gifts entitled them to leadership — had deposed some of their overseeing elders and assumed that they themselves could preside at liturgy (sounds almost contemporary, doesn't it?).

Clement writes them about everybody keeping the place proper to each and about each individual fulfilling his/her sacred function [the Greek word is *leitourgia*, liturgy] on behalf of the community; “no one else can exercise it in his place, and he cannot exercise anyone else's.”⁷ Clement compares the proper ranks occupied by Christian worshipers to the ranks of worshipers in the Old Covenant. The great theologian Louis Bouyer comments:

The bishop corresponds to the high priest and his liturgy; the Levites . . . have their replica in the deacons; but what corresponds to the ancient priests (*hiereis*) and their function? There is no doubt that, for all of Christian antiquity, it is with the Christian *laos*[=laity] that the function equivalent to the priestly function of the Old Covenant corresponds. Before the end of the Patristic period, we never see *hiereus* (or its equivalent, *sacerdos*) [=priest] applied to the presbyters, our “priests of the second rank.” At the same time the word *archiereus* [=high priest] was always applied to the bishop as president over the eucharistic synaxis [= the Mass], as was *hiereus* to *all the faithful* [Bouyer's emphasis]. The ancient *laos*, excluded from priestly functions in the Old Covenant, no longer have a corresponding term in the New. In the Church of the New Testament, all the laity are priests and exercise all the function of priests.⁸

This looks something like:

Old Covenant	New Testament
The High Priest (<i>archiereus</i>)	Overseer/Elder (bishop/priests)
The Priests of the First Rank (<i>hiereus</i> = <i>sacerdos</i>)	The People
The Priests of the Second Rank	The Deacons
<hr/>	
The People (<i>laos</i>)	

And where do priests, as we understand them, fit into this scheme? They assist the bishop in his presidency over the assembly. (We have to remember that for the first century or so the terms *episcopus* (overseer, bishop) and *presbyteros* (elder,

Bouyer:

The Eucharist is at once essentially collective and essentially priestly. All celebrate it together, but each individual exercises his proper function, which cannot otherwise be exercised, in accord, in “symphony” with the functions of all the others. To the bishop alone belongs presidency of the assembly, in which he is assisted by the body of presbyters. To deacons alone belongs the service that is intermediary between this presidency and the totality of the assembly: they gather the gifts of all and transmit to all the directives that will order and unify their liturgies into one service. But all have to pray, to offer, to communicate, and these are the preeminent priestly actions, although they can be exercised only with the concurrence of all the Church in one concord, of which the bishop, assisted by his presbyters is rector and guardian.⁹

Bouyer concludes that, in all the ancient liturgies, every eucharistic celebration

includes five actions, two of which belong solely to the president . . . and the other three to all its members . . . To the ministry of the celebrant are reserved [1] the proclamation of the Divine Word, with apostolic authority, and [2] the consecration of the eucharistic banquet. But this Word is announced only to be received in [3] the prayer of all, and the consecration can have no other matter but [4] the offering of all, nor can it prepare any other end than [5] the communion of all . . . To pray, to offer, and to communicate — these are always the three essential actions in the eucharistic celebration and they belong to the faithful. And in the Roman liturgy of this time, three moments of silence were observed, which supposed the successive accomplishment by each individual of these three functions (which the three “collects” of the president are limited to “collecting”): the oration, the secret, and the post-communion.¹⁰

This suggests to me that one way of restoring a sense to

everyone in the assembly that each and every person counts is recovering those ancient silences and explaining them to the people and to presiders. (I often suggest to audiences to imagine what would happen if the assembly went on strike, that is, refused to pray when the presider says, “Let us pray,” Mass would grind to a halt. Picture what would happen if the people met with stony silence the presider’s request, “Pray, brothers and sisters, that our sacrifice may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.” The Order of Mass and the Foreword to the Sacramentary clearly direct the people and the presider to pause for silent prayer at the collect, before the prayer over the gifts, and before the prayer after communion.)

There is, finally, a simple ritual we use at liturgy the meaning of which is almost totally gone: “The Lord be with you” “And also with you.” I always thought this was a nice greeting, especially now that it was in English. But I learned (not from Bouyer; I read it first in Yves Congar and followed his lead to other sources¹¹) that this greeting is actually a prayer and was once so sacred that it was used only once during the Mass, at the beginning of the eucharistic prayer. (After much overuse, it has been confined to the beginning of Mass, the beginning of the gospel, and the dismissal rite.) Why it was so sacred is because it was a prayer to the Holy Spirit poised, so to speak, between the presider and the assembly for the rekindling of the gift given all in baptism and the gift given the presider in ordination in order that what was about to be done could be done and could be fruitful. This awareness brings alive the warning Pope St. Gregory the Great gave many times: “[T]he ministers of the Church cannot legitimately consecrate the Eucharist without a People who offer it with them.”¹²

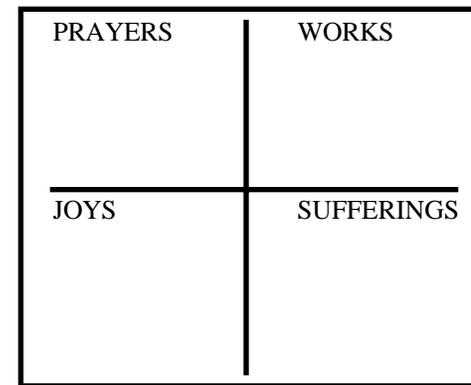
Assembly-aware, Ministry-assisted, Christ-centered, Spirit-led, Father-destined Liturgy

As a consequence of the foregoing, I would like to propose a list of suggestions for moving forward in our renewal of the way we worship. This list is in two parts: liturgical formation, especially liturgical spirituality, and liturgical practice.

Liturgical Formation

1) Every Catholic needs instruction on the meaning of the Mass and how to prepare for Mass. In light of this essay, every Catholic needs to be taught to bring his/her own concerns to the prayer-silences during the Mass.

The Morning Offering prayer with its cruciform structure of prayers, works, joys, and sufferings, is especially helpful in this matter. I recommend that people be taught to make a cross on a piece of paper and write Prayers, Works, Joys, and Sufferings, one in each quadrant, and then meditate on their own lives and write their own needs and experiences in each quadrant. Thus:



If they were then to bring this paper either spiritually or even physically to Mass, they would know what do do when the presider summons, “Let us pray.”

2) Every Catholic needs to know the five-fold structure of collects: the invitation to prayer, the silent prayer of all, the invocation of God in response to God’s gracious activity on our behalf, the actual petition, and the conclusion with the assembly ratification.

3) Every Catholic needs to know the substance of this essay: that they are irreplaceable at every stage and in every state of life and that this is never more true now than at Mass.

Liturgical Practice

1) Recover the ancient silence before the collect. Presiders should be reminded that their words, “Let us pray,” are an invitation to prayer and therefore they should allow a generous silence for their own prayer and the prayer of everyone else present.

4) The General Intercessions or Universal Prayer (what we have come to call “The Prayer of the Faithful,” a title which should be reserved for the Lord’s Prayer¹³) needs to become what it was designed to be:

Enlightened by God’s word and in a sense responding to it, the assembly of the faithful prays in the general intercessions as a rule for the needs of the universal church and the local community, for the salvation of the world and those oppressed by any burden, and for special categories of people. . . . In these petitions, “the people, exercising their priestly function, make intercession for all with the result that, as the liturgy of the word has its full effects in them, they are better prepared to proceed to the liturgy of the eucharist.¹⁴

To illustrate this theology the 1966 Roman booklet, “The Universal Prayer or Prayer of the Faithful” makes two bold analogies: (1) Just as communion is the climax of the liturgy of the eucharist, so the prayer of the faithful is the climax of the entire liturgy of the word; and (2) this prayer is the hinge [the Latin word is *cardo*] between the two parts of the Mass.¹⁵ As the theologian Robert Cabié summarizes,

The General Intercessions can be seen to mark the end of the entire Liturgy of the Word and at the same time to be, as it were, the threshold of the Eucharist proper. Coming as they do after the dismissal of the catechumens, they are the privilege of the faithful, and the underscore the latter’s priestly character. To present to God the appeals and hopes of the entire human race is to share in the care and concern of the Priest of the New Covenant who gave his life for the salvation of the world; it is to share in his mission. We may say that the intercessions represent the other side of evangelization, since speaking of human beings to God is inseparable from speaking of God to human beings.¹⁶

Cabié here is reflecting the vision of the church for this prayer:

[Its] place . . . is at the end of every celebration of the word of God . . .

The reason is that this prayer is . . . the fruit of the working of the word of God in the hearts of the faithful: instructed, stirred, and renewed by the word, all stand together to offer prayer for the needs of the whole Church and the whole world. (UP §4)

But is this the experience of average Catholics? Or do they hear ‘canned’ intentions provided by well-meaning publishers, or laundry-lists of persons who are sick or deceased or petitions for every conceivable need, to which they respond with a rattled off “Lord, hear our prayer.” Do ordinary people look forward to this prayer with the same longing as they have for receiving communion? And do they experience the same sort of satisfaction after this prayer as they do after communion?

Seven years after it issued its booklet of principles, rules, and samples of the universal prayer, the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship has to remind conferences of bishops throughout the world, “Much is to be made of the general intercessions which . . . is the community’s response response to the word of God proclaimed and received.”¹⁷ But do we make much of this prayer? Do people feel that the Church is *only* “John Paul, our Pope, Roger, our bishop, and all the clergy” or that they are the “gathered Church . . . , the great entreater and advocate appointed for all humanity” (UP §3)?

Conclusion

Nearly a decade ago a group of U.S. Bishops, on an *ad limina* visit to Rome, presented to Pope John Paul II a list of

“say a few words.” He chose to talk about the celebration of Sunday Eucharist. He said to his brother bishops:

I am convinced that we can render a great pastoral service to [our] people by emphasizing their liturgical dignity, and by directing their thoughts to the purposes of worship. When our people realize . . . that they are called to be “. . . a royal priesthood . . .” and that we are called to adore and thank the Father in union with Jesus Christ, an immense power is unleashed in their Christian lives. When they realize that they actually have a sacrifice of praise and expiation to offer with Jesus Christ, when they realize that all their prayers of petition are united to an infinite act of the praying Christ, then there is fresh hope and new encouragement for the Christian people.¹⁸

If the Church prayed this way, aware of the irreplaceability of everyone in the assembly — especially those alienated or marginalized in any way, if priests and all other ministers saw themselves in indispensable roles of assisting each person in the assembly in his/her indispensable role of praying, offering, and communicating, there would indeed be fresh hope and new encouragement for the Christian people, especially those injured by any real or imagined abuse of power by the ordained. If the Church had always prayed this way, there might not even be any question about the role of women in the eucharistic celebration. In the spirit of St. Francis de Sales’s “On Meekness toward Ourselves,”¹⁹ let us gently mourn the past with all of its failures, losses, and missed opportunities; and let us resolve to do better in the future.

Then, after a lifelong struggle to be victorious in Christ our victor-bridegroom, we will join our fellow unique, unerasable, and irreplaceable human beings at the wedding banquet which goes on forever. Cheers!

¹ “Where Everybody Knows Your Name,” © Judy Hart Angelo and Gary Portnoy.

² (Chicago, Franciscan Herald, 1982).

³ See C. S. Lewis, “Membership,” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, edited by Walter Hooper (New York: Macmillan, 1980), pp. 106–120.

⁴ See “The Principal Manifestation of the Church (SC41)” by Pedro Romano Rocha, S.J., in *Volume Two of Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives*, edited by Rene Latourelle (New York: Paulist, 1989), pp. 3–26.

⁵ (New York: Hawthorn, 1958). In a letter to Daniel-Rops, Archbishop J. B. Montini, the future Pope Paul VI, thanks the author on behalf of the Pope Pius XII in words that seem to foreshadow the coming restoration: “His Holiness trusts that your book will convey to its readers those insights which will lead them to a fuller sharing in the Holy Sacrifice . . .”

⁶ Ansgar J. Chupungco, O.S.B., *Liturgies of the Future: The Process and Methods of Inculturation* (Liturgical Press, 1989)

⁷ Louis Bouyer, *The Church of God*, p. 289; please excuse the exclusive language translation. See also Lightfoot and Harner’s translation in *The Apostolic Fathers*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), p. 50, Alexandre Faivre’s *The Emergence of the Laity in the Early Church* (New York: Paulist, 1990), pp. 15–24, and Simon Tugwell’s *The Apostolic Fathers* (Harrisburg: Morehouse, 1989), pp. 89–103.

⁸ Bouyer, p. 290.

⁹ Bouyer, p. 290.

¹⁰ Bouyer, p. 292; bracketed numbers added for clarity.

¹¹ *In I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (New York: Crossroads, 1983) Congar refers twice (vol 1, p. 33; vol. 3, p. 236) to W.C. Van Unnik’s article, “*Dominus Vobiscum*: the Background of a Liturgical Formula,” in *New Testament Essays: Studies in Memory of T.W. Manson 1893–1958*, edited by A. J. B. Higgins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), pp. 270–305.

¹² Bouyer, p. 292 and p. 304, n. 38.

¹³ DOL [*The Documents of the Liturgy 1965–1979* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1982)] 239, number 1911 (p. 598).

¹⁴ The Lectionary of the Mass [1981]: Introduction, 30.

¹⁵ DOL 239 (pp. 594–603), hereafter abbreviated as “UP”; the reference here is to principal paragraph number 1894. Explaining the second analogy UP says: “[The prayer] terminates the liturgy of the word in which God’s wonderful works and the Christian calling are brought to mind; it ushers in the liturgy of the eucharist by stating some of those general and particular intentions for which the sacrifice is to be offered.”

The two essential readings about the General Intercessions are UP and the 1979 U.S. statement, “General Intercessions” [hereafter abbreviated GI] the second is in the USCC/BCL publication, *Thirty Years of Liturgical Renewal* (Publication No. 154–7), edited by Frederick P. McManus. See also Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948–1975* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990), pp. 402–404, Robert Cabié, *The Eucharist*, in *The Church at Prayer*, Volume II, A. G. Martimort, ed. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1986), pp. 69–75 and 203, and Nicholas Paxton, “The Prayer of the Faithful,” *Church Music*, 17:2 (April 1991), pp. 36–44.

¹⁶ Cabié, p. 75.

¹⁷ Circular Letter *Eucharistiæ Participationem*, April 27, 1973 (DOL 248: 1990 [p. 628]), emphasis added.

¹⁸ BCL Newsletter, XIX (August/September 1983).

¹⁹ *Introduction to the Devout Life*, III, 9.