

In Communion with Christ

Programme Introduction
& materials for homilist

In *Communion With Christ* is an all-parish resource designed to complement *With Hearts and Minds*. It is intended to assist participants to a deeper appreciation of the nature and role of the Liturgy in the life of the Christian community; to participate more deeply in the Liturgy.

Like *With Hearts and Minds* it is based on a six week programme. It follows the same broad themes, but it is a resource that can be shared with the whole parish, both through Sunday preaching on those broad themes and through take-away A4 sheets to help people continue to reflect on what has been preached about in the homily.

It is not usually practical for all parishioners to commit themselves to take part in a six week formation course based on house-groups. *In Communion with Christ* means that they can still engage in the formation opportunity being offered by those groups.

In Communion with Christ is intended as a complement to, not a substitute for *With Hearts and Minds*. However it is also able to be used as a stand-alone programme where that is judged the better way to proceed.

Overview

Session 1	Introduction	
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Session 3	Word	Liturgy of the Word
Session 4	Thanksgiving	Liturgy of the Eucharist — Eucharistic Prayer
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In Communion with Christ is one a series of resources produced by the Liturgy Office of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales to assist parishes reflect on their celebration of the Eucharist in the light of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*. Other resources are available from www.liturgyoffice.org.uk

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**Liturgy
Office**
ENGLAND
& WALES

Introduction

For Catholics today, as in the past, the Mass is the source and summit of the whole Christian life. It is the vital centre of all that the Church is and does, because at its heart is the real presence of the crucified, risen and glorified Lord, continuing and making available his saving work among us. The Second Vatican Council reminded us: 'the most holy Eucharist holds within itself the whole spiritual treasure of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Passover and our living bread'.

Yet for an increasing number of Roman Catholics today there appears to be a certain discontinuity between everyday experience and the Sunday Mass. For many a discernible gulf has opened up between the spiritual journey of the individual and the communal, liturgical acts of worship. (*Celebrating the Mass*, 2)

In his letter *Spiritus et Sponsa* published in 2003 to mark the 40th anniversary of the 2nd Vatican Council that Pope John Paul II asked the Church to consider how it might address such matters.

In Communion with Christ is a resource of the Liturgy Office of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales to assist parish communities with:

- their understanding of the celebration of the Mass;
- their participation in its celebration;
- more firmly establishing the Mass as a source for faithful Christian living.

It is part of a wide range of materials that accompany the publication of the English translation of the 3rd edition of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, (GIRM) and the Bishops' Conference's own *Celebrating the Mass* (CTM) – a pastoral guide to the celebration of the Mass.

The principal publication to assist the wider parish community engage with these documents is *With Hearts and Minds*. It is a resource for use by small groups, helping familiarise them with the basic teaching about the celebration of the Mass, and to help promote the formation of a deeper liturgical spirituality.

With Hearts and Minds has been prepared in response to declared need for such a resource. It will be found most suitable for those parishes that already have experience of organising small groups for prayer and reflection. Where parishes do not already have that experience they will find detailed practical assistance in the Leader's booklet and in the additional Parish Leader's material which can be freely downloaded from www.liturgyoffice.org.uk.

Using *With Hearts and Minds* will assist the development of liturgical understanding and participation skills across the parish. However it is not usually practical for all parishioners to commit themselves to take part in a six week formation course. The need therefore arises to help those who cannot join a group to also engage in the formation opportunity being offered.

In Communion with Christ is a supplementary resource which seeks to do just that. Like *With Hearts and Minds* it is based on a six week programme. It follows the same broad themes, but it is a resource that can be shared with the whole parish, both through Sunday preaching on those broad themes and through take-away A4 sheets to help people continue to reflect on what has been preached about in the homily.

In Communion with Christ is intended as a complement to, and not a substitute for *With Hearts and Minds*. However it is also able to be used as a stand-alone programme where that is judged the better way to proceed.

Preaching at Sunday Mass

One of the fruits of the renewal of the liturgy since Vatican II has been the development of liturgical preaching. Once the preaching was commonly on topics somewhat independent of the liturgy being celebrated. Now it is widely appreciated that the homily is an integral part of the liturgy, and that in consequence its theme should be drawn from the liturgy itself. Most commonly the homily will be directly related to the readings of the day. Yet there are alternative subjects that the homilist might legitimately explore:

‘The homily (is to be) firmly based upon the mysteries of salvation, expounding the mysteries of Faith and the norms of Christian life from the biblical readings **and liturgical texts throughout the course of the liturgical year and providing commentary on the texts of the Ordinary or the Proper of the Mass, or of some other rite of the Church.**’

Redemptionis Sacramentum 67, (Emphasis added) See also GIRM 65

In Communion with Christ proposes a series of six Sunday homilies each of which explore different aspects of the mystery of the Eucharist, the Mass, which is being celebrated.

These six Sundays might be consecutive Sundays. If so, they should be six Sundays in Ordinary Time, or in the seasons of Lent or Easter to avoid obscuring the transition from one season of the Church year to another. However sometimes it will be thought better to have the six Sundays more spread out, perhaps a fixed Sunday each month for six months. Thought should be given as to what arrangement will best suit a particular parish, and care taken to ensure that following the programme does not obscure any particularly important features of the liturgical year.

It is probably better for the Sunday preaching on a particular theme to take place on the Sunday after the *With Hearts and Minds* groups have reflected on that same theme. That way the preaching can reinforce the learning done in the group sessions. It also will give additional matter for those groups to reflect on at the beginning of their meeting when next they meet.

Mystagogy

In *Spiritus et Sponsa* Pope John Paul writes of the thirst for God that exists even in the most secularised society. He notes that the most profound response to this longing is provided by the liturgy, and especially the Eucharist. However for this response to be effective it requires that Pastors minister the liturgy in such a way that ‘the meaning of the mystery penetrates in consciences, rediscovering and practicing the “mystagogic” art, so dear to the Fathers of the Church’. *Spiritus et Sponsa* 12.

Mystagogy is a mode of formation in the faith that has its origins in the preaching and catechesis which assists those seeking to be initiated into the life of Christ in the Church. It is exemplified in the mystagogical homilies of St Cyril of Jerusalem, St John Chrysostom, St Theodore of Mopsuestia, St Ambrose, and St Augustine. In the 4th and 5th Centuries preaching and catechesis intended for the unbaptised was typically confined to preaching on the scriptures. They were offered mystagogical preaching, preaching on the Mysteries – the sacraments – after they had celebrated the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil. The focus of the preaching was their experience of the sacraments and the meaning mediated by this experience.

In later centuries when adult baptism was rare and infant baptism the norm, the practice of mystagogy declined. With it declined the ease with which the Church did its sacramental theology with reference to people’s experience of the liturgy.

The mystagogic arts of which Pope John Paul speaks in *Spiritus et Sponsa* were widely neglected. A more systematic theology took its place, and people's ability to understand the meaning of the liturgy they celebrated was compromised.

The language and practice of mystagogy has begun to find a new home in the Church as a consequence of the restoration of the Rites for Adult Initiation – the RCIA.

'The period of postbaptismal catechesis or mystagogy... is a time for the community and the neophytes to grow in deepening their grasp of the paschal mystery and in making it part of their lives through meditation on the Gospel, sharing in the eucharist and doing the works of charity...

The neophytes are, as the term 'mystagogy' suggests, introduced into a fuller and more effective understanding of mysteries through the Gospel message they have learned and above all through their experience of the sacraments they have received.'

RCIA 234f

Mystagogy is a form of preaching that does not simply speak of the rites, and their history and theology. Rather it opens up the very heart of the liturgy, leading men and women to cherish it and understand its inner dynamic – how the liturgy expresses our faith in what we sing and say and do; in what we hear and what we pray; in how things taste and smell and feel; how the rites connect us with the love and the power of God, and how their meaningfulness echoes in our lives.

Perhaps a couple of examples will serve. The first is from the preaching of Cyril of Jerusalem. The second from St Augustine. Both relate to the reception of Holy Communion:

When you come forward, do not come with arm extended or fingers parted. Make your left hand a throne for your right, since your right hand is about to welcome a king. Cup your palm and receive in it Christ's body, saying in response: Amen. ...Consume it, being careful not to drop a particle of it. For to lose any of it is clearly like losing part of your own body. Tell me me, if anyone gave you some gold dust, would you not keep it with the greatest care, ensuring that you did not lost by dropping any of it? So you should surely take still greater care not to drop a fragment of what is more valuable than gold and precious stones.

Cyril of Jerusalem, Mystagogic Catechesis, Sermon V

'The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.' If you are the body and members of Christ, then it is your sacrament that is placed on the table of the Lord; it is your sacrament that you receive. To that which you are you respond 'Amen' ('yes, it is true!') and by responding to it you assent to it. For you hear the words, 'the Body of Christ' and respond 'Amen.' Be then a member of the Body of Christ that your Amen may be true.

St. Augustine, Sermons, 272

If some forms of theology can seem impersonal, mystagogy wears its heart on its sleeve. It is pre-eminently a confessional theology – an understanding of the Church's tradition as it is manifested in the Church's first theology, her liturgy. *Lex orandi lex credendi*.

Though prompted by the initiation of new members, mystagogic preaching is not only for them, or just for a season but is something needed by the whole community, and as a regular feature of their continuing formation. It is just this sort of formation that progressively enables the assembly to develop its ability to fruitfully participate in the liturgy, 'to probe more deeply the word of God and the mystery being celebrated.' (*Redemptionis Sacramentum* 39)

Homilist's Introduction

This section does not offer an 'Introduction to Homiletics'. There are details of some excellent Introductions in the Bibliography that concludes this section. Instead it is simply a guide to resources provided for the homilist who will preach at Sunday Mass during the weeks that the parish uses the *In Communion with Christ* materials.

There are many ways in which a homily can be prepared. The books in the bibliography offer discussions of the pros and cons of a variety of methods. However the expectation of the homily is always going to be the same - that it will 'lead (the assembly)... to profound appropriation of the mystery of Christ and his Sacrifice in a more wholehearted celebration of the Eucharist and in their daily lives.' (*Celebrating the Mass* 168)

Listening

The homily is to serve the participation of the whole assembly. It therefore needs to make a connection between the liturgy and their daily lives. If the homily is to do this then before he preaches to the assembly the homilist needs to listen to it. He needs to know its situation, its concerns and preoccupations, what is giving its members life, and what is stifling their lives.

This listening by the homilist can take place in many settings – while offering pastoral care to individuals and families; while helping people prepare for their wedding or the baptism of their children; during the time of catechesis for first communions and confirmation; during the meetings of adult catechumens; during the ministering of the sacrament of reconciliation, of ministry to the sick and to the bereaved. It can go on during visits to the school, and to the homes of parishioners; and through involvement in the life of the local civic community – and of course through personal friendships.

Increasingly homilists are realising the value of supplementing this 'individual' listening to the community with a more formal listening together with the community to the scriptures and the liturgical texts. This is accomplished by meeting together with a small group of other members of the parish. Such a group helps them to hear how these 'sound' in the hearts and minds of others in their community. A group might include the other full-time members of the parish team, the readers of the week, and those serving in the parish's catechetical and liturgy preparation teams. Simple processes have been developed to facilitate the listening and the reflection.

So far as the homily is concerned the role of the group is to listen to the scriptures together and to reflect. It does not write the homily – that task remains with the homilist, but the reflections of the group provide the homilist with a rich resource to draw from.

Before you read any further, do take a moment to reflect on the following questions about your present practice.

- What do you feel makes for a good homily? Or makes for a poor one?
- What is your present practice concerning homily preparation? What do you see as its strengths? And its weaknesses?
- What opportunities for feedback on your homilies do you have? How reliable and helpful are the comments you receive?

Preaching on the Liturgy

The particular challenge of the preaching during *In Communion with Christ* is that its main focus is not on the scriptures of the day but on the various moments of the celebration of the Mass. And this is a practice that many homilists are not very familiar with.

As you preach on these topics you will hopefully find that some of the things that you are preaching on are aspects of the liturgy that your community does well – and the challenge then is mostly about helping people to a deeper participation in them.

However it is possible that as you read through the revised *General Instruction* and *Celebrating the Mass* and the other materials provided you will recognise certain weaknesses in your parish celebrations, and identify where current practice would benefit from being worked on. How then to preach about the opportunities for development and growth? The prospect of ‘change’ will be disturbing for some, challenging to others, and perhaps welcome to yet others. An important principle would seem to be to focus on the values that each element of the liturgy manifests, and the opportunity each offers of prayerful encounter with the Lord in the communion of the Church.

It is important that the liturgy be celebrated as well as it can be. No minister or parish should allow themselves to become complacent. Even so if there is need for the way a parish celebrates to be changed or developed this change or development will take time. It needs to be prepared for by good catechesis; precisely what needs to be addressed and how must be carefully agreed; and then the ‘new way’ introduced and reviewed. Taking care to manage change, so that it is introduced only after formation and is introduced after it has been considered by the parish community, witnesses to not only the importance of the liturgy itself, but also of the community that celebrates it.

Resources

Homilists will come to *In Communion with Christ* in different states of preparedness for what is asked of them. Some will have already read and reflected on the revised *General Instruction* and/or *Celebrating the Mass*. Others will not have.

Before leading the parish into a process of liturgical catechesis and renewal it is important to have read *Celebrating the Mass*, and desirable to have read the *General Instruction*. These documents express a vision of liturgy which is authentic to the teaching of the Church at Vatican II, and towards which the Church continues to work. The documents urge local communities to achieve a quality of celebration which is not commonly experienced in our parishes at the present time. There is no shame in that – great progress has been made in responding to the call to renewal of the liturgy since the time of the Council. But there is more that we can accomplish. That is the reason for which these various documents have been produced – and presumably also for your interest in them. So be sure to build on firm foundations and be familiar with the content of these two core documents.

If you have not already read the *General Instruction* and *Celebrating the Mass* then you will find reference to the most relevant sections of both noted in the sheets for each week. Reading these sections week by week will mean that by the end of the six weeks you will have read virtually the whole of each document. If you are pressed for time and have not already read either document you will probably find it more fruitful simply to focus on the passages from *Celebrating the Mass*.

If you are already familiar with the documents then choose what you wish to re-read. You may find the People's leaflets for *In Communion with Christ* will suggest particular matters to re-visit. Additional texts from the Catechism and the writings of Pope John Paul have been provided in this present resource as further 'refreshers' for those who are already familiar with the main texts.

Work sheets are provided so that you can note down and continue to work with the challenges and opportunities you identify in your reading of the documentation, and to assist your reflecting on the liturgical texts and context of the celebration of the liturgy at which you will preach.

What is not provided

It has not been thought useful to provide so-called 'model homilies'. Model homilies produced by people in a different place and at a different time cannot serve your parish assembly so well as a homily you prepare yourself. Hopefully the various materials provided will feed your reflection, but the homily you deliver will be all the better for being your own work, coming from your own reflection on the general principles of liturgy and on the circumstances and experiences of your own community.

That said it will perhaps be helpful to indicate the sort of structural elements that your homily might contain.

A. Describing the Rite

This might be in terms of words used or actions performed. The focus should be on what people hear, see, say or do - the externals. Two examples might be: 'Let us pray' - the invitation to pray before the Opening Prayer; and the Sign of Peace.

B. Reflecting on the liturgical/theological meaning of the Rite

With the first example meanings that might be explored are the significance of the word 'us' - our prayer is as a community; or that prayer is something we are invited to, it can't be forced from us; or that what we are invited to is first prayer in silence together, which is then gathered together into the prayer said on behalf of all by the priest and to which all then assent with the 'Amen'.

With the second example the focus might be on how the sign of peace is not the opportunity for us to be distracted from our prayerful preparation for Holy Communion by going to greet all and sundry, but is a quiet and simple gesture where we remind ourselves that communion with Christ is enjoyed not by each one alone, but in communion with those others who are members of Christ's Body, the Church.

C. Encouraging Participation

Here the challenge is to indicate how the assembly might participate in this element of the liturgy - not simply in terms of 'doing' it but of living it. We know the difference between a sign of peace that is a token and one that engages us. It is not a question of what is done, but how it is done. A fulsome gesture might be more empty of significance than a simple grasp of the hand. Why is it important that we do this? Not just for the liturgy but also for the way that the liturgy rehearses us in the ways we might live as Christian people outside the liturgy. To take the simple phrase 'let us pray' - what a difference it makes when we do, and experience our solidarity with each other, our seeking together to be in communion with the Lord. It not only gives us a clearer experience of sharing in common prayer, but it should make a difference to the way we relate to one another outside of the Mass too.

Put like that our task as homilists might sound daunting, but when it comes down to it surely all this amounts to is doing what all pastors were urged to by the Fathers

of Vatican Council II: 'ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects.' (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 11)

May your work as homilist prove to be fruitful in helping the people of God recognise the saving presence of God in the mysteries they celebrate, and to turn to him still more eagerly, to offer him the spiritual offering of their prayer and their lives re-made in Christ.

Prayer for those with responsibility for presiding at the Church's prayer

Gracious God, eternal Shepherd,
We thank you for the gift of Communion with Christ,
and for calling us to serve your Church
by leading your people in worship.

Guide and inspire us by your Holy Spirit
that we may fulfil this ministry,
to the glory and honour of your name.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

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Preaching

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In Communion with Christ

1. Introduction

With the passing of time, in the light of the fruits that it has brought, one sees ever more clearly the importance of ‘Sacrosanctum Concilium.’ In it are luminously delineated the principles that are the foundation of the liturgical praxis of the Church, and they inspire healthy renewal in the course of time. The Liturgy was placed by the conciliar Fathers in the context of the history of salvation, whose end is human redemption and the perfect glorification of God. The redemption has its prelude in the wonderful divine gesture of the Old Testament and was brought to fulfilment by Christ the Lord, especially through the paschal mystery of his blessed passion, death, resurrection and glorious ascension. Yet it has need not only of being proclaimed but lived, and it is this that happens ‘through the Sacrifice and the Sacraments, on which the whole of liturgical life is based.’ Christ renders himself present in a special way in liturgical actions, associating the Church to himself. Every liturgical celebration is, therefore, the work of Christ the Priest and of his Mystical Body, ‘integral public worship,’ in which one participates, as a foretaste of the Liturgy of the heavenly Jerusalem. Because of this, ‘the Liturgy is the summit toward which the action of the Church tends and, at the same time, the source from which all its virtue emanates.’

With forty years of hindsight, it is opportune to assess progress to date. Already on other occasions, I have suggested a type of examination of conscience in regard to the reception of the Second Vatican Council. Such an examination cannot disregard the liturgical-sacramental life. ‘Is the Liturgy lived as ‘source and summit’ of ecclesial life, according to the teaching of ‘Sacrosanctum Concilium’?’ Has the rediscovery of the value of the Word of God, which the liturgical reform has brought about, found a positive affirmation in our celebrations? To what degree has the Liturgy entered the concrete living of the faithful and to what degree does it reflect the rhythm of the individual communities? Is it understood as a means of holiness, as an inner force of apostolic dynamism and ecclesial mission?

The conciliar renewal of the Liturgy has its most evident expression in the publication of the liturgical books. After an initial period in which there was a gradual insertion of renewed texts within liturgical celebrations, it became necessary to go more profoundly into the riches and potential that they represent. Such profundity must exercise the

Perhaps the most serious lesson to be learned from these last several decades is the almost total lack of thoughtful and sustained catechesis on the liturgy. My suspicion is that too much was presumed of a liturgy in the vernacular. Once the liturgy was in our own language we would have no more need of teaching because each of us would understand it. Just a few words of explanation would suffice, or at least that appears, in hindsight, to have been the operative wisdom.

Now we know differently. To understand the words is not necessarily to understand what we are doing when we gather to give praise and thanks, express our sorrow, pledge our lives, beg for healing or participate in any of the other sacramental moments. I have friends who will admit privately that they don’t participate in the sacrament of reconciliation because they don’t know what to do or say. I know others who still talk about the ‘last rites’ – which is precisely what these rites are not. I know scores of people who do not think there is much difference between a celebration of the Eucharist or a service of word and communion when a priest is not available for Eucharist, yet these are *essentially* different events of prayer.

Kathleen Hughes.

Saying Amen: A Mystagogy of Sacrament.
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Key Texts

**General Instruction
of the Roman Missal**
16–45; 352–385

Celebrating the Mass
1–138

principle of total fidelity to Sacred Scripture and Tradition, authoritatively interpreted in particular by the Second Vatican Council, whose teachings were confirmed and developed in the subsequent Magisterium.

In this perspective it is more necessary than ever to promote the liturgical life within our communities, through an adequate formation of the ministers and of all the faithful, in view of that full, conscious and active participation in the liturgical celebrations envisioned by the Council.

The duty of Pastors is indispensable, in education in prayer and in particular in the promotion of the liturgical life. It implies a duty of discernment and guidance. These is not perceived as a principle of rigidity, as opposed to the need of the Christian spirit to abandon itself to the action of the Spirit of God, who intercedes in us and 'for us with sighs too deep for words' (Romans 8:26). Rather, through the guidance of Pastors, a principle of 'guarantee' is realized, foreseen in the design of God for the Church, being governed by the assistance of the Holy Spirit. The liturgical renewal realized in these decades has demonstrated how it is possible to combine a norm that ensures the Liturgy its identity and its decorum, with room for creativity and adaptation, which render it close to the expressive needs of the various regions, situations and cultures. By not respecting the liturgical norm, one arrives at times at even serious abuses that put in shadow the truth of the mystery and create disturbance and tensions in the People of God. Such abuses have nothing to do with the authentic spirit of the Council and are to be corrected by Pastors with an attitude of prudent firmness.

In the life of the Church, the promulgation of the liturgical Constitution has marked a stage of fundamental importance for the promotion and the development of the Liturgy. The Church that, animated by the breath of the Spirit, lives its mission of 'sacrament, that is sign and instrument of the intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race,' finds in the Liturgy the highest expression of its mystery and reality.

In the Lord Jesus and in his Spirit the whole of Christian life becomes a 'living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God,' authentic 'spiritual worship' (Romans 12:1). Great, indeed, is the mystery that is realized in the Liturgy. It opens to earth a glimpse of Heaven and the community of believers is raised, in harmony with the singing of the heavenly Jerusalem, the perennial hymn of praise: '*Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth. Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua. Hosanna in excelsis!*'

A 'liturgical spirituality' is developing at this beginning of the millennium, which makes one become aware of Christ as first 'liturgist,' who does not cease to act in the Church and in the world in the strength of the paschal mystery continually celebrated, and associates the Church in himself, in praise of the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

Teach me the ritual that runs beyond
The rote of words,
the flexing of the knee:
Let me be always, Lord of Life, with Thee!
In all my motions ready to respond
To Thy unveilings,
though in Scripture conned,
Or in the mid-night's insect melody,
The scent of bloom from desert bush
or tree,
The dawn's reflection in the blushing pond.
How shall I worship only for an hour?
How think Thee present
under dome and spire.
Or sense Thee in the wafer and the wine
Except the common bread and cup
are Thine,
Thine shop and street, the hearth-stone
and the fire,
Thine all the ministries of natural power?

Robert Whitaker (1863-1944)

Spiritus et Sponsa 2, 6-8, 15-16

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Introduction

Starting points

What particular points struck you from your reading of GIRM and/or CTM; from the People's leaflets; or from the other reading material?

In what ways do these particular points challenge or affirm your present practice?

How do you prepare yourself for Sunday and your ministry?

What are the particular strengths of liturgical celebration in your parish?

What particular weaknesses are you aware of?

What are the main points you wish to continue to explore?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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Introduction

Homily notes

How is the liturgy or worship represented or described in:

- today's readings and psalm?
- the Mass propers?
- the preface and Eucharistic Prayer?
- the Ordinary of the Mass?
- the music and songs chosen for use in the Mass?

What place does liturgy or other forms of ritual have in the daily life of your community? What is there to learn from this?

What are the major events in your parish/town at present?

What are the major national/international events at present?

What stories/experiences connect with the theme of liturgy and worship?

And what songs, plays, films, paintings etc.?

Main points to be carried forward into homily

1.

2.

3.

In Communion with Christ

2. Gathering

‘I am with you always, to the end of the age’ (Mt 28:20). This promise of Christ never ceases to resound in the Church as the fertile secret of her life and the wellspring of her hope. As the day of Resurrection, Sunday is not only the remembrance of a past event: it is a celebration of the living presence of the Risen Lord in the midst of his own people.

For this presence to be properly proclaimed and lived, it is not enough that the disciples of Christ pray individually and commemorate the death and Resurrection of Christ inwardly, in the secrecy of their hearts. Those who have received the grace of baptism are not saved as individuals alone, but as members of the Mystical Body, having become part of the People of God. It is important therefore that they come together to express fully the very identity of the Church, the *ekklesia*, the assembly called together by the Risen Lord who offered his life ‘to reunite the scattered children of God’ (Jn 11:52). They have become ‘one’ in Christ (cf. Gal 3:28) through the gift of the Spirit. This unity becomes visible when Christians gather together: it is then that they come to know vividly and to testify to the world that they are the people redeemed, drawn ‘from every tribe and language and people and nation’ (Rev 5:9). The assembly of Christ’s disciples embodies from age to age the image of the first Christian community which Luke gives as an example in the Acts of the Apostles, when he recounts that the first baptized believers ‘devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers’ (2:42).

The Eucharistic assembly

The Eucharist is not only a particularly intense expression of the reality of the Church’s life, but also in a sense its ‘fountain-head’. The Eucharist feeds and forms the Church: ‘Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread’ (1 Cor 10:17). Because of this vital link with the sacrament of the Body and Blood of the Lord, the mystery of the Church is savoured, proclaimed, and lived supremely in the Eucharist.

This ecclesial dimension intrinsic to the Eucharist is realized in every Eucharistic celebration. But it is expressed most especially on the day when the whole community comes together to commemorate the Lord’s Resurrection. Significantly, the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that ‘the Sunday celebration of the Lord’s Day and his Eucharist is at the heart of the Church’s life’.

The day of the Church

The *dies Domini* is also the *dies Ecclesiae*. This is why on the pastoral level the community aspect of the Sunday celebration should be particularly

A few years ago there was an episode on the television series *thirtysomething* in which Michael was anxious about what religious tradition he and his wife, Hope, would offer their new baby. When Hope asked him if he believed in God, Michael blurted out: ‘Sure, I believe in God but God *who?* God *where?*’

There are many important questions homilists must ask themselves about their particular assembly, the biblical pericopes, the liturgical season, their listeners’ ‘habits of the heart’. But foundational to all of these are the questions, God *who?* God *where?* In other words, authentic preachers must always struggle to construct a convincing theology of revelation. People who come to church on Sunday believe in God, but like Michael they are asking the preacher, God *who?* God *where?*

Robert P. Waznak.

An Introduction to the Homily.
Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998. p93

Key Texts

General Instruction of the Roman Missal

46-54; 120-127

Mass with Deacon: 172-174

Concelebrated Mass 199-217

Celebrating the Mass

21-51; 139-151

stressed. As I have noted elsewhere, among the many activities of a parish, ‘none is as vital or as community-forming as the Sunday celebration of the Lord’s Day and his Eucharist’. Mindful of this, the Second Vatican Council recalled that efforts must be made to ensure that there is ‘within the parish, a lively sense of community, in the first place through the community celebration of Sunday Mass’. Subsequent liturgical directives made the same point, asking that on Sundays and holy days the Eucharistic celebrations held normally in other churches and chapels be coordinated with the celebration in the parish church, in order ‘to foster the sense of the Church community, which is nourished and expressed in a particular way by the community celebration on Sunday, whether around the Bishop, especially in the Cathedral, or in the parish assembly, in which the pastor represents the Bishop’.

The Sunday assembly is the privileged place of unity: it is the setting for the celebration of the *sacramentum unitatis* which profoundly marks the Church as a people gathered ‘by’ and ‘in’ the unity of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. For Christian families, the Sunday assembly is one of the most outstanding expressions of their identity and their ‘ministry’ as ‘domestic churches’ when parents share with their children at the one Table of the word and of the Bread of Life. We do well to recall in this regard that it is first of all the parents who must teach their children to participate in Sunday Mass; they are assisted in this by catechists, who are to see to it that initiation into the Mass is made a part of the formation imparted to the children entrusted to their care, explaining the important reasons behind the obligatory nature of the precept.

At Sunday Masses in parishes, insofar as parishes are ‘Eucharistic communities’, it is normal to find different groups, movements, associations and even the smaller religious communities present in the parish. This allows everyone to experience in common what they share most deeply, beyond the particular spiritual paths which, by discernment of Church authority, legitimately distinguish them. This is why on Sunday, the day of gathering, small group Masses are not to be encouraged: it is not only a question of ensuring that parish assemblies are not without the necessary ministry of priests, but also of ensuring that the life and unity of the Church community are fully safeguarded and promoted.

It is also important to be ever mindful that communion with Christ is deeply tied to communion with our brothers and sisters. The Sunday Eucharistic gathering is an experience of brotherhood, which the celebration should demonstrate clearly, while ever respecting the nature of the liturgical action. All this will be helped by gestures of welcome and by the tone of prayer, alert to the needs of all in the community. The sign of peace – in the Roman Rite significantly placed before Eucharistic communion – is a particularly expressive gesture which the faithful are invited to make as a manifestation of the People of God’s acceptance of all that has been accomplished in the celebration and of the commitment to mutual love which is made in sharing the one bread, with the demanding words of Christ in mind: ‘If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift’ (Mt 5:23-24).

Love bade me welcome;
yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love,
observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
If I lack'd anything.

‘A guest,’ I answer'd, ‘worthy to be here:’
Love said, ‘You shall be he.’
‘I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
I cannot look on Thee.’
Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
‘Who made the eyes but I?’

‘Truth, Lord, but I have marr'd them:
let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.’
‘And know you not,’ says Love,
‘Who bore the blame?’
‘My dear, then I will serve.’
‘You must sit down,’ says Love,
‘and taste my meat.’
So I did sit and eat.

George Herber.

John Paul II *Dies Domini*, 31-44

In Communion with Christ

Gathering

Starting points

What particular points struck you from your reading of GIRM and/or CTM; from the People's leaflets; or from the other reading material?

In what ways do these particular points challenge or affirm your present practice?

In what ways are the people of the parish invited to prepare themselves for the celebration of Sunday Mass?

How would you describe the mood in the church before Mass begins? How does this effect the celebration of the Introductory Rites?

What are the signs of hospitality in your parish?

What are the main points you wish to continue to explore?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

In Communion with Christ

Gathering Homily notes

How is the action of gathering represented or described in

- today's readings and psalm?
- the Mass propers?
- the preface and Eucharistic Prayer?
- the Ordinary of the Mass?
- the music and songs chosen for use in the Mass?

Where does this action of 'gathering' take place in the daily life of your community? What is there to learn from this?

What are the major events in your parish/town at present?

What are the major national/international events at present?

What stories/experiences connect with the 'gathering' theme?

And what songs, plays, films, paintings etc.?

Main points to be carried forward into homily

1.

2.

3.

In Communion with Christ

3. Word

The senses of Scripture

According to an ancient tradition, one can distinguish between two senses of Scripture: the literal and the spiritual, the latter being subdivided into the allegorical, moral, and anagogical senses. The profound concordance of the four senses guarantees all its richness to the living reading of Scripture in the Church.

The literal sense is the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation: 'All other senses of Sacred Scripture are based on the literal.'

The spiritual sense. Thanks to the unity of God's plan, not only the text of Scripture but also the realities and events about which it speaks can be signs.

The allegorical sense. We can acquire a more profound understanding of events by recognizing their significance in Christ; thus the crossing of the Red Sea is a sign or type of Christ's victory and also of Christian Baptism.

The moral sense. The events reported in Scripture ought to lead us to act justly. As St. Paul says, they were written 'for our instruction.'

The anagogical sense (Greek: *anagoge*, 'leading'). We can view realities and events in terms of their eternal significance, leading us toward our true homeland: thus the Church on earth is a sign of the heavenly Jerusalem.

A medieval couplet summarizes the significance of the four senses:

The Letter speaks of deeds; Allegory to faith;
The Moral how to act; Anagogy our destiny.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 115-118.

Living by the Word

There has been a renewed interest in the Word of God according to the orientation of the Council which called for a 'more abundant, more varied, and better selected readings of Sacred Scripture.' The new lectionaries, for example, offer an ample choice of Scriptural passages, which constitute an inexhaustible source from which the People of God can draw. Indeed, we cannot forget that 'in listening to the word of God, the Church is built and grows; nor can we forget the wonderful deeds that God has performed in the history

If Christian individuals and families are not regularly drawing new life from the reading of the sacred text in a spirit of prayer and docility to the Church's interpretation, then it is difficult for the liturgical proclamation of the word of God alone to produce the fruit we might expect. This is the value of initiatives in parish communities which bring together during the week those who take part in the Eucharist - priest, ministers and faithful - in order to prepare the Sunday liturgy, reflecting beforehand upon the word of God which will be proclaimed. The objective sought here is that the entire celebration - praying, singing, listening, and not just the preaching - should express in some way the theme of the Sunday liturgy, so that all those taking part may be penetrated more powerfully by it. Clearly, much depends on those who exercise the ministry of the word. It is their duty to prepare the reflection on the word of the Lord by prayer and study of the sacred text, so that they may then express its contents faithfully and apply them to people's concerns and to their daily lives.

Pope John Paul II *Dies Domini*. 40

Key Texts

General Instruction of the Roman Missal

55-71, 128-138

Mass with Deacon: 175-177

Concelebrated Mass 212-213

Celebrating the Mass

68-71, 91-92, 98, 151-173

of salvation, by mystical truths reflected in the signs of liturgical celebration.' Within the celebration, the Word of God expresses the fullness of its meaning, stimulating Christian life in a continual renewal, because 'that which is heard in the liturgical action is later acted in life.'

In our time a renewed need of spirituality re-emerges, in so many forms. How can one not see in this a proof of the fact that in the inner being of man it is not possible to cancel the thirst for God? There are questions that find an answer only in a personal contact with Christ. Only in intimacy with him every life acquires meaning, and can arrive at experiencing the joy that made Peter say on the mountain of the Transfiguration: 'Master, it is well that we are here' (Luke 9:33 par).

Given this longing for the encounter with God, the Liturgy provides the most profound and effective response. It does so especially in the Eucharist, in which it is given to us to be united to the sacrifice of Christ and to be nourished from his Body and his Blood. It is necessary, nevertheless, that the Pastors do so in a way that the meaning of the mystery penetrates in consciences, rediscovering and practicing the 'mystagogic' art, so dear to the Fathers of the Church.

Pope John Paul II. *Spiritus et Sponsa*, 8, 11, 12.

The source from which catechesis draws its message is the word of God:

'Catechesis will always draw its content from the living source of the word of God transmitted in Tradition and the Scriptures, for sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the word of God, which is entrusted to the Church'.

This 'deposit of faith' is like the treasure of a householder; it is entrusted to the Church, the family of God, and she continuously draws from it things new and old. All God's children, animated by his Spirit, are nourished by this treasure of the Word. They know that the Word is Jesus Christ, the Word made man and that his voice continues to resound in the Church and in the world through the Holy Spirit. The Word of God, by wondrous divine 'condescension' is directed toward us and reaches us by means of human 'deeds and words', 'just as the Word of the eternal Father, when he took on himself the flesh of human weakness, became like men'. (And so without ceasing to be the word of God, it is expressed in human words. Although close to us, it still remains veiled, in a 'kenotic' state. Thus the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, has to interpret the word continually. She contemplates the word with a profound spirit of faith, 'listens to [it] devotedly, guards it with dedication and expounds it faithfully'.

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant---
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise
As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind ---

Emily Dickinson

General Directory for Catechesis, 94

In Communion with Christ

Word

Starting points

What particular points struck you from your reading of GIRM and/or CTM; from the People's leaflets; or from the other reading material?

In what ways do these particular points challenge or affirm your present practice?

How effective is the sound system in the Church? Is there a loop system installed for the benefit of the hard of hearing? Is the face of the reader well lit, for benefit of those relying on lip-reading?

What ongoing formation is provided for parish readers?

How are people helped to listen to the word proclaimed?

What helps/hinders people's use of times of silence after the readings?

What are the main points you wish to continue to explore?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

In Communion with Christ

Word

Homily notes

How is the action of hearing and responding to God's word represented or described in

- today's readings and psalm?
- the Mass propers?
- the preface and Eucharistic Prayer?
- the Ordinary of the Mass?
- the music and songs chosen for use in the Mass?

Where does this action of 'listening and responding' take place in the daily life of your community?
What is there to learn from this?

What are the major events in your parish/town at present?

What are the major national/international events at present?

What stories/experiences connect with the theme of listening and responding?

And what songs, plays, films, paintings etc.?

Main points to be carried forward into homily

1.

2.

3.

In Communion with Christ

4. Thanksgiving

'*Mysterium fidei!* – The Mystery of Faith!'. When the priest recites or chants these words, all present acclaim: 'We announce your death, O Lord, and we proclaim your resurrection, until you come in glory'.

In these or similar words the Church, while pointing to Christ in the mystery of his passion, also reveals her own mystery: *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. By the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the Church was born and set out upon the pathways of the world, yet a decisive moment in her taking shape was certainly the institution of the Eucharist in the Upper Room. Her foundation and wellspring is the whole *Triduum paschale*, but this is as it were gathered up, foreshadowed and 'concentrated' for ever in the gift of the Eucharist. In this gift Jesus Christ entrusted to his Church the perennial making present of the paschal mystery. With it he brought about a mysterious 'oneness in time' between that *Triduum* and the passage of the centuries.

The thought of this leads us to profound amazement and gratitude. In the paschal event and the Eucharist which makes it present throughout the centuries, there is a truly enormous 'capacity' which embraces all of history as the recipient of the grace of the redemption. This amazement should always fill the Church assembled for the celebration of the Eucharist. But in a special way it should fill the minister of the Eucharist. For it is he who, by the authority given him in the sacrament of priestly ordination, effects the consecration. It is he who says with the power coming to him from Christ in the Upper Room: 'This is my body which will be given up for you This is the cup of my blood, poured out for you...'. The priest says these words, or rather he puts his voice at the disposal of the One who spoke these words in the Upper Room and who desires that they should be repeated in every generation by all those who in the Church ministerially share in his priesthood.

I would like to rekindle this Eucharistic 'amazement' by the present Encyclical Letter, in continuity with the Jubilee heritage which I have left to the Church in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* and its Marian crowning, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*. To contemplate the face of Christ, and to contemplate it with Mary, is the 'programme' which I have set before the Church at the dawn of the third millennium, summoning her to put out into the deep on the sea of history with the enthusiasm of the new evangelization. To contemplate Christ involves being able to recognize him wherever he manifests himself, in his many forms of presence, but above all in the living sacrament of his body and his blood. The Church draws her life from Christ

Over the years I have assigned theological students the task of finding a piece of art for a Good Friday bulletin cover. They were to bring the picture to class along with a brief meditation on the artist's work that would be appropriate for typing on the back of the bulletin cover.

One student wrote a meditation on the peace and courage we could see in the face of the Saviour as he bore the cross to Calvary. But when we looked closely at the face of Christ in the picture, we noticed that the eyes were dilated, like those of a trapped animal, and the fine muscles at the corners of the mouth and eyes were drawn tense by pain so that the face looked about to crack under the strain. The student's preconceived verbal ideas distorted his ability to see what the artists had actually drawn. The result was a subjective projection that blocked the accurate use of the imagination.

The first task for this student as a preacher was to learn to see the world more accurately until he was able as Rudolph Arnheim has said, 'to understand through the eyes.'

Thomas H. Troeger. *Imagining a Sermon*.
Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990.

Key Texts

General Instruction of the Roman Missal

72-79, 139-151

Mass with Deacon: 178-180

Concelebrated Mass 214 – 236

Celebrating the Mass

93-126, 174-199

in the Eucharist; by him she is fed and by him she is enlightened. The Eucharist is both a mystery of faith and a ‘mystery of light’. Whenever the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the faithful can in some way relive the experience of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: ‘their eyes were opened and they recognized him’ (Lk 24:31).

John Paul II *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 5-6.

A joyful celebration in song

Given the nature of Sunday Mass and its importance in the lives of the faithful, it must be prepared with special care. In ways dictated by pastoral experience and local custom in keeping with liturgical norms, efforts must be made to ensure that the celebration has the festive character appropriate to the day commemorating the Lord’s Resurrection. To this end, it is important to devote attention to the songs used by the assembly, since singing is a particularly apt way to express a joyful heart, accentuating the solemnity of the celebration and fostering the sense of a common faith and a shared love. Care must be taken to ensure the quality, both of the texts and of the melodies, so that what is proposed today as new and creative will conform to liturgical requirements and be worthy of the Church’s tradition which, in the field of sacred music, boasts a priceless heritage.

At the Lamb’s high feast we sing
Praise to our victorious King,
Who hath washed us in the tide
flowing from his piercéd side;
Praise we him, whose love divine
Gives his sacred Blood for wine,
Gives his Body for the feast,
Christ the victim, Christ the Priest.

Anonymous, 7th Century,
tr. Robert Campbell

A celebration involving all

There is a need too to ensure that all those present, children and adults, take an active interest, by encouraging their involvement at those points where the liturgy suggests and recommends it. Of course, it falls only to those who exercise the priestly ministry to effect the Eucharistic Sacrifice and to offer it to God in the name of the whole people. This is the basis of the distinction, which is much more than a matter of discipline, between the task proper to the celebrant and that which belongs to deacons and the non-ordained faithful. Yet the faithful must realize that, because of the common priesthood received in Baptism, ‘they participate in the offering of the Eucharist’. Although there is a distinction of roles, they still ‘offer to God the divine victim and themselves with him. Offering the sacrifice and receiving Holy Communion, they take part actively in the liturgy’, finding in it light and strength to live their baptismal priesthood and the witness of a holy life.

John Paul II. *Dies Domini*, 50,51

In Communion with Christ

Thanksgiving Starting points

What particular points struck you from your reading of GIRM and/or CTM; from the People's leaflets; or from the other reading material?

In what ways do these particular points challenge or affirm your present practice?

If you regularly have to distribute Holy Communion during Mass using the reserved Sacrament how might things be managed better?

What, if anything, stops the singing of the Eucharistic Acclamations?

How is the whole assembly helped to experience the Eucharistic Prayer as being the prayer of the gathered Church, not only of the presider?

What are the main points you wish to continue to explore?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

In Communion with Christ

Thanksgiving Homily notes

How is the action of thanksgiving represented or described in

- today's readings and psalm?
- the Mass propers?
- the preface and Eucharistic Prayer?
- the Ordinary of the Mass?
- the music and songs chosen for use in the Mass?

Where does this action of 'thanksgiving' take place in the daily life of your community? What is there to learn from this?

What are the major events in your parish/town at present?

What stories/experiences connect with the theme of listening and responding?

Main points to be carried forward into homily

1.

2.

3.

What are the major national/international events at present?

And what songs, plays, films, paintings etc.?

In Communion with Christ

5. Communion

Incorporation into Christ, which is brought about by Baptism, is constantly renewed and consolidated by sharing in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, especially by that full sharing which takes place in sacramental communion. We can say not only that *each of us receives Christ*, but also that *Christ receives each of us*. He enters into friendship with us: 'You are my friends' (*Jn 15:14*). Indeed, it is because of him that we have life: 'He who eats me will live because of me' (*Jn 6:57*). Eucharistic communion brings about in a sublime way the mutual 'abiding' of Christ and each of his followers: 'Abide in me, and I in you' (*Jn 15:4*).

By its union with Christ, the People of the New Covenant, far from closing in upon itself, becomes a 'sacrament' for humanity, a sign and instrument of the salvation achieved by Christ, the light of the world and the salt of the earth (cf. *Mt 5:13-16*), for the redemption of all. The Church's mission stands in continuity with the mission of Christ: 'As the Father has sent me, even so I send you' (*Jn 20:21*). From the perpetuation of the sacrifice of the Cross and her communion with the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, the Church draws the spiritual power needed to carry out her mission. The Eucharist thus appears as both *the source* and *the summit* of all evangelization, since its goal is the communion of mankind with Christ and in him with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Eucharistic communion also confirms the Church in her unity as the body of Christ. Saint Paul refers to this *unifying power* of participation in the banquet of the Eucharist when he writes to the Corinthians: 'The bread which we break, is it not a communion in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread' (*1 Cor 10:16-17*). Saint John Chrysostom's commentary on these words is profound and perceptive: 'For what is the bread? It is the body of Christ. And what do those who receive it become? The Body of Christ – not many bodies but one body. For as bread is completely one, though made of up many grains of wheat, and these, albeit unseen, remain nonetheless present, in such a way that their difference is not apparent since they have been made a perfect whole, so too are we mutually joined to one another and together united with Christ'. The argument is compelling: our union with Christ, which is a gift and grace for each of us, makes it possible for us, in him, to share in the unity of his body which is the Church. The Eucharist reinforces the incorporation into Christ which took place in Baptism though the gift of the Spirit (cf. *1 Cor 12:13, 27*).

The joint and inseparable activity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, which is at the origin of the Church, of her consolidation and her continued life, is at work in the Eucharist. This was clearly evident

It may be helpful to emphasise the modesty of the liturgical homily. It is not an exposition of 'the meaning' of a particular passage or of two or three passages from the Bible. It is not a survey of all the possible meanings of the this passage. It is not a complete exposition of the liturgical texts or the meaning of the liturgical action. It is simply a response in faith by a limited human being in a specific situation. I am convinced that the best a preacher can do week-in and week-out with sensitivity to the liturgical assembly, to the assembly's act of thanksgiving, and the scriptures that have been determined for the day is to discern one thing that needs to be said in this situation and to say it imaginatively enough to have an impact. In my experience many a promising homily flounders on the shoals of over-ambition.

John Baldovin,
'Biblical Preaching in the Liturgy'
Studia Liturgica 22 (1992), pages 113-114.

Key Texts

General Instruction of the Roman Missal

80-89, 152-165

Mass with Deacon:181-183

Concelebrated Mass 237-249

Celebrating the Mass

100-102, 107-109, 200-216

to the author of the *Liturgy of Saint James*: in the epiclesis of the Anaphora, God the Father is asked to send the Holy Spirit upon the faithful and upon the offerings, so that the body and blood of Christ 'may be a help to all those who partake of it for the sanctification of their souls and bodies'. The Church is fortified by the divine Paraclete through the sanctification of the faithful in the Eucharist.

The gift of Christ and his Spirit which we receive in Eucharistic communion superabundantly fulfils the yearning for fraternal unity deeply rooted in the human heart; at the same time it elevates the experience of fraternity already present in our common sharing at the same Eucharistic table to a degree which far surpasses that of the simple human experience of sharing a meal. Through her communion with the body of Christ the Church comes to be ever more profoundly 'in Christ in the nature of a sacrament, that is, a sign and instrument of intimate unity with God and of the unity of the whole human race'.

John Paul II *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 22-24

An aspect that must be cultivated with greater commitment within our communities is the experience of silence. We have need of this 'to receive in hearts the full resonance of the voice of the Holy Spirit, and to unite more closely personal prayer with the Word of God and with the public voice of the Church.' In a society that lives ever more frenetically, bewildered by rumours and distracted in the ephemeral, it is vital to rediscover the value of silence. It is no accident that beyond Christian worship, meditation practices are spreading that give importance to recollection. Why not undertake, with pedagogical audacity, a specific education in silence within the confines of the Christian experience? Before our eyes must be the example of Jesus, who 'rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed' (Mark 1:35). The Liturgy, among its different moments and signs, cannot neglect that of silence.

The liturgical pastoral program, through the introduction to the various celebrations, must instil the taste for prayer. It will do so, surely, taking into account the capacity of the individual believers, in their diverse conditions of age and education; but it will do so seeking not to be satisfied with the 'minimal.' The pedagogy of the Church must be able to 'dare.' ... This privileged attention to liturgical prayer is not placed in tension with personal prayer, rather it assumes and requires it, and combines it well with other forms of community prayer, especially if recognized and recommended by the ecclesial Authority.

John Paul II. *Spiritus et Sponsa* 13, 14.

Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life:
Such a way as gives us breath;
Such a truth as ends all strife,
Such a life as killeth death.

Come, my Light, my Feast, my Strength:
Such a light as shows a feast,
Such a feast as mends in length,
Such a strength as makes his guest.

Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart:
Such a joy as none can move,
Such a love as none can part,
Such a heart as joys in love.

George Herbert

In Communion with Christ

Communion Starting points

What particular points struck you from your reading of GIRM and/or CTM; from the People's leaflets; or from the other reading material?

In what ways do these particular points challenge or affirm your present practice?

How do you mark the beginning of the Communion rite as the start of our preparation for Holy Communion?

What helps or hinders the prayerful ministering and reception of Holy Communion in your parish?

What determines whether you have a song of thanksgiving or a time of silence after the ministering of Holy Communion?

What are the main points you wish to continue to explore?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

In Communion with Christ

6. Mission

The Eucharist, Principle and Plan of 'Mission'

The two disciples of Emmaus, upon recognizing the Lord, 'set out immediately' (cf. *Lk* 24:33), in order to report what they had seen and heard. Once we have truly met the Risen One by partaking of his body and blood, we cannot keep to ourselves the joy we have experienced. The encounter with Christ, constantly intensified and deepened in the Eucharist, issues in the Church and in every Christian an urgent summons to testimony and evangelization. I wished to emphasize this in my homily announcing the *Year of the Eucharist*, based on the words of Saint Paul: 'As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes' (*1 Cor* 11:26). The Apostle closely relates meal and proclamation: entering into communion with Christ in the memorial of his Pasch also means sensing the duty to be a missionary of the event made present in that rite. The dismissal at the end of each Mass is a charge given to Christians, inviting them to work for the spread of the Gospel and the imbuing of society with Christian values.

The Eucharist not only provides the interior strength needed for this mission, but is also — in some sense — its plan. For the Eucharist is a mode of being, which passes from Jesus into each Christian, through whose testimony it is meant to spread throughout society and culture. For this to happen, each member of the faithful must assimilate, through personal and communal meditation, the values which the Eucharist expresses, the attitudes it inspires, the resolutions to which it gives rise. Can we not see here a special charge which could emerge from this *Year of the Eucharist*?

Giving thanks

One fundamental element of this plan is found in the very meaning of the word 'Eucharist': thanksgiving. In Jesus, in his sacrifice, in his unconditional 'yes' to the will of the Father, is contained the 'yes', the 'thank you' and the 'amen' of all humanity. The Church is called to remind men and women of this great truth. This is especially urgent in the context of our secularized culture, characterized as it is by a forgetfulness of God and a vain pursuit of human self-sufficiency. Incarnating the Eucharistic 'plan' in daily life, wherever people live and work—in families, schools, the workplace, in all of life's settings—means bearing witness that human reality cannot be justified without reference to the Creator: 'Without the Creator the creature would disappear' This transcendent point of reference, which commits us constantly to give thanks for all that we have and are—in other words, to a 'Eucharistic' attitude—in no way detracts from the legitimate autonomy of earthly realities, but grounds that autonomy more firmly by setting it within its proper limits.

In approaching the Scriptures, whether during Mass or in personal reading and prayer, it is helpful to remember that they give us the definitive answer to the question 'What happens when the love of God takes flesh in our world?' The Scriptures answer that question in the history of the Chosen People, and above all, in the words and action of Jesus himself. The Scriptures also unfold the meaning and implications of that answer, announcing its radical consequences, inviting all to share in its truth. They lay bare the meaning and implication of that answer, announcing its radical consequences, inviting all to share in its truth. They lay bare the dynamic of the 'work of God', the patterns which occur in the lives of all who are caught up in it. Over and over again we see that the sick are healed, the broken-hearted are restored, the arrogant are challenged, the comfortable disturbed, the repentant sinners are forgiven and promises are fulfilled.

Vincent Nichols

Promise of Future Glory: Reflections on the Mass
London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1997, p27f

Key Texts

General Instruction of the Roman Missal

90, 166-170

Mass with Deacon: 184-185

Concelebrated Mass 250-251

Celebrating the Mass

1-17, 217-225

In this *Year of the Eucharist* Christians ought to be committed to bearing more forceful witness to God's presence in the world. We should not be afraid to speak about God and to bear proud witness to our faith. The 'culture of the Eucharist' promotes a culture of dialogue, which here finds strength and nourishment. It is a mistake to think that any public reference to faith will somehow undermine the rightful autonomy of the State and civil institutions, or that it can even encourage attitudes of intolerance. If history demonstrates that mistakes have also been made in this area by believers, as I acknowledged on the occasion of the Jubilee, this must be attributed not to 'Christian roots', but to the failure of Christians to be faithful to those roots. One who learns to say 'thank you' in the manner of the crucified Christ might end up as a martyr, but never as a persecutor.

The way of solidarity

The Eucharist is not merely an expression of communion in the Church's life; it is also a project of solidarity for all of humanity. In the celebration of the Eucharist the Church constantly renews her awareness of being a 'sign and instrument' not only of intimate union with God but also of the unity of the whole human race. Each Mass, even when celebrated in obscurity or in isolation, always has a universal character. The Christian who takes part in the Eucharist learns to become a promoter of communion, peace and solidarity in every situation. More than ever, our troubled world, which began the new Millennium with the spectre of terrorism and the tragedy of war, demands that Christians learn to experience the Eucharist as a great school of peace, forming men and women who, at various levels of responsibility in social, cultural and political life, can become promoters of dialogue and communion.

At the service of the least

There is one other point which I would like to emphasize, since it significantly affects the authenticity of our communal sharing in the Eucharist. It is the impulse which the Eucharist gives to the community for a practical commitment to building a more just and fraternal society. In the Eucharist our God has shown love in the extreme, overturning all those criteria of power which too often govern human relations and radically affirming the criterion of service: 'If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all' (*Mk* 9:35). It is not by chance that the Gospel of John contains no account of the institution of the Eucharist, but instead relates the 'washing of feet' (cf. *Jn* 13:1-20): by bending down to wash the feet of his disciples, Jesus explains the meaning of the Eucharist unequivocally. Saint Paul vigorously reaffirms the impropriety of a Eucharistic celebration lacking charity expressed by practical sharing with the poor (cf. *1Cor* 11:17-22, 27-34).

Can we not make this *Year of the Eucharist* an occasion for diocesan and parish communities to commit themselves in a particular way to responding with fraternal solicitude to one of the many forms of poverty present in our world? I think for example of the tragedy of hunger which plagues hundreds of millions of human beings, the diseases which afflict developing countries, the loneliness of the elderly, the hardships faced by the unemployed, the struggles of immigrants. These are evils which are present—albeit to a different degree—even in areas of immense wealth. We cannot delude ourselves: by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognized as true followers of Christ (cf. *Jn* 13:35; *Mt* 25:31-46). This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged.

John Paul II *Mane Nobiscum Domine* 24-28

I've just come from the fountain,
I've just come from the fountain,
Lord, I've just come from the fountain,
His name's so sweet.

O brothers, I love Jesus,
O brothers, I love Jesus,
O brothers, I love Jesus,
His name's so sweet.

O sisters, I love Jesus,
O sisters, I love Jesus,
O sisters, I love Jesus,
His name's so sweet.

Been drinking from the fountain,
Been drinking from the fountain,
Been drinking from the fountain,
His name's so sweet.

From the African-American Spiritual,
'I've just come from the fountain'
Lead Me, Guide Me. Chicago: GIA, 1987

In Communion with Christ

Mission Starting points

What particular points struck you from your reading of GIRM and/or CTM; from the People's leaflets; or from the other reading material?

In what ways do these particular points challenge or affirm your present practice?

What is done to strengthen the unity of the gathered assembly with the sick and the housebound of the parish?

What formation is given to assist commissioned Ministers of Holy Communion in their ministry with the sick and housebound?

What is your policy about parish notices during the concluding rites? How regularly would other members of the parish speak at this time?

Do you commonly dismiss the assembly and then expect them to stay in their places to sing a final hymn?

How strong is the sense of 'Sunday' continuing to be kept by the parish after they have been at Sunday Mass?

What might be done to deepen awareness of the special character of the Lord's Day?

What are the main points you wish to continue to explore?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

In Communion with Christ

Mission

Homily notes

How is the action of mission represented or described in

- today's readings and psalm?
- the Mass propers?
- the preface and Eucharistic Prayer?
- the Ordinary of the Mass?
- the music and songs chosen for use in the Mass?

Where does this action of 'mission' take place in the daily life of your community? What is there to learn from this?

What are the major events in your parish/town at present?

What are the major national/international events at present?

What stories/experiences connect with the theme of mission?

And what songs, plays, films, paintings etc.?

Main points to be carried forward into homily

1.

2.

3.