

## **THE MASS**

We are true to the liturgy  
when we are true to the MEANING  
of its various parts.

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Sessions prepared for Christchurch Religious Education Office  
for video presentation

SESSION 1	Real Drama
SESSION 2	Participation
SESSION 3	The language of the Liturgy
SESSION 4	Translations; Inculturation.
SESSION 5	Seasons of the Liturgy
SESSION 6	The Gathering Time
SESSION 7	Liturgy of the Word
SESSION 8	Liturgy of the Eucharist
SESSION 9	Holy Communion and Being Sent
SESSION 10	From God, for People

## SESSION 1: REAL DRAMA

Something very dramatic happens in the celebration of Eucharist – and it's not just the change from bread and wine! It is implied in Jesus' words: "do this as a memorial of me." "Memorial" in a biblical sense means so much more than what we mean by remembering.

It was foreshadowed by the Hebrew celebration of the Passover. That celebration gave succeeding generations a way of personally sharing in what had happened at the time of the exodus – at that time the people had passed out of slavery into freedom. The annual Passover gave people of later generations a way of stepping forward and personally participating in what God had done. The exodus was a once-for-all event, but the freedom it brought was meant for those who came after as well. And through the ritual of memorial, they were able to participate in it. Through the ritual of memorial we open ourselves to what God is doing in human history.

What God is doing came to a climax in Jesus' Passover, from death to life. This is what He shares with us in our Baptism. But we then need to *live the gift* we have received, and *make it our own*. We do this in all the ways that we are faithful, but above all in that "memorial" which is the Eucharist. Christians of succeeding generations step forward to personally and more deeply enter into their pass-over from death to life; to living with meaning, freedom and joy, - which is what Christ's Passover gives us.

This passing over *really happens* to us because of our union with Christ; and our union with Christ really happens because in the Eucharist, Christ's presence really happens.

Making this real is the work of the Holy Spirit. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* puts it:

In every liturgical action, the Holy Spirit is sent in order to bring us into communion with Christ and so form his body. (n. 1108)

And that's what the Eucharist is: the Holy Spirit bringing about our union with Christ, so that through union with him we have sure "access to the Father." (cf Ephesians 2:18) It doesn't come better than that!

However, all this is very adult: life has gradually brought us the desire to pass from death to life; the desire to know that those most dear to us are destined for life, and we with them; that our lives and loves and sacrifices and joys are not ultimately all for nothing. Experience brings us to this adult need. But that is not the experience of children and young people – yet.

What they are ready for, however, based on their experience of being loved and of loving, is to know the Person who loves them even more than their parents do. From earliest years they are capable of intimately relating to Our Lord. And the conversation they have with Him needs to be about real life. That is why they should accompany their parents when their parents go to be alongside people who are lonely or needy. Savvy parents know how lead their children into life's realities without prejudice to their children's need for the joys and playfulness of childhood. The Holy Spirit is with children too, and as they gradually learn of Jesus' love for them, they too will experience the desire to spend time with Him, including time at Mass. But if the experience of family love, and love's reaching out to others, and its orientation towards transcendence have not been part of their formation, then don't expect them to see the point of the Mass. Mass only makes sense in its context. And its context is personal companionship with Christ, in the circumstances of real life.

## SESSION 2 PARTICIPATION

Over many centuries, the Catholic people's ability to participate in the Mass was seriously diminished, and there was little or no liturgy formation. This led to forms of piety and devotion that people used as substitutes for the liturgy. Devotions have their rightful and important place, but the Second Vatican Council realized that devotional piety could never be enough to nurture and sustain robust Christian faith in an increasingly secular world. And so the Council wanted people to be able to participate more fully in the liturgy itself. The liturgy links us to the historical events of our salvation. That is where robust faith is focused.

Having distinguished between "unchangeable elements divinely instituted" and "elements subject to change", the Council said the latter

"...not only may, but ought to be changed if, with the passage of time they have suffered from the intrusion of anything out of harmony with the inner nature of the liturgy or have become less suitable. In this restoration both texts and rites should be drawn up so as to express more clearly the holy things they signify. The Christian people, as far as possible, should be able to understand them with ease and take part in them fully, actively and as a community." (*Const. on Liturgy*, n 21)

The Council was aware that the then current Missal had obscured elements of the Church's most ancient tradition. The Council's decisions were based on sound scholarship, pastoral responsibility and faithfulness to the Church's tradition. So when, later on, Pope Benedict XVI allowed the 1962 Missal to continue to be used, he emphasized that the revised Missal issued by Pope Paul VI was to be regarded as the "ordinary" form of the Roman rite, and that the 1962 Missal was "extraordinary"; it was by way of a concession, and was not an alternative ordinary way of celebrating Mass.

Participation doesn't merely mean "doing things". It is first of all allowing ourselves to be absorbed by the mystery unfolding around us; being "taken up" into it. This is essentially a contemplative disposition. We allow ourselves to experience wonder – wonder at the mystery of God and the mystery of God's love for us. "The mystery", St Paul tells us, "is Christ among you, your hope of glory" (Col 1:27)

When we are really aware of being in God's presence, we feel a deep need to respond, by our posture as well as by word or by silence. Posture and gesture are the "body language" of our responding. Liturgical praying is not purely internal and "spiritual", accompanied by suitable bodily postures. Liturgical prayer *includes* our whole person.

Different postures and gestures have different meanings. We stand to greet and to show respect, and to show readiness for action. Standing is the posture of the Easter people lifted up to greet their risen Lord. Kneeling is what we do to express repentance, or adoration, depending on what the liturgy itself is "saying" at a particular moment. Open hands are a sign of reverent asking and receiving.

Our external gestures and responses express our internal dispositions; and they also deepen those dispositions. We become as we do. By acting the liturgy, we are becoming what the liturgy enables us to be – a consecrated, prophetic, priestly people.

And so our actions and responses are those of a community - a congregation acting as “one body, one spirit, in Christ”; (Eucharistic Prayer 3). We are part of the *community's* sense of God's presence; the *community's* worship; the *community's* thanksgiving; the *community's* intercession... Liturgy is personal, but it is not private. We listen -- together; respond -- together; sing -- (more or less) together; are silent -- together.

We should also expect that the reverence shown by a congregation will be different from the reverence we show when acting on our own. In the liturgy, we are simply not on our own. And yet, the united listening, or united movement, or united silence of a congregation can also be a moving experience of reverence. In this part of the world we need look no further than the way Pacific peoples reverently bring the book of the Gospels into the church during the liturgy of the word.

### SESSION 3 THE LANGUAGE OF THE LITURGY

The “language of the liturgy”, here means something much more than just translations. The language of the liturgy is all the ways the liturgy “speaks” to us through its different seasons and colours, its rituals, gestures and movements, beauty, stillnesses, songs and silence. These impact on our senses, memory, mind and heart, and create an environment for contemplative awareness and surrender to the mystery.

In the presence of mystery, our responding depends on language that can never ‘say it all’. What God is doing for us is always more marvelous than we can say. There is always a gap between what we know in faith and how we express it. That is why the language of liturgy involves ritual, symbols, art, posture, gesture, attentive listening, and stillness...more than it involves words. In fact, wordiness can kill the conversation!

We should not under-estimate the importance of silence.

“If the words and symbols of the liturgy are to penetrate the depths of our consciousness, we need silence; if God is to speak to our hearts and transform our lives, we need silence. If we are to be deeply aware of those around us as brothers and sisters, we need silence. (*Exploring the Liturgy*, NZ Catholic Bishops, p 8).

We should feel the need for silence especially after each reading, after the homily, and after Holy Communion.

The church's furnishings also “speak” to us. The main furnishings are the table of the word and the altar, which stand as partners in our celebration of word and sacrament. Because they focus our attention on what is central to the Church's liturgy, they should not have to compete with statues and holy pictures or the tabernacle for our attention. These all have their own rightful places within the church. It is just that they are not usually part of the liturgy.

The liturgy is also “spoken” through music, which is why its songs need to be the songs *of the liturgy* – not other songs *at the liturgy*. It needs to be music that people can sing and enjoy singing. Special motifs sung by a choir, at appropriate times, can also help to create the atmosphere that heightens our awareness of the mystery of God's presence among us. Choirs misuse their position, however, when they become intrusive and oppressive. The liturgy is not the time or place for concert performances.

That is not what the congregation has come for, and it is not good liturgy. It was in order to rid the church of such performances that Pope Pius Xth, in 1903, encouraged simple plain-chant.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) specifies that in the design of each church, the music group should be so located that its character as truly part of the gathered community of the faithful, with a special function to carry out, stands out clearly. The location should also assist the choir to exercise its function... (n 312)

#### SESSION 4 TRANSLATIONS; INCULTURATION

Texts and translations are also part of the language of the liturgy. The purpose of translation into the vernacular languages is to enable the congregation's "full, conscious and active participation" (Const. on the Liturgy, n. 14). Good translations are

- translations that evoke a sense of it being God we are addressing, and therefore a language that is dignified, but without seeming to distance God from ordinary human life;
- translations that are faithful to the meaning of the original texts;
- and translations that respect the people who are using them.

It is on this last point that our present translations fall short, because although the words are in English, the syntax is still in Latin. This happened because the Congregation for Divine Worship and Sacraments wanted the English translation to correspond word for word, phrase for phrase – dictionary like – to the Latin. That restraint was neither theologically required nor linguistically defensible. Translation is essentially an act of communication; if it doesn't communicate, it hasn't trans-lated, i.e. carried across the *meaning* of the original text. Pope Francis' Motu Proprio on this matter allows translations to more fully respect the idioms and syntax of the receiving language, and instructs the Congregation for Divine Worship and Sacraments not to impose its will as it had previously done.

[As I watched Harry and Meghan's wedding I noticed again how beautifully the Anglican liturgy's introductions, prayers, vows and blessings speak of what marriage is – because they have been able to express themselves in the syntax and the idioms of the English language, not in awkward translations.]

It should be noted that when the work of translating and approving translations has been done, there is still the role of the presiding priest. It is his responsibility to ensure that the prayers of the Missal can become the prayers of the people present. The work done by the translators does not excuse him from carrying out his role, which can sometimes require the small adaptations that more effectively communicate the meaning the prayers to a particular congregation.

In response to a query about whether a Bishops' Conference, or local bishop, can impose one option for the sake of uniformity where the liturgy allows several options, the Consilium for the Implementation of the Constitution on the Liturgy replied:

Strictly speaking, this is lawful. But always to be kept in mind is the preservation of that freedom, envisaged by the new rubrics, to adapt the celebration *in an intelligent way* to the particular church, and assembly of the faithful, in such a way that the universal rite is a living reality for this gathering of people. (*Notitiae 1, (1965) 254, n.76; cf Documents of the Liturgy, p. 93*).

That is the mind of the Church.

Akin to the matter of translation is inculturation. Pope John Paul II described inculturation as the “incarnation of the Gospel in autonomous cultures and at the same time the introduction of those cultures into the life of the Church” (Pope John Paul II, *Letter on the Apostles to the Slavic Peoples*, 1985,21). He uses the term “incarnation” which is something more than mere “adaptation” (though he himself, and other Roman documents, still used the latter term.) Pope Paul VI had used a musical metaphor when he described evangelization as a “transposition of the Gospel... in the field of liturgical expression, and in the areas of catechesis, theological formulation, secondary ecclesial structures and ministries” (*Letter on Evangelization*, n 63). – We are a long way short of this kind of “transposition”.

For years, the Church in our country provided a separate “Maori Mission” which ran in parallel with the parishes. An unfortunate side effect of this was that we didn’t feel any need for inculturation in our parishes or our liturgies. As a result, it is difficult, even today, for many practising Catholic Maori, to feel truly “at home” in most of our Sunday congregations and parish activities. For them, it can feel like being at someone else’s place. We need to take seriously Pope John Paul II’s words to the Churches of Oceania:

Adequate translations of liturgical texts and appropriate use of symbols drawn from local cultures can avert the cultural alienation of indigenous people when they approach the Church’s worship. The words and signs of the liturgy will be the words and signs of their soul. (Letter to the Church in Oceania, n.39)

Fortunately, many of our parishes now at least open the Mass with the sign of the cross in Maori, and end with the blessing in Maori, and provide for Maori art in the churches. Some parishes go further, even celebrating scheduled parish Masses in te reo once a month.

#### SESSION 5: SEASONS OF THE LITURGY

These, too, are part of the “language” of the liturgy. They help us to walk through the times and places and events of salvation history. This connecting with the actual events of our salvation puts liturgy on a completely different level from devotions, and gives a wider horizon than particular “themes” or agendas that are sometimes tagged on to Masses. In Eucharist, our connection with Christ’s life is real because his presence is real.

The “language” of each season (including the choice of scripture readings, hymns, colours etc) helps to create the atmosphere proper to each season.

During Advent, the Hebrew people’s longing for the coming of the Saviour becomes our longing for the One who came, and we “look forward to his coming again”. (Eucharistic Prayers 3 & 4).

During Christmas the liturgy’s main motif is wonder – wonder that God would want to be so close to us - among us, sharing our condition. The Churches of the East celebrate God’s coming in this human way mainly as the manifestation of God; - ephiphany.

During Holy Week we walk with Jesus through the last week of his life – becoming more aware of what it cost him personally, and of why He went through with it. Then Good Friday must have seemed the end of everything worth hoping for.

On the following day – Holy Saturday – the disciples must have felt totally abandoned, and that even Jesus had been abandoned. There must have been a feeling of terrible emptiness. The Church echoes this between-time by not celebrating sacraments through Good Friday and Holy Saturday (except in emergencies).

The experience of Easter Sunday morning must have left the disciples feeling beside themselves, both joyful and fearful. Now they knew that not even the feeling of being abandoned by God was abandonment at all; and that sin and death don't have the last word after all.

The liturgical year gets further colour from the feasts of the saints; we recall that they also passed this way - where we are now; and where they are now, we shall be. The Eastern Churches have a strong sense of liturgy being celebrated simultaneously in Heaven and on earth; (witness their priests' coming and going through openings in the iconostasis.) This sense of the liturgy taking place simultaneously in Heaven and on earth is also echoed in the Preface of our Masses.

## SESSION 6 THE GATHERING TIME

The gathering time is more than just “the time before Mass starts”. Our coming out from of our own homes and converging on “Christ among us” already expresses what the Church itself is. One of the most ancient names for the Church was the “assembly” or “gathering” of Jesus’ disciples. Gatherings to hear the word and celebrate Eucharist are a continuation of gatherings that began with the first Easter and Pentecost, and that have never ceased since. They take place in spectacular cathedrals and little country churches, in catacombs and trenches, hospitals and homes.

The space we are entering when we gather should suggest an environment of hospitality. The layout and arrangement of the seats, should help us to see ourselves as one worshipping community.

Church documents envisage two separate spaces – one for where we celebrate the liturgies of the community, and another for private devotion before the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle. Having separate spaces helps to ensure that the activities proper to the liturgy are not inhibited, and that respect for the Blessed Sacrament is not compromised.

The place in a church or oratory where the Eucharist is reserved in a tabernacle should be truly a place of honour. It should also be suited to private prayer so that the faithful... (can) continue to honour the Lord in this sacrament by private worship. Therefore, it is recommended that as far as possible the tabernacle be placed in a chapel set apart from the main body of the church, especially in churches where there are frequently marriages and funerals...(*Instruction on the Eucharistic Ministry*, 1967, n.53)

Arrival at the church is the time for relating – in a subdued and respectful way - to those with whom we shall worship as “one body...”. Various ministries are already active in welcoming, or providing



explanations, or helping the congregation to practise any musical responses that need to be practised. It is not a private time.

The musicians are the ones best placed to signal the dramatic moment when the hubbub ceases and the time for sacred silence begins. We are now readying ourselves to hear God's *life-giving* word. This word doesn't just tell us *about* life and forgiveness, healing and hope and reconciliation – it actually gives us what it tells us. This was how the Old Testament prophets already understood God's life-giving word:

Yes, as the rain and the snow come down from the heavens and do not return without watering the earth, making it yield and giving growth to provide seed for the sower and bread for the eating, so the word that goes from my mouth does not return to me empty, without carrying out my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do; (Isaiah, 55:10,11).

Sacraments, too, are God's saving word – they are God's word at that point where there is simply no gap between what God says and what God does. When Christ says, through someone authorized to speak in his name: "your sins are forgiven", they are. When He says, "this is my body/blood", it is.

By the time the presiding minister prays the Collect, we are all collected – this is a prayer of the whole community, spoken by the presiding minister who speaks for all. Once the Mass is under way, it must be allowed to flow. We are "moving together". Explanations, commentaries and stoppages run counter to this sense of movement. Any pause before or after a particular action must be just long enough to draw attention to what is about to be done, or what has just been done – a pause that helps the community's contemplation – not one that leaves them wondering "what's gone wrong?"

## SESSION 7 LITURGY OF THE WORD

The Council expressed our faith this way:

When the scriptures are proclaimed in the assembly,  
Christ is speaking to his people. (*Const. on the Liturgy*, n.7) – present tense.

And when Christ is speaking to us, NOTHING else should be happening; no movement anywhere. All eyes are on the reader.

This is also why, even if on special occasions some other reading is used, no matter how edifying it is, it can never substitute for the holy scriptures.

This sense of Christ being the One who speaks is also highlighted by the way the Book of the Gospels is presented before the Gospel is read. It is brought to the lectern accompanied by singing and incense, and in some cultures by dancing.

Before the Second Vatican Council, the liturgy of the word was hugely under-valued. The Missal contained only a very limited selection of scripture readings that recurred each year. Now we have a three-yearly cycle of readings for Sundays, and a further two-yearly cycle for weekdays.

Before the renewal, it was commonly taught that one could miss the whole liturgy of the word and still fulfill one's Sunday obligation. The renewed liturgy corrects this legalistic minimalism, emphasizing the

*unity of word and sacrament: Mass is word and sacrament together* – both presided over the ordained minister.

The first reading brings to mind events and teachings from the Old Testament that would have been remembered by the people to whom Jesus spoke, and that He himself could have had in mind. We respond to what we have heard, using prayers the people of the Old Testament used, (the psalms). This is a *response* to the reading; it should not be introduced as if it were another reading. A leader, preferably a cantor, facilitates the response that needs to *arise* from the congregation.

The readers need to know that they not just reading a record of something that was said or done in the past; God “is speaking”; it’s a live broadcast. So, at the end of the reading, they pause – long enough to attract attention - and then say: “the word of the Lord!” - as if to say: “listen, the Lord is speaking to us”. This is more than saying “this is the word of the Lord”, which can mean: “this is something the Lord has said” - past tense.

The scripture readings combined give us a backdrop against which to notice how God has been involved in people’s lives. Through their experience of adversity, God’s people were being challenged to trust. Through their experience of sin and failure, they were being led to experience God’s mercy. By learning to recognize God’s “style,” so to speak, we can more easily notice how God is present in the events of our own lives. Guided by this larger, broader picture of God’s presence, we are less likely to lapse into mere self-reflection and self-perfection.

The homily is in the same vein. It is meant to help us recognize how God is present in our lives. It is about what *God* is doing. This makes it different from a sermon, which is about what *we* should be doing. Repeatedly being told what we should be doing can feel oppressive to people who already know their weaknesses. Whereas, discovering how to God is present in our lives, notwithstanding our weaknesses, encourages and inspires.

The Church also encourages other forms of preaching, including lay preaching (canon 766). Because the homily is part of the Mass itself, it should not be omitted on Sundays or other holy days unless there is a good reason. But good reasons can and do arise, and the paramount need to communicate God’s word effectively sometimes justifies replacing the homily by other forms of reflection, or catechesis, which someone other than the priest can lead, when this helps to better communicate with a given congregation.

## SESSION 8 LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

If we listen carefully to the Eucharistic Prayers at the centre of the Mass, we become aware of the movement and direction of the Mass: we are worshipping the Father, through union with Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Even the gestures - carried out according to the rubrics - symbolize a gradual crescendo in this movement to the Father. At the preparation of the gifts, the bread and wine are raised only “a little” while the priest prays “quietly.” (The highlight is not what “earth has given and human hands have made”, but what God does with them.) What God does with them is what we profess in the acclamation after the consecration when the host and chalice are held up – just enough to “show” them to the

congregation. The prayer reaches its climax when the priest “lifts high” the consecrated elements and proclaims (preferably in song) that all honour and praise are given to God “through Him (Christ), with Him and in Him”. To this we assent with the great “Amen”.

The appropriate posture of the worshipping community at this time is the one that best expresses what is happening at this time. When the focus is on Christ, we kneel or bow low in adoration, as we do at the consecration. But the main focus of the Eucharistic Prayer is on our being raised up with Christ and taken by Him to the Father. For this we should normally be on our feet.

People need to remember the reason for standing, otherwise their standing might be a posture of mere convenience. The early Christians were alive to the reason for standing. St John Chrysostom forbade his people to kneel during the Easter season. The Council of Nicea, (AD 325) forbade kneeling for prayer on Sundays; and when in the ninth century kneeling became more common, it was only on non-festive days, never on the days that commemorated the resurrection, i.e. Sundays and feast days. Standing is still the posture in the Eastern churches. We rise and stand for the Gospel, out of respect for the One speaking to us. Standing is sign of respect. Of course, we must allow people who are aged or indisposed to sit as they need.

It is hardly surprising that the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* re-states the traditional posture of standing for the Eucharistic Prayer, and kneeling if possible for the consecration, or otherwise making a profound bow (similar to the priest concelebrants); - *a deep bow and respectful bearing are signs of the reverence and adoration to be shown at the time of the consecration.* (GIRM art. 43.) It presupposes that we are standing.

The most recent revision of the Missal adds that retaining the practice of kneeling where this custom has developed is “laudable” (notice, not prescribed), but leaves decisions on this to the Bishops’ Conferences. Where this custom is retained, care should be taken not to reinforce the idea that the priest is celebrating the Mass and the people are “attending” Mass – (“Father’s Mass”). In fact, this is how we used to think; it needed to change because it is the *whole congregation* that celebrates the Eucharist:

“It is the whole *community*, the body of Christ united with its Head, that celebrates”. (CCC n 1140)

- always understanding “celebrate” as “do this in memory of Me”.

Within that celebrating community, the ordained priest’s role is to give voice and visibility to what Jesus himself is doing in the midst of the gathered priestly people. Ordained ministers do not act “on behalf of “ Christ; – it Christ himself who is acting. Ordained ministry is the outward sign of what *Christ* is doing:

There is only one pastor of the Church and he is Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. All that priests do as pastors is serve Christ’s own pastoring of the Church. There is only one priest in the Church, Jesus Christ, and all that Christian priests do is to be the sacramental presence of Christ’s own priesthood. There is only one teacher of the Church, Jesus Christ, and all that priests do is give voice to Jesus who speaks through them as the Word of life for their hearers.

As priests preside over the Church’s liturgy and over the Christian community, they do so only as servants of Christ who alone is Head of the Church. (Bishop Michael Putney, *The Prayer of the Priest*, 2005 )

## SESSION 9 HOLY COMMUNION &amp; BEING SENT

When Jesus speaks of giving us his “body” and “blood” He is saying “it is my very self that comes to you”. In the Hebrew way of speaking, “body” stood for the whole person, and “ blood “, the living person. Reference to his “ body ... *given up*” and his “ blood ... *poured out*” was to his death, - as the culmination of the sacrifice of his whole self and whole life for us. And by telling us to “take ... eat” / “take ... drink”, he was inviting us to participate in the sacrifice He was making, in the customary way that people participated in sacrifices, i.e. through the meal – by eating and drinking. (Meal and sacrifice are not competing concepts!)

This union with Christ becomes the basis of a deeper union with one another. As St Paul says: “... though there are many of us, we form a single body because we have a share in this one loaf”. Belonging to Christ and belonging to others go together. We just can’t have Christ without his friends. We recognize this in the sign of peace: at the very time when we are about to receive Christ in the sacrament we acknowledge Christ present in those next to us. That makes this gesture different from a greeting (which will have taken place before Mass begins). Because the sign of peace has a different meaning, it is given differently: it is an expression of reverence.

It is a principle of sacramental theology that sacraments are celebrated and received “humano modo”, i.e. in the way that humans act. That is why Holy Communion is given and taken in the manner that adults give and receive food, which is from hand to hand. And for infants and disabled people food and drink are given directly to their mouths. It is not as if one way were more reverent than the other.

Regarding hygiene, especially at times when spreadable diseases are about, it is a matter of charity, moral responsibility and common sense to minimize the spread of infections - in the way we give the sign of peace, and in the ways that Holy Communion is given and received – and in the way the priest speaks over the Host and Chalice. A policy statement from the Auckland Diocesan Liturgy Commission published in *Liturgy*, 1997, gives a useful list of examples.

Mass ends with our being sent. Pope Benedict and Pope John Paul II both taught that if our celebrations of Eucharist do not spill over into our lives, our Eucharistic celebrations “lack authenticity”.

The Second Vatican Council taught that “the split between the faith that many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age” (Church in the World, n.43) A proper understanding of what Holy Communion means should obviate that error, because when the consecrated elements are held before the communicant, the minister proclaims: “the body of Christ”/“the blood of Christ”, to which the communicant responds “Amen”, meaning “yes, I commit to being one with the “body given up for others”; one with the “blood (life) poured out for others”. In other words, going out to be Christ to others belongs to the very meaning of Holy Communion.

This echoes the experience of Peter, James and John, when they were given a privileged time with Jesus on the mountain where He was transfigured. Peter wanted it to end there: “let’s build tents and stay here”! But Jesus made it clear that the good times were but preparation for the hard times; they were to come down from the mountain, on to the plains, and among the people. That’s what we are doing when we are “sent”.

The “notices” should name some of the ways we do carry our holy communion out into our lives.

## SESSION 10 FROM GOD, FOR PEOPLE

Liturgy is about what God is doing – much more than about what we are doing. In the liturgy, we are on sacred ground.

But the Christian community has a responsibility to safeguard this treasure. The Church has appropriate norms for doing this. Canon lawyers make an important distinction between canon law and liturgical norms:

The sharp distinction between canon law and liturgical norms follows from the natural difference between the external structures of the Church, and its intimate life of worship. Each needs to be ordered and regulated, but in different ways. The main *purpose of the canons* is to build, to support, and to safeguard the necessary societal structures. The *aim of liturgical norms* is to help the community to recall God's mighty deeds and to experience God's presence through the celebration of the mysteries. In this difference of intent there is an important clue regarding the interpretation of each set of norms.

There should be stability in the external order; hence, exceptions from structural and disciplinary laws should not be easily granted. There should be flexibility in worship according to the spiritual needs of the people: hence, adaptations should be more easily forthcoming. (*The Code of Canon Law, A Text and Commentary*, Ed. James Coriden, 1985, p 26)

In similar vein, Pope John Paul II speaks of how the renewed liturgy allows for both safeguarding the "identity and decorum" of the liturgy, and appropriate "creativity and adaptation" respecting different situations and cultures; (see *The Spirit and the Bride*, 2003, n 15).

What the liturgical books allow for in that regard should find a corresponding mindset in those who celebrate the liturgy. We should all want to safeguard the "identity and decorum" of the liturgy; there is no place for abuses of the liturgy. And we should all value the "creativity and adaptation" that help to ensure the liturgy engages each given congregation; there is no place for the kind of rigidity that can inhibit people's ability to engage.

Where does rigidity come from? Times of social change, and change in the Church, can give rise to feelings of insecurity. That is normal. How we live with that is what counts: for some, their need for reassurance is expressed in their concern for clarity and orthodoxy; for others, less important markers of identity will take on disproportionate importance. Others again will want to return to some golden age that never really was. Some will feel obliged to impose their own rigidity on others.

The fact is, we all happen to live during a relatively recent and still unfinished development, namely a devolution from more paternalistic ways of leading people and of being led, to a greater acceptance of personal responsibility. This development is based on a greater appreciation of personhood and of the priority of conscience.

Progress in this direction has had a bumpy ride within the Church. Several human and civil rights that we now take for granted were originally condemned by Popes Pius IX and Pius X. There are some who still long for styles of exercising authority that were typical of feudal societies. They feel the need for law and order and compliance at all costs. They seem to have forgotten how this often resulted in immature dependence instead of growth in personal responsibility. In reality, however, our pastoral guidance, sacramental practices, and participation in a pluralist society, must function within these complexities.

Misuses and abuses of the liturgy, therefore, include:

- leading, or participating, in a merely routine or perfunctory manner.
- accommodating the Mass to our culture's need for being entertained (as if Our Lord's death and resurrection could be "celebrated" in that sense!)
- taking liberties that obscure the original meaning of a rite or a text;
- failing to inculturate or accommodate in the sense allowed by the liturgical books;
- substituting non-scriptural readings for the word of God;
- wordiness that disallows key symbols to speak to us through our other senses;
- inhibiting or excluding people's participation e.g.
  - by not allowing sufficient scope for young people to take lead roles;
  - by allowing choirs to inhibit or exclude the role of the congregation.

In a word: accommodations which obscure the *givens* of the Church's liturgy, or which make it harder for people recognize those givens, are aberrations. On the other hand, accommodations which enhance people's ability to *enter into those givens* help to fulfill the spirit and purpose of the law and the liturgy.