

Liturgy

NEWS



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THE NEXT SIXTY YEARS

Over lunch recently with a group of seven people, the topic of the Second Vatican Council came up. We were discussing the sixtieth anniversary of the liturgy document when someone pointed out that I was the only person there who was alive in 1963. I was a teenager already and remember it well.

I realised then that the Council was rapidly entering the category of 'history', even though there is still much that we need to understand and implement. The process over the last six decades has been one of learning. This means that there have been mistakes and misguided enthusiasm, along with very significant change and growth. However, the phase of reception is still unfinished. That is why there are so many diverse understandings of what the Council asked and intended.

One thing is certain. We cannot just mine the Council documents to uncover a simple blueprint for today's pastoral strategies.

For a start, the world now is radically different from that of the 1960s when laptops and the internet, mobile phones and social media were all still in the future. These things alone have profoundly changed the way we see ourselves and the way we relate to one another and communicate, even in the Church. The Council could not have possibly imagined how the world and the Church would change. It does not make much sense therefore to keep asking 'what did the Council say' as though it had ready answers and solutions to the issues of our day.

In fact, even at the Council there were great debates about issues which have continued to occupy our attention in the last sixty years. Many of these were not resolved at the time of the Council. Instead contrasting statements were placed side by side to enable the bishops to agree on a

document – at least each could identify a statement which expressed his personal understanding. For example, how to articulate the local and universal aspects of the Church is an issue still playing out in questions about inculturation and adaptation in the liturgy. Even particular matters such as the use of Latin or the type of music to be used in liturgy remain the cause of debate and division.

What the Council did do was to embrace change, deliberately leaving open many areas for future clarification and decision. The Council established trajectories and we are still in the process of seeing where they lead. We cannot argue that liturgical developments should now be stopped or reversed because they have gone beyond what the Council asked or imagined. The Council Fathers intended to open vistas for future exploration.

The directions for further development are established – it is now a matter of discovering what they call us to do. There has been a shift from an ecclesiology centred on ordination to a baptismal ecclesiology. We have come to see the liturgy as the communal action of the whole baptised people and this affirms that Christ is actually the celebrant of the liturgy. Thus, by our 'full, conscious, active participation', we are drawn into the paschal mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection and it is in the Church's worship that we encounter Christ. However, to experience this reality we need the eyes to see and understand symbols and the sacramental signs. They open up for us windows to the sacred.

When the Second Vatican Council set up its program for reform, it encouraged the elimination of 'useless repetitions' and the establishment of short, clear liturgical rites, noble in their beauty and simplicity, that could be understood without much explanation. This has been very helpful in clearing away the obscure accretions of the centuries. But how is this now to be carried forward? Perhaps it is time to enrich our liturgical forms with dimensions that are more colourful and diverse. This is beginning to take place through the interchange of cultures. Growing organically from the bones of the Roman rite, popular devotion can help us listen to the voices of other cultures, loosen clerical control and promote opportunities for more visual and affective participation.

One of the unforeseen results of the liturgical reform has been a narrowing of the possibilities for liturgical celebration. The Church's worship is easily reduced to the celebration of Eucharist which becomes, not the summit and source, but the whole mountain. If the borders between liturgy and other communal prayer became a bit more fuzzy, we might be able to open up new opportunities for liturgy, less focussed on the priest, and more inclusive of those who currently find themselves at the edges.

Another example. Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* calls the Church to engage with issues relating to the environment and the care of our common home. He raises issues of justice and an equitable share in the world's resources. He encourages us to see ourselves not as masters of creation but part of creation. The vision of this encyclical moves us from an anthropocentric mindset to accept our place in a 'communion of creatures'.

The seeds of such a broader vision of the liturgy (a glimpse of the eschatological 'new heaven and new earth') are already there in our liturgical texts. *All you have created rightly gives you praise... you give life to all things and make them holy* (EP III). This liturgical vision includes not only human beings, but also animals and forests. The role of human beings is that we can give voice to all the creatures which God has made and blessed. *We... confess your name in exaltation, giving voice to every creature under heaven...* (EP IV).

By embracing change and encouraging zeal for the promotion and restoration of the liturgy, the second Vatican Council has given us a model of tradition which is not traditionalism or historicism, but rather one of organic growth. As we seek to embrace the vision and spirit of the Council, we are called to forge a living tradition for the next sixty years.





OPEN HANDS AND HEARTS



by John Fitz-Herbert

Some Catholic parishes across Australia are culturally diverse and others are becoming increasingly multicultural. Seeing this phenomenon with 'the eyes of faith' is to recognise diversity in the Body of Christ as a gift to the local Church. To welcome this gift of diversity into our worshipping communities is to stand together with open hands and hearts. People of every race and culture who make up the community of faith are coming together to offer communal praise and thanks to God, to grow together in the call to holiness for the life of all.

In *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), Pope Francis wrote: *When properly understood, cultural diversity is not a threat to Church unity. The Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, transforms our hearts and enables us to enter into the perfect communion of the blessed Trinity, where all things find their unity. He builds up the communion and harmony of the people of God. The same Spirit is that harmony, just as he is the bond of love between the Father and the Son. It is he who brings forth a rich variety of gifts, while at the same time creating a unity which is never uniformity but a multifaceted and inviting harmony. Evangelisation joyfully acknowledges these varied treasures which the Holy Spirit pours out upon the Church. We would not do justice to the logic of the incarnation if we thought of Christianity as monocultural and monotonous* (EG 117).

For a growing number of parishes, this diversity is seen in the priest presider, especially in parishes with multiple churches and whose boundaries extend for hundreds of kilometres. Some years ago my dad became 'a grey nomad', travelling from the east coast to the west coast of Australia, hauling his vintage caravan. When he returned many months later, I asked him about his experience of Mass in the various parishes he visited. He said something like this: *Well, John, if it weren't for the priests from overseas, we wouldn't have been able to celebrate Mass!*

Many parishes are also experiencing growing cultural diversity in the members who make up the Sunday assembly week after week. It might even be that people from other cultures and nations -- those who speak languages in addition to English and who have made Australia their home -- are now the backbone of the parish.

Questions

Against this backdrop, exciting questions arise about the celebration of the liturgy. What might it mean to celebrate the Church's liturgy interculturally? Might it be that celebrating the liturgy interculturally is a Spirit-led response to God's shaping us and renewing us to be the diverse people of God we are and are called to be? Supposing that the celebration of the liturgy is a rehearsal of how we are to live with others in the world, what might intercultural liturgy evoke within us so that we might better live God's mission in a diverse world?

In addressing these issues, I would like to trace an evolution from monolingual liturgy, through multilingual and multicultural liturgy, to intercultural liturgy.

The first, *monolingual liturgy*, sees an assembly celebrating in one language – normally it is the group's dominant language or a gathering of people across a region who speak the same language. Over many years we have seen notices in parish bulletins alerting parishioners to 'Mass in French' or a 'Chinese Mass' or an invitation to join the Italian community for Mass. Those attending expect the entire liturgy to be celebrated in the one language. Some parishes have Masses in other languages on a given Sunday of the month.

Multilingual liturgy occurs when two or more languages are used in the one celebration. The languages spoken by various groups in the parish would find a place in the parish Sunday Mass. Some conferences of bishops around the globe provide guidelines and recommendations for the spoken and sung words in several languages.

For example, there might be a marriage between a couple whose families come from two language groups. The couple might decide the scriptures are to be proclaimed in several languages so that all present may hear the word of God. Sometimes the text is spoken in one language and printed in the other.

Hymn composition offers another possibility. There are hymns now written in two or more languages. We see compositions in English and Spanish or in Vietnamese and English. So, for example, at Christmas, a parish could sing the first verse of *O Come All Ye Faithful* in Latin, the following verse in English, and the next in another language.

Multicultural liturgy goes beyond languages. It incorporates various gestures and customs, symbols and signs that are part of a particular cultural usage. Again two examples will help us see how other signs may be incorporated into the liturgy.

Filipinos bring a tradition of honouring Mary called 'Flores de Mayo' (Flowers of May). It is often celebrated during the Easter season. It will be marked differently depending on what part of the Philippines the people come from. Rituals within the Mass might include the procession of an image of Mary which is placed on a special table decorated with flowers. Later in the liturgy, the younger members of the community might offer flowers to Mary. It becomes a cross-generational experience, too, as grandparents and parents mentor the young ones in this offering ritual. Music from various Filipino languages is part of these processions (There are 120 languages spoken in the Philippines).

A second example: parish members from Samoa might dress parts of the church, altar and ambo in woven floor coverings. Traditional dress – the

puletasi for females and linen *lavalava* for males – might be worn. At the preparation of the gifts, the procession of bread and wine will often include a garland of fresh flowers placed around the neck of the presiding priest, fresh flowers around the altar, and offerings of food for the priest and those in need. Samoan families and community members also wear different clothes to celebrate funerals.



The timing of annual multicultural liturgies varies across Australian parishes. Some parishes hold a multicultural Mass on Australia Day, 26 January. The Preface at the start of the Eucharistic Prayer prays: *For from ancient times you made this land a home for many peoples ... And so, we lift our voices to you this day... with the people you have made your own, from every race and tongue, every place and time...*

Other parishes celebrate their multicultural Mass on Pentecost Sunday. It seems a neat fit with the scripture reading describing the first Pentecost Day in Jerusalem: *they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak foreign languages as the Spirit gave them the gift of speech* (Acts 2:1-11) or the second reading which acknowledges that *there is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of service to be done, but always to the same Lord; working in all sorts of different ways in different people, it is the same God who is working in all of them* (1 Cor 12). These texts proclaim the action of the Spirit which creates the unity and diversity of the Christian people. Adding the other liturgical texts for Pentecost, we have a good liturgical context for the celebration of a multicultural community of faith.

Here in Brisbane, the cathedral church of St Stephen holds a multicultural Mass annually on *World Refugees and Migration Sunday* in September. All parishes and cultural communities within the Archdiocese are invited to *share your cultural faith expression and celebrate the diversity of the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Brisbane*. This year's theme was 'Building the Future with Migrants and Refugees'. The Mass was celebrated by the archbishop and was followed by cultural performances and diverse foods in the cathedral grounds.

I have also seen Multicultural Sunday marked on the final Sunday of the liturgical year, Christ the King. Whatever day is chosen for an annual multicultural event, I would like to think that there really is something important to celebrate here. It holds up a mirror to ourselves and rejoices in the richness of our Christian life – the inclusion of peoples, the diversity of cultures, the gift of peoples' primary cultural heritage, and the unity the Spirit brings from those of every race and tongue.

Celebrating who we are

Australians are a diverse mob – diverse in culture, nation, race. This has changed enormously in the decades since Federation in 1901. For the first fifty years, government policy privileged the reception of migrants from Anglo-Celtic backgrounds and did not welcome our neighbours from Asia, especially China and Pacific Island nations. In the aftermath of World War II, Australia began receiving people who had survived the war and wanted a new start for themselves and their families. This broadened our diversity. From 1949 to 1973, governments progressively abandoned what was commonly called the 'White Australia Policy' and diverse people from other cultures, nations and parts of the world were welcomed to Australia. We have also come to recognise and value the First Peoples of our nation. The 'face of Australia' is a rich mosaic of amazing diversity.

This challenges us to take the next step, to move from a multicultural approach to an intercultural one. Under a multicultural rubric, different cultural traditions and languages are acknowledged and juxtaposed. An intercultural approach involves listening to and learning from one another. Here there is interaction between the cultural customs and symbols, the mindset and values of different peoples. Something new emerges out of such mutual reciprocity.

Intercultural liturgy means working together with open hands and open hearts. It will reshape the language and music of the liturgy, its gestures and movement, its vesture, architecture and art. The community of believers is invited into a new experience of God. It will involve a sharing of liturgical preparation by the cultural groups in the parish, even from those whose numbers might be small, lest larger cultural groups in the parish dominate.

This work is not new. In 2008, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops produced *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* which encouraged parish musicians to move toward intercultural liturgy: *When prepared with an attitude of mutual reciprocity, local communities might eventually expand from those celebrations that merely highlight their multicultural differences to celebrations that better reflect the intercultural relationships of the assembly and the unity that is shared in Christ* (59). In 2012, the USA

Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions published *Liturgy in a Culturally Diverse Community: A Guide Towards Understanding*. It suggested that *preparing authentic 'intercultural liturgy' requires a long-term commitment of the parish (especially the pastor himself) that prioritises the development of a real intercultural parish identity and the empowering of all the cultural groups of the parish*.

An intentional move towards intercultural liturgy would mean a parish is attentive and alert to who makes up the parish and thus who is celebrating the liturgy. A first step would be to discover from census data what is the actual composition of the parish population (see abs.gov.au and ncpr.catholic.org.au). Then, those who prepare the parish liturgy could begin to move from a once-a-year multicultural event to intercultural liturgy throughout the liturgical year. Liturgical music may include the languages, styles and genres of local cultures – the whole assembly might learn some responses, refrains and antiphons in other languages. The commemoration of the saints opens possibilities for particular cultural groups to shape the parish liturgy – a growing Korean community might be invited to share their commemoration of the Korean martyrs, for example. Rostered liturgical ministers, church décor for the liturgical seasons, liturgical objects (communion vessels, processional cross, etc) may all reflect the diversity within the worshipping community. The homilist can draw on stories and events from the cultures of parishioners who are migrants or refugees. Particular religious devotions or festivals might enrich the whole parish community – the Filipino Advent customs of Simbang gabi, for example, or the blessing of foods at Easter. The Christmas crib may be prepared by different cultural groups in the parish year by year. With imagination and respectful listening, the possibilities are endless.

Led by the Spirit, ever ancient and always new, our parishes might breathe new life into the community of the baptised if they were prepared to appreciate the gifts all bring from their cultures and to invite them into the celebration of the liturgy. Members of the parish might learn through the liturgy what it means to live interculturally in a complex world where difference may be experienced as a gift and where shared gifts create unity and respect, harmony and peace for all.

As Ruth Duck wrote in her 1991 hymn:

*Diverse in culture, nation, race,
we come together by your grace.
God, let us be a meeting ground
where hope and healing love are found.*

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The Liturgical Context Matters

Proclaiming the Scriptures

by Clare Schwantes

Worshippers arrive and gather in the church for a liturgical celebration. Energy begins to build. There is a sense of expectation as the community stands to sing the opening hymn and the procession moves through the liturgical space. People observe the colour of the liturgical vestments, the Lectionary or Book of the Gospels elevated in a position of honour, and the altar servers walking reverently with candles. At the conclusion of the Introductory Rites, the people sit with a sense of anticipation. The reader approaches the ambo.

It is intriguing to ponder the mindset with which each person then experiences the scripture proclamation. Are people aware of the inherently corporate nature of the event in which they are taking part, or are they inwardly focused on their personal encounter with God? When the Scripture readings are proclaimed, do people feel addressed as members of the Church and perceive implications for the community, or are they searching for clarity or insight about their personal life circumstances?

When the Lectionary readings are proclaimed in the midst of the assembly, people are immersed in a unique context: it is a very different engagement with Scripture when compared to the experience of reading the Bible in solitude. In this liturgical context, people hear scriptural passages proclaimed aloud, juxtaposed beside other biblical readings according to the Lectionary's unique structure, all while being surrounded by the ecclesial community and immersed in the multisensory context of the liturgy. So, what is it about the liturgical event that sets it apart as a unique context for engaging with Scripture?

The Proclamation as Communal and Social Event

Despite cultural and societal trends towards individualism in modern times, the hearing of Lectionary texts in the liturgy is a communal activity and a complex social event. The common action of word, song and gesture in the liturgy has a powerful impact in the formation of a social identity and the establishment of an ecclesial community within which worshippers receive meaning in the scriptural proclamation. This stands in stark contrast to the modern concept of reading, where a reader sits alone and silent before a written text, engaged in a private and disembodied activity.

The liturgical proclamation is addressed to a group of people, not to solitary individuals. Members of the assembly gather not as independently spiritual persons, but as members of the Body of Christ who experience a sense of physical and social embeddedness in the community while listening to the scriptural proclamation which is addressed to them. A personal encounter and moment of conversion can undoubtedly take place in the liturgical event, but the context of the liturgy makes it a vastly different sort of encounter to that which may occur when sitting in solitude and reading a passage from the Bible.

The tension between the public, ritualised proclamation of the Scripture texts, and the inward movement towards silent reflection must be preserved. In this way, the experience of receiving the proclaimed Scripture texts in the liturgy is profoundly personal, without being individualistic. It is also deeply communal and forms both personal and communal identity.

Sacramental Encounter

The distinguishing feature of the scriptural proclamation in the liturgy, which sets it apart from other contexts in which people might engage with biblical texts, is the premise that Christ is sacramentally present and speaking in the assembly. *Christ is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the Church* (SC 7). The sacramental presence of Christ is assured once more in the General Instruction on the Roman Missal: *When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his word, proclaims the Gospel* (GIRM 29).

It is important to note that the sacramental presence of Christ in the word resides not in the book but in the proclamation to the assembly which constitutes a living event. American priest and professor of liturgy and sacramental theology, Paul Janowiak, describes the presence of Christ in the scripture proclamation as *a complex circulation of grace-filled energy*. It becomes clear that, in the ritual proclamation of the Lectionary readings, there is not only an encounter between God and humanity, but also an encounter of faith among human beings.

The proclamation of Scripture in the Mass forms part of a single act of worship with the celebration of the Eucharist which follows (SC 56). The Introduction to the Lectionary emphasises this unity: *The Church is nourished spiritually at the table of God's word and at the table of the Eucharist: from the one it grows in wisdom and from the other in holiness. The spoken word of God brings to mind the history of salvation; the Eucharist embodies it in the sacramental signs of the liturgy* (GIL 10).

Thus, in instances where a celebration of the Eucharist is not possible, the assembly is assured of the sacramental presence of Christ and their communion with him through the proclamation of Lectionary pericopes in which they are fed from the table of the word. This has particular importance for remote communities who regularly participate in Sunday Celebrations of the Word due to the unavailability of a priest.

Potentiality to Actuality

Just as a musical score is no more than a series of black marks on paper until the musicians take up their instruments and transform the written marks into musical sound, so too Scripture remains dormant in a state of future potentiality until it is proclaimed and actualised. Jesuit philosopher and professor of English literature, Walter Ong, described a parallel between the Victorian art of pressing flowers between the pages of a book and living words on the pages of a closed book. The flowers become dry and lifeless, yet all their details are exquisitely preserved. Words pressed within a book are not dead, however, but rather exist in a state of *potentiality* until the

book is re-opened and the words spoken. In the Catholic tradition, the liturgical proclamation is the primary context for converting the otherwise dormant letters of the Lectionary readings into living words addressed to a contemporary community.

Of course, in modern times, scriptural texts are no longer confined to black marks on the page of a sacred book that resides in the church building; they are readily accessible in a variety of translations with associated commentaries, in both printed and electronic formats. An Internet search instantaneously displays any chosen part of the Bible, while a variety of apps can display the Lectionary readings assigned to any given liturgical day. In a highly literate society where people are accustomed to having personalised and immediate access to texts, it may seem questionable to assert that Lectionary texts are only actualised through proclamation in an ecclesial community and within a ritual context.

Yet, the study of orality and literacy recognises that when a text is read aloud in a public forum, meaning is conveyed not only through the content of the text, but also through the very act of its being proclaimed publicly. The ritual act of proclaiming scripture in public not only attributes to the texts a sense of continuity and enduring wisdom, but affirms their normative status in and for the Church.

Written and Oral Texts

Scripture texts are the product of an oral tradition, in which writing was simply a way of carrying and preserving spoken words across time and distance until they could be re-sounded again in the community. The texts chosen for inclusion in the bible were selected because early Church communities repeatedly used them in liturgical gatherings, and the texts thus became a treasured communal memory. The biblical texts, in their original language, are rich with oral features such as rhyme, rhythm and repetition. These characteristics were designed to assist in the hearing of the texts, rather than facilitating their comprehension in silent reading.

Even though literacy levels and access to texts are considerably greater today than they were in the early Church, a Lectionary is nonetheless printed solely for the purposes of oral proclamation and aural reception. The readings fall into the categories of both written and spoken text which give them a distinctive influence. As written text, the lections convey a sense of authority and permanence; as spoken words they embody the qualities of presence, participation, connection and involvement.

The Homily

The homily continues the liturgical hearing of the sacred texts, illuminating a focus from the readings and exploring implications for the contemporary

assembly. On any liturgical day, the same Lectionary text is heard, albeit in the various vernacular languages, in every parish around the world, and must be mediated to convey meaning to each specific congregation. Indeed, it could be argued that the homilist should spend as much time interpreting the local community and their specific socio-cultural reality as they do interpreting the Scriptures.

It is helpful to view the homily as a dialogical event rather than an instance of unidirectional communication; that is, an internal dialogue takes place in the mind of the listener. The homilist speaks to the community as one with them, as a 'questioning listener' embedded in the same culture and time. Ultimately, of course, those listening to the homily may formulate new questions and perceive new insights not foreseen or intended by the homilist.

Multi-sensory Signs and Symbols

The context of the liturgical event is rich in multi-sensory elements. Visually the congregation absorbs the arrangement of the architectural space, the appearance of the sacred books, the baptismal font, ambo and altar, the celebrant's vestments, the presider's gestures, movement and postures, candles, processions, liturgical colours, sacred vessels, works of religious art in the worship space, the way the light falls, and the rest of the assembly gathered around.

The auditory sense is stimulated with spoken words, instrumental sounds of the musicians, the singing of the cantor and assembly, bells which might be rung, the creaking of pews as the assembly stands and sits, and the cries of infants and small children. The sense of smell is engaged when incense is used on solemn occasions, when sacramental oils are used at Baptism and Confirmation, at the fire of the Easter Vigil, and more generally in the unique smells that inhabit a particular church building.

The tactile sense is engaged in the bodily experiences of sitting, standing, genuflecting, moving in procession, sharing a sign of peace, and receiving communion. Sitting after the opening prayer indicates a preparedness for listening as a collective group and facilitates a reflective stillness in the moments of silence between each reading. Standing to greet the gospel denotes a degree of heightened reverence and attentiveness. The incorporation of the sense of taste at the reception of holy communion completes the engagement of all five senses.

All these non-verbal elements promote a profound affective response which facilitates an encounter with the Lectionary readings that goes far beyond the texts themselves. The sensory elements and symbolic actions that form part of the liturgical event not only support and complement the Scripture readings but become a significant part of the total message being transmitted.

Singing

The place of singing in the Catholic liturgy cannot be overlooked as an influence on the interpretation of Scripture texts. Singing is an integral part of Sunday celebrations; *whoever sings well prays twice over* (GIRM 39-40). The words and images of Scripture are not only uttered by the reader, cantor or presider in the liturgy but are also placed on the lips of the assembly in the responsorial psalm. Hymnody also provides rich avenues for the words of Scripture to be sung by the assembly, and invites the people to revisit the themes of the readings, meditate upon them and dwell longer on the words as they fit the melodic contour. The words of Saint Paul come to mind: *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly... and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God* (Col 3:16).



Silence

Without intentional moments of silence, with almost everything spoken or sung aloud, little time or space is kept for reflection or the perception of new insights. Providing time before the Liturgy of the Word allows worshippers to prepare their hearts and minds to receive the sacred texts. Moments of communal silence after each reading, and after the homily, provide necessary space for worshippers to enter into an internal dialogue with the sacred texts and with the words of the homilist, prompting the emergence of new meaning.

Silence in a liturgical context is different from just being quiet. *Silence is not an inner haven in which to hide oneself in some sort of intimate isolation, as if leaving the ritual form behind as a distraction.* Instead, the assembly falls quiet together, with an awareness of the dynamic social energy that is circulating, such that the liturgical silence is a symbol of *the presence and action of the Holy Spirit who animates the entire action of the celebration* (Pope Francis, *Desiderio Desideravi* 52).

Full, Conscious and Active Participation

In this year of the sixtieth anniversary of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, it is timely to recall one of its key premises, that each person present at the liturgy is a 'doer' of the liturgical action by virtue of their baptism. The full, conscious and active participation called for in SC14 has inevitable implications for scripture interpretation in the liturgy.

The bodily gestures, postures and processions in the liturgy draw together the external and the internal, establishing a mutual relationship between thoughts, words, and actions and creating a unique context in which to interpret the scripture readings. It is important to note, however, that active participation not only encompasses observable movements but also spiritual participation through listening, reflecting, and engaging sensory and cognitive faculties.

In an ideal scenario, participation is encouraged when the readings proclaimed are articulate and audible, and the assembly is quiet and attentive. However, the reality of many liturgical events is quite different. Parents with small children may be distracted for several minutes at a time, people may be absorbed with other concerns, or may be unfamiliar with liturgical texts and rituals. The reader's voice may be barely audible due to an ineffective sound system, or a strong accent may make the words difficult to decode. The work of active participation required of the assembly during the Liturgy of the Word is a skill which requires practice and nurturing, and which may occur with varying degrees of success because of particular circumstances.

Biblical Fragments

The proclamation of Lectionary readings in the Liturgy of the Word is not the only time when Scripture is heard in the Catholic liturgical event. Biblical fragments pervade the Catholic Mass from beginning to end and take on new meanings according to their position in the liturgy. Before coming forward to receive communion, for example, the people say together: *Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed* (RM 704). Most would recognise that this prayer corresponds to the biblical words of the centurion who trusted in the ability of Jesus to heal his servant from afar (Lk 7:6-7).

In the liturgical context, the words of the centurion are placed on the lips of the assembly, reminding them to adopt the centurion's attitude of faith and humility, and to approach the sacrament as recipients of Christ's healing. The recitation of this Scripture text by the assembly week after week adds a new layer of meaning which becomes embedded in their minds such that they cannot hear these words of Luke's gospel without perceiving eucharistic connotations.



Sent Forth on Mission

The closing words of the liturgy always send the assembly forth on mission, issuing the challenge to take the fruits of their sacramental encounter with Christ into their families, workplaces, schools and sporting clubs. In gathering to be nourished and transformed through the scriptural proclamation and through the Eucharist, the worshipping community opens itself to critique; there is an expectation that there will be some evidence of this transformation permeating the wider world. The ritual activity of the assembly becomes a paradigm for the work of that same community beyond the liturgy, fulfilling the words of Scripture by feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, sheltering the homeless.

Drawing meaning from the Scriptures in the liturgy is therefore a function not of the text alone, but of the complex network of interrelationships that draw together people, symbols, texts, actions and sensory stimuli in the communal worship event. The text is activated in us as we go out to live what we have proclaimed.

Text and Context

Having heard the Scriptures proclaimed and shared from heart to heart, from faith to faith, worshippers go forth renewed and inspired. The energy of the voice of Christ has changed them. In word and song, in reflection and silence, the word – indeed the Word – has been received. The communal encounter with Christ has formed a people into the Body of Christ. Christ has readied them and strengthened them to continue his work in the world.

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I EARLY LENT AND EASTER.

by Elizabeth Harrington

Parish liturgy teams will have been busy preparing for the celebrations held during the Advent-Christmas seasons. Liturgy leaders will be well and truly ready to put their feet up and catch their collective breaths. But no rest for the wicked – and precious little more for the good, as a dear departed friend of mine always added! In just a few short weeks, on 14 February (yes, Valentine's Day) we keep Ash Wednesday.

Surely a month or more is plenty of time to gear up for Lent. Perhaps it is for those in the northern hemisphere, but here in Australia? It is summer holiday time. Schools, universities and some parishes are closed for much of January. The holidays end with Australia Day, a long weekend which is the last chance for many people to get away. Schools start up again at the end of January and tertiary institutions around 19 February – after the first Sunday of Lent.

It is difficult enough at the best of times, but an early Lent makes liturgy preparation a special challenge. Ash Wednesday can occur as early as 4 February, but we needn't worry about this: it will not occur until 2285! Lent beginning before mid-February however is not that rare: we will encounter this problem in 2027, 2029, 2032... I suggest that there will be less stress if committees started doing some forward planning in January.

Ash Wednesday is one weekday other than Christmas when Catholics go to church in good numbers. Being marked with ashes as a sign of mortality and repentance remains important in

Catholic liturgical spirituality. A prayerful Ash Wednesday observance goes a long way in helping believers to enter the Lenten season in the right spirit. Communal prayer, the ritual of the ashes, familiar Lenten readings and hymns provide the context out of which the journey of renewal and continuing conversion proceeds. It would be time well spent then to think ahead. Who will prepare the ashes? Who will minister the ash cross? What words will they use? (*Repent, and believe in the Gospel* is more likely to resonate people today than the older formula *Remember that you are dust...*) Will the school children take part?

One area where some advance organisation and planning is needed is the catechumenate. The Rite of Election occurs probably in the cathedral on the first Sunday of Lent. Catechumens and godparents, candidates and sponsors, along with members of the parish RCIA team need to have the date in their diaries to keep it free. Catechumens will need preparation so that they understand what happens during the Rite of Election and what they are required to do and say.

Many parishes hold weekly discussion groups during Lent. These need to be in place so that they can begin meeting in the week of Ash Wednesday. Who will be the group leaders, where will they be held, are the resources in hand...?

Because of the short time available to us in Australia before Lent begins, it is good to develop a strong liturgical tradition in the parish. This will simplify the Lent planning process:

- ◆ Do not reinvent the seasons each year; start with what was done in previous years.
- ◆ When planning Lent, keep the Triduum and Easter season in mind.
- ◆ No *Gloria* or *Alleluia* is sung. Music is kept to a minimum with instruments used only to accompany the singing of the assembly. Using a seasonal psalm, a common Mass setting and common hymns throughout Lent will make planning simpler. Singing during the preparation of gifts or at the end of Mass may not be needed.

◆ The tone is one of restraint and simplicity: flowers are used sparingly, decorations understated. During Lent there should be more times of silence in the liturgy.

◆ Appendix V of the Missal offers model General Intercessions for Lent. Solemn Blessing 5 (For the Passion of the Lord) may replace the Prayer over the People on all Sundays of Lent.

It might also be helpful to keep a few features of that liturgical season in mind and this can make the task less daunting.

◆ The first four weeks take their direction from the readings, penitential rites and the rites related to the Catechumenate (RCIA).

◆ On the fifth Sunday of Lent, the focus shifts to Christ's passion.

◆ Holy Week is the last week of Lent that runs until the beginning of the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday.

◆ The Triduum (Latin for 'three days') refers to the period from the evening of Holy Thursday until the evening of Easter Sunday.

The appropriate symbols for liturgies in Lent are given to us:

◆ Ashes - a symbol of humility, purification and sorrow; a sign of willingness to cleanse our heart through prayer, fasting and self-denial.

◆ Cross - this sign clearly symbolises Christianity and leads us to Easter.

◆ Purple - Purple or violet is the penitential liturgical colour.

People are sometimes surprised by the first Preface of Lent which calls Lent *this joyful season when we prepare to celebrate the paschal mystery with mind and heart renewed*. Lent is certainly marked by seriousness but, contrary to certain stereotypes, it is also a time of joy. Lent is not a period of guilt-laden introspection, but a time to bask in God's mercy, a joyful walk towards the great season of Easter, the summit of the liturgical year.

■ Elizabeth Harrington has been Education Officer with Liturgy Brisbane. She was a teacher and pastoral associate.

II Learning from one another. Working with one another.

by Anne Frawley-Mangan

The invitation to help prepare the opening liturgy for the *Mystery and Mission* national conference in September was too good to be true. I would be working with a treasured colleague, Ryan Gato, who is a leader in faith formation with the Catholic Schools Office in Maitland-Newcastle. AND we were to include within the ritual a Welcome/Acknowledgement of Country. AND we were allocated considerable half-hour timeslot to do the job well. This was a dream come true.

Over many years of working together in large gatherings, our dream was to integrate First Nations elements throughout the prayer. We were no longer content with a five-minute 'Welcome' and then onto the whitefella parts. Indeed our Indigenous Australian friends have never been satisfied with this either, but perhaps accepted it because it was better than nothing – at least they had some voice.

When we began, we had not planned any part of the prayer. Out of respect, we could not go to an Aboriginal elder with a complete plan and tell them where they slotted in. Actually, the prayer really was not finalised until the rehearsal, the day before the conference began. The rest of the conference prayer team found this difficult and it required a lot of trust on their part. However, this 'synodal' approach is the way First Nations people have related for millennia.

So, first things first. We needed a respected elder to guide us. We approached Aunty Evelyn Parkin, a Quandamooka woman from Minjerribah (Stradbroke Island) to work with us. She grew up in the Catholic faith and holds a Master of Theology degree. Like the Virgin Mary, not knowing where it would lead, she said, yes.

When we met in person to dream together, we listened to Evelyn sharing her faith journey. The words of her story became flesh. For a long time, she had struggled to integrate her Indigenous spirituality with her Catholic Christian heritage. That is, until John's gospel took root in her...*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God...* She learned that the Spirit who was around their campfires in the earliest times could be called by another name: Jesus. With great joy, she realised that Jesus had been hidden in her Aboriginal story from the very beginning, from the dreaming.



Evelyn's words painted pictures of Spirit, fire, smoke, water, light. These stories of memory and journey, passed from generation to generation, meant that her people knew where they had come from, and so they could know how to keep going.

Her gentle words led us to the Easter Vigil where we too gather around a fire, follow the light, share our stories, sprinkle and baptise with water and the Spirit. We remember in order to make present. And so the shape of our opening ritual prayer was born.

Evelyn's story, the words and images of the Easter Vigil, smoking and fire, water, scripture and song in both languages, were integrated, while retaining their own integrity within each tradition. Other Indigenous Australians joined us; we talked together and they assisted us in shaping the acknowledgement, music, a water blessing and sprinkling, prayers and action.

We made a 'campfire' in the sacred space, and Aunty Evelyn insisted that the First Nations participants sit together with her at the campfire because 'my people do things together'. As the opening liturgy unfolded in word, song and symbol, the 500 participants at the Conference found themselves also sitting at the fire, united by a deep connection in the Spirit.

Feedback from participants suggests that this integrated way of praying and giving voice to our shared stories of faith was deeply moving. The voice of our First Nations brothers and sisters in Christ was cherished and honoured. Hearts were opened to receive God's message and faith was shared in the words, images, symbols, songs, ritual and silence.

■ Anne Frawley-Mangan is sacramental and pastoral coordinator at the parish of Albany Creek in Brisbane.

COMMUNION FROM THE CUP

Reintroduced in many dioceses at Eastertime after a hiatus for the epidemic, communion from the cup is gradually getting back to 'normal'. Around Australia, the level of practice does depend on the parish and the enthusiasm with which the pastor promotes the fullness of the sacramental sign. Many parishes, however, report an uptake of 70 or 80% of the congregation who drink from the cup.

Obviously, it is never compulsory because, under either the sign of bread or wine, we receive the living Christ. Yet the fuller sign of communion from the cup is important. It expresses more clearly that the new covenant is ratified in the blood of Christ, that in communion we participate in the paschal sacrifice of the cross and resurrection, and that our communion is a foretaste of the banquet of heaven.

With a recent rise in the number of Covid cases, some parishes are asking if communion from the common cup should be halted for a period. This would be a retrograde step. As in every other sphere of Australian society, it is up to the individual to decide what safety measures to take. Those who are vulnerable would refrain. But the norm is clear. Jesus says: take this bread and eat; take this cup and drink. It is an integral part of the sacramental sign and is not just an optional extra.

CATHOLIC LUTHERAN COMMUNION

Over the last five years, a seminar group of Catholic and Lutheran scholars within the North American Academy of Liturgy has been working on full communion between the Churches. In June 2023, they released a statement "On the Way to Full Communion: Thinking about Christian Unity from Liturgy". Examining Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry in turn, the group identified

areas of mutual agreement as well as some areas where further learning needs to take place.

The short document concludes with this extraordinary affirmation:

As together we explored and identified solutions for the remaining differences between our two communions, the positive results of our seminar lead us to invite both of our churches to consider taking bold action. On the basis of our liturgical methodology (lex orandi/lex credendi) we have found that agreement between Lutherans and Roman Catholics is such that there should be no obstacle to eucharistic sharing and that there are no significant obstacles to the mutual recognition of ministries. These conclusions are founded on a liturgical ecclesiology rooted in baptism. Today as the Christian world faces considerable challenges, we can no longer fear to take those steps which will witness to the world our reconciliation and our unity for which Christ prayed (John 17:22).

EVERYONE, EVERYONE, EVERYONE

There is room in the Church for everyone, said the Pope in Lisbon recently, repeating the word 'everyone'. At the end of October 2023, the Vatican Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, in answer to a question from Brazil, allowed transgender and homosexual people to be godparents at a Catholic baptism, witnesses at a Catholic wedding, and to be baptised themselves. Likewise, children of same-sex couples, whether adopted or conceived through a surrogate mother, may be baptised.

The same conditions apply to these celebrations as they would to any other sacramental rite in the Church. For baptism, there must be a well-founded hope that the child will be raised or the newly baptised adolescent or adult will live within the faith community of the Church. A godparent must be able to make a profession of faith and support the child's growth as a Christian. This leaves some space for discernment and pastoral prudence in these cases, but there is no exclusion. *The Church is not a customs house, says the response, but*

the fatherly home in which there is room for every person with their difficult life. Transgender and same sex people are recognised for their human dignity and for their belonging as Catholics.

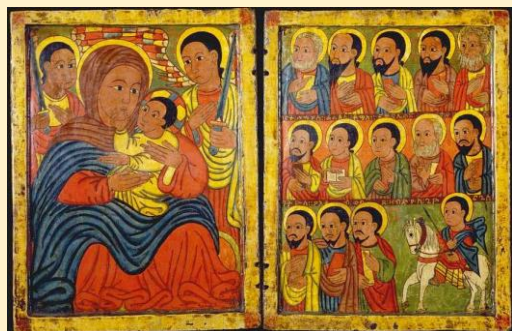
Then, in December, the same Dicastery reminded 'rigorist' Catholics that women who have had children outside marriage can and should receive holy communion and have their babies baptised. It quoted Pope Francis who praised their bravery. *I know it is not easy to be a single mother... but you respected life, respected the life that you had inside you... The ecclesial community should value the fact that single mothers welcomed and defended the gift of life they carried in their wombs and struggle, every day, to raise their children.*

PASTORAL GESTURES



Making Nazi symbols and gestures illegal has recently been on the agenda in various parts of Australia. Many Christian Churches use an extended hand and arm for a gesture of blessing. In the Catholic Church, the presider will often use such a gesture for the absolution or final blessing. On other occasions, the whole assembly may be invited to extend hands over a person or group to receive the blessing of the Church. It is important that the arm and hand for this gesture not be so stiff or rigid that it could look like a Nazi salute. The words, of course, and the liturgical context give the sense of the gesture, but this will not be evident in a photo. Make sure the elbow is bent and the fingers spread somewhat to avoid any possible misinterpretation.

WOMEN'S PLACE



After the recent Synod in Rome, Pope Francis used an interesting image to speak of the place of women in the Church. Pointing out that women's ordination is a theological problem, not an administrative one, he said that it cannot be reduced to functionalism. He contrasted what he called the Petrine principle and the Marian principle. The 'Petrine' refers to the mandate given to Peter by Christ which is continued by the pope, the bishop of Rome. Together with the college of bishops, this leadership covers jurisdiction. The second principle, the 'Marian', refers to the Virgin Mary image of the Church as mother. The Church is the Bride of Christ; the Church is woman (often portrayed in early Christian art as the 'orans' figure, a woman who prays with her hands extended). The pope affirmed that the Marian is a more important principle than the Petrine: Mary is more important than Peter.

(Illustration: Ethiopian Diptych 1450 *Virgin Mary and the Apostles*)

A THEOLOGICAL APPROACH

On 1 November 2023, Pope Francis released a statement setting out a contemporary perspective on theology (Motu Proprio *Ad theologiam promovendam*). While he is speaking of the teaching of theology, it is interesting to consider his pastoral and contextual approach in relation to liturgical principles as well.

A synodal, missionary and 'outgoing' Church can only correspond to an 'outgoing' theology, he writes. Theology with a 'pastoral' stamp uses an inductive method that starts from different contexts and the concrete situation in which people live.

Theological reflection is therefore called to a turning point, to a paradigm shift, to a 'courageous cultural revolution' which commits it, first of all, to being a fundamentally contextual theology, capable of reading and interpreting the Gospel in the conditions in which men and women live daily, in different geographical, social and cultural environments. The Incarnation of the eternal Word is the archetype, Christ's entry into culture... Starting from here, theology can only develop in a culture of dialogue and encounter between different traditions and different knowledge, between different Christian confessions and different religions, openly engaging with everyone, believers and non-believers alike. The need for dialogue is in fact intrinsic to the human being and to the entire creation, and it is the peculiar task of theology to discover the 'Trinitarian imprint' in the web of relationships that makes the cosmos...

IN MEMORIAM



COLIN BUCHANAN (1934–2023) was an English liturgical scholar and, since 1985, an Anglican bishop. He is well known to liturgy people around the world through his constant attendance at Societas Liturgica meetings over forty years. He would arrive at the biennial congress with a suitcase full of the Grove Booklet Series which he had founded, which he edited and for which he wrote. These small scholarly texts, he sold to defray the costs of attending the conference. His colourful contribution to church life will be missed. *May he rest in peace.*

CREMATION

The 2016 provisions for keeping a person's ashes after a cremation have been loosened slightly. These rules forbid the sprinkling of a person's ashes in nature or keeping them at home – a person's remains are treated with respect whether it is their body interred in a grave or their ashes kept in a sacred place.

The new arrangements now allow for a small part of the ashes to be retained in a place of significance for the history of the deceased, such as the home. It also allows for a common sacred place where the ashes of various deceased persons may be placed together, for example, in a memorial garden. This possibility also offers a solution for the expiry of a columbarium contract when a person's ashes can no longer be kept in a columbarium.

We wish you all a very happy Christmas!

OUR COVER

LITURGY SNAPSHOTS:

Sing to the Lord

Music above all has the ability to unite the assembly in one voice of praise and to lift the spirit to God. Sacred song, closely bound to the text, forms an integral part of the liturgy, makes worship more noble and offers the opportunity for the active participation of all the people (SC 112-113).

Choirs, cantors, organists and other instrumentalists exercise a key ministry of service in leading the Church's worship; they need to be gifted and competent to exercise this ministry well.

Music has a special role to play in liturgical inculturation. People's own religious songs and musical traditions are important in shaping their attitude to faith and in adapting worship to their own culture. Thus, a sense of ownership and belonging in the liturgy is encouraged (SC 119). Local composers, filled with the Christian spirit, have a special vocation in this regard (SC 121).

PRAYING INTERCESSIONS

It is worth reminding ourselves of the structure of the Prayer of the Faithful at Mass. First, people are invited to pray for an intention: it is an invitation, not a prayer; it presents a topic, not an analysis.

Second, there is silence while the assembly prays.

Finally there is a communal response, sung or said together.

One parish in Brisbane has introduced a way of praying the Universal Prayer that works well. It goes like this:

Reader: For peace in the Ukraine and the Middle East, we pray...

(significant silence).

In your mercy, Lord, hear us.

All: In your mercy, Lord, hear our prayer.

BLESSING GAY COUPLES and THE DIVORCED-REMARIED

On 18 December 2023, a declaration from the Vatican set a significant new direction in the pastoral care of LGBTQ+ Catholics and those who are divorced and remarried. The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith allowed priests to bless these couples even though this had been forbidden in 2021.

The declaration, *Fiducia Supplicans*, reflects on the nature of blessing: it is ascending in that it praises (blesses) God; it is descending in that it invokes God's grace upon (blesses) us and our world. The document recognises that even irregular relationships contain much that is good and for which we are thankful: love and mutual care, commitment and fidelity.

Like the sacraments themselves, blessings are not for the perfect. *'When one asks for a blessing, one is expressing a petition for God's assistance, a plea to live better, and confidence in a Father who can help us live better.'* This request should, in every way, be valued, accompanied, and received with gratitude. People who come spontaneously to ask for a blessing show by this request their sincere openness to transcendence, the confidence of their hearts that they do not trust in their own strength alone,



their need for God, and their desire to break out of the narrow confines of this world, enclosed in its limitations (FS 21).

Obviously, there should be no confusion that such blessings constitute a kind of marriage – the church doctrine on the nature of marriage has not changed. Therefore, formal ritual texts and procedures should be avoided so that a blessing is not seen as a liturgical act which legitimises an irregular situation. A priest will not administer a blessing during a second marriage or a civil ceremony of a same-sex union.

In such cases, a blessing may be imparted that not only has an ascending value but also involves the invocation of a blessing that descends from God upon those who—recognising themselves to be destitute and in need of his help—do not claim a legitimization of their own status, but who beg that all that is true, good, and humanly valid in their lives and their relationships be enriched, healed, and elevated by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

These forms of blessing express a supplication that God may grant those aids that come from the impulses of his Spirit – what classical theology calls 'actual grace' – so that human relationships may mature and grow in fidelity to the Gospel, that they may be freed from their imperfections and frailties, and that they may express themselves in the ever-increasing dimension of the divine love.

Indeed, the grace of God works in the lives of those who do not claim to be

righteous but who acknowledge themselves humbly as sinners, like everyone else. This grace can orient everything according to the mysterious and unpredictable designs of God. Therefore, with its untiring wisdom and motherly care, the Church welcomes all who approach God with humble hearts, accompanying them with those spiritual aids that enable everyone to understand and realise God's will fully in their existence.

... God never turns away anyone who approaches him! Ultimately, a blessing offers people a means to increase their trust in God. The request for a blessing, thus, expresses and nurtures openness to the transcendence, mercy, and closeness to God in a thousand concrete circumstances of life, which is no small thing in the world in which we live. It is a seed of the Holy Spirit that must be nurtured, not hindered (FS 31-33).

These spontaneous blessings by the priest should conserve the style, simplicity and language of popular piety, rather than the more formal structures and vocabulary of liturgical prayer. It is not envisaged that bishops conferences would prepare texts or publish rites.

These new possibilities express clearly the Church's respect and care for every human being made in God's image and likeness. They demonstrate that all the baptised belong to the Body of Christ and share in Christ's mission in the world. They recognise that all human beings are sinners in need of God's grace and with room to grow in the life of the Spirit.

THE POWER OF INVITATION

by Paul Corfield

Recently at St Laurence's College in Brisbane, staff and students were invited to participate in a process of sacramental preparation for initiation into the Church. Much to our surprise, some 40 students and two staff members responded to this invitation. We were humbled by the number of students who wished to make such an important decision in their faith journey.

The College is a Catholic community that prides itself on forming young people through an education that immerses them in the gospels through programs of service and advocacy. Our students show an openness to spirituality through their involvement in retreat programs that allow them to break open the gospels and connect the message to their own context. Students participate regularly in Masses and other liturgical celebrations.

As an inner-city school in a central location, we do not draw our students from a local area with just a few feeder schools. Our student population travels from afar, coming from all parts of Brisbane and adjoining areas. This can present a challenge for us to connect our students with parish life. Luckily, through members of our music staff, the College has had strong links with a parish a few kilometres away at Toowong, but developing a connection with the local parish at Dutton Park also became vital.

The parish connection is often lost when students begin at St Laurence's in Year 5. It can perhaps be taken for granted in Catholic primary schools which are part of a parish. In this situation, the APRE works with the parish sacramental team to integrate the children as they prepare for Confirmation and First Communion. Moving out of this context from Year 5 means that many students also miss out on completing their Christian initiation. For many, the school is the faith community they belong to.

Through the RE program, we teach the sacraments and I have found that, during these units, many students express a desire to belong to the faith community and to celebrate the sacraments. We wanted to be able to offer them this opportunity.

It started with a conversation early in the year that I had with our Coordinator of Culture and Solidarity, Dr Anthony Young. Within minutes we found ourselves on the phone to Liturgy Brisbane, asking how we could make a sacramental program a lived reality at our College. Some Catholic secondary schools are associated with a religious order of priests who also staff the neighbouring parish. Our school does not have such a connection, making it all the more necessary that we align ourselves with the local parish. We are very grateful for the understanding and generous hospitality of the pastor and people of Dutton Park who enabled us to undertake the preparation leading to sacraments of initiation. They were very open and willing to work with us and helped us through on many occasions.



With the approval of the parish in place, we put out the invitation to the school community. We expected perhaps a dozen interested people, but the numbers kept coming in. With so many participants, we initially thought this process would be overwhelming, but we were able to gather the necessary documentation and the journey of discovery began.

I worked with Susan Harris, another staff member from our Religious Education department, to put together the necessary elements of the formation process. The challenge was that members of the group ranged from Years 5 to 11, so we had to figure out a way to make it engaging and accessible to everyone. The College has a timetabled formation program every fortnight and we were able to make use of this time slot. Thus it was accessible to busy students who have after-school training and Saturday sports. Staff made themselves available for extra sessions and these were great as they became facilitated discussions about our faith journey and the meaning behind the sacraments. The fortnightly formal learning sessions ran over the course of terms two and three.

Again, Liturgy Brisbane were very helpful with providing us with resources and modules from a variety of different areas, so getting this together never felt overwhelming. A key element was the Archdiocese of Brisbane RCIA resource for 9-16 year-olds, *Crossroads RCIA* (see <http://crossroadsrcia.org/>). This was augmented with the Liturgy Brisbane sacramental resources, the *Our Family Prepares* series, and also the adult RCIA resource *At Home With God's People* for the older students and the staff members. It helped that many of the sacraments are embedded in different year levels as part of our RE curriculum, so the students came to us with some background knowledge already.



Prayer and liturgy were an essential part of the catechumenal formation. Students regularly participate in the Mass through four whole-College celebrations as well as the House Masses each Friday. The students in the group often attended the Friday Mass together after their formation session. Because of the exceptional work of people like Dr Anthony Young, we have a strong culture of student voice participation. Not only are they very aware of the parts of the Mass but they also take part enthusiastically in singing.

In the week leading up to the celebration of the sacraments of initiation, we held reconciliation for the students who were already baptised. This was a great experience for our students, with one Year 11 student telling me he felt as if a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders. In fact, going through reconciliation turned out to be one of the highlights of our formation time together.

On All Saints Day, the celebration of the sacraments took place during Mass in our College Chapel. There were over 270 family members and supporters present. It was truly a special experience and we were grateful to have Bishop Tim Norton with us for this occasion. With Baptisms, Confirmations and First Communions, as well as Reception into the Catholic Church, the Mass had many moving parts but, with careful planning, all went smoothly. The local parish was on hand to help us in registering the sacraments.

For our staff and students, the opportunity to take up the invitation to explore their faith held great meaning and importance. One of the staff members who was received into the Catholic Church said: *Participating in the RCIA program through St Laurence's College was an exceptionally humbling and powerful experience for me. Working in Catholic education for approximately 25 years has enabled me to develop my faith life and I had wanted to affirm my connection with the Church by becoming a Catholic. I particularly enjoyed the discussion that took place during the program and hearing about other people's faith journey and questions. Taking part in the RCIA at St Laurence's was a wonderful experience and I enjoyed being part of the group undertaking the program as I felt a lovely sense of camaraderie with the other participants. I was deeply moved by the sacrament of reconciliation and found this to be extremely powerful. The program, which culminated in a joyous Mass led by Bishop Tim Norton, has further strengthened my faith and commitment to Church. I am grateful for having this opportunity.*

One of the parents of two students commented: *My sons both received their final sacraments [of initiation] and it was a wonderful night. On the drive home we commented on how we could feel the Holy Spirit and how lovely it is for our family to be a part of this together.*



The process seemed overwhelming at the start. It involved a great amount of work not just within the College but also on the part of those who helped us. But it was well worth it in the end. The founder of the Christian Brothers tradition, Blessed Edmund Rice, said of working with young people: *Have courage; the good seed will grow up in the children's hearts later on.* For our students, the seeds for their faith development were planted and, by taking up the invitation, they were able to grow. The fact that we had both staff and older students take it up shows that we had many in the school community looking to be more connected to their faith and the power of invitation gave them this chance.

■ Paul Corfield is Dean of Identity and Community at St Laurence's College, Brisbane.

Kevin Irwin, *Ecology, Liturgy, and the Sacraments*

(New York: Paulist Press, 2023) 250 + xxvii pages

by James Cronin

I still regret the failure to launch a 1986 text called *Eucharistic Prayer A*, prepared by ICEL for bishops conferences. This prayer embraces creation as evolution and titled Jesus 'Lord of Creation'. *Death could not bind him, for you raised him up in the Spirit of holiness and exalted him as Lord of creation... Then, at last, will all creation be one and all divisions healed, and we shall join in singing your praise through your Son, Jesus Christ.*

Notwithstanding my longing for such modern compositions, Kevin Irwin warns against simply updating the theology of our prayers. He wants also and more urgently to give full weight to the material symbols we use: *Texts set up and enhance, but should not define or discourse about what takes place. Actions are primary; texts support* (p. 132). What parish or community can claim to have paid enough attention to strong processions, the quality of the bread and wine, the plenitude of the water, or the abundance of the oil? The movement of creation towards Christ is already prefigured in all liturgy – life through death.

Kevin Irwin opens his study with a survey of theological approaches to sacrament. He then sets out his own comparative and contextual methodology. A key grounding for his approach – illustrated on the book's cover – lies in the 'primal elements' of earth, air, fire, water. As he unfolds the triad *ecology-liturgy-sacrament*, he

shows how in particular places and times we experience the sacred mystery, using the examples of Baptism/Easter, Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours to set forth an integral ecology.

Irwin quotes *Laudato Si'* (LS) extensively; this landmark text is now central to theology. Among the many incisive excerpts from LS, I note the following: *The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation. The world which came forth from God's hands returns to him in blessed and undivided adoration: in the bread of the Eucharist, 'creation is projected towards divinisation, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator himself. Thus, the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation* (LS 236). It is dispiriting when some Catholics opt to focus on eucharistic miracles of a bleeding host and ignore the broad cosmic, ecclesial and justice dimensions of what we do.

Sorely needed is a theology and praxis flowing from statements like this: *The Eucharist as the body of Christ unites the Church, and it should challenge us to abandon some of the selfishness of life in favour of selfgiving and surrender of the self so that others may eat and be cared for by the same Lord* (p. 173). Many are without food and theology must allow itself to be 'challenged by reality' and reach the faithful where they are. *Good theologians, like good pastors, the pope has said, have the smell of the people and of the street.* I have adorned a wall in our parish centre with posters showing ways of reducing our domestic use of fossil-fuels. It was my way of offsetting the mooted display about miraculous encounters between saints and the sacred species of the Eucharist!

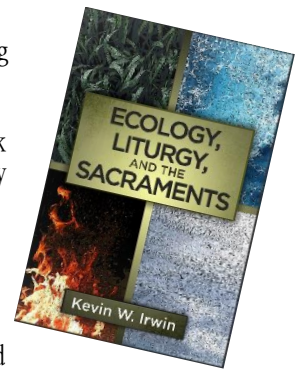
My liturgical training has imbued in me the need for complementing words with actions; liturgy is given to us as 'the lens we need to view all of reality'. *Having a wide-angle lens on as much of life as possible is true to what I now call the principle of the ecology of the liturgy. Part of the challenge that celebrating sacramental liturgy can offer is to help*

us to reflect on the world in which we live and to ponder our care for it as well as our concern for those who dwell on it. This means taking seriously our obligation of being in communion with and caring for our common home. We are never to presume that we are the masters or lords of our common home. We are fellow companions, responsible to succeeding generations for our care of it (p. 128).

Some farmers I know resist using pesticides and fertilizers, and some try to block encroachment by gas miners. Of course, many others in the community get top wages from mining and chemical companies. There is no silver bullet that will stop global warming in its tracks. Yet LS 24 baldly states: *this century may well witness extraordinary climate change and an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequences for all of us.* The occasional parishioner will tell me when I use such language that global warming is 'fake news'; regrettably the majority are more likely just overcome by inertia.

Irwin investigates the frequency and import of words like *Creator*, *creation*, and *Founder* in our liturgies. These titles for God are strongly tied to the idea of stewardship over creation. But we are still a long way from Teilhard de Chardin's concept of a God who is both 'evolver' and 'evolving'. Our youth seriously worry that global warming will stunt or terminate their lives; for them we need a theology which 'remembers the future', a teaching which quarries hope from a Saviour who is the omega point, the cosmic lover, who is arriving even now as love conquers sin and stupidity. I cannot give up believing that, robustly performed, *one or other of the elements of the liturgy can engage our imaginations in ever new ways, even as we need to engage our minds, hearts and imaginations to work as we must to 'save' our common home* (p. 198).

I warmly recommend this informative and challenging book!





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