

Liturgy

NEWS



AUTUMN / MARCH 2026 ♦ VOLUME 56/1

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THE 54TH INTERNATIONAL
**EUCCHARISTIC
CONGRESS 2028**
SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA
THIS IS MY BODY GIVEN FOR YOU

I was delighted when I saw that the theme for the 2028 Eucharistic Congress was *'This is my body given for you'* because it takes us directly to the action of Christ. Christ speaks these words at the Last Supper and they are fulfilled on the cross. In his magnificent letter on the liturgy, *Desiderio Desideravi*, Pope Francis affirmed that this is indeed the heart of the Eucharist: *The content of the bread broken is the cross of Jesus... it is of this that we make memorial in every Eucharist* (DD 7).

The pope speaks of our amazement, astonishment and wonder at the Eucharist, *at the fact that the paschal mystery is rendered present in the concreteness of sacramental signs* (DD 24). *The astonishment or wonder of which I speak is not some sort of being overcome in the face of an obscure reality or a mysterious rite. It is, on the contrary, marvelling at the fact that the salvific plan of God has been revealed in the paschal deed of Jesus, and the power of this paschal deed continues to reach us in the celebration of the 'mysteries' of the sacraments* (DD 25). *Wonder is an essential part of the liturgical act because it is the way that those who know they are engaged in the particularity of symbolic gestures look at things. It is the marvelling of those who experience the power of symbol,*

which does not consist in referring to some abstract concept but rather in containing and expressing in its very concreteness what it signifies (DD 26).

At this early stage, these insights are not prominent in the preparatory materials available on the Congress website. Instead there is a laudable focus on celebrating the liturgy prayerfully and with reverence, and an emphasis on exposition and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Resources are offered to help understand the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. However, the nature of 'sacrament' is left unexplored. Yet it is exactly by means of signs that we are taken to the heart of the saving mystery (DD 21).

One of the prominent themes in Pope Francis' letter is that, in order to encounter Christ in the Eucharist, we need to *become capable of symbols*, to recover the capacity to engage with symbolic action which is an essential trait of the liturgical act (DD 44, 27). It is by means of the sacramental sign that we are able to access the reality of what Christ is doing. This is not an act of the imagination. When we look at the consecrated host in the monstrance, we are seeing bread with our eyes; but with our heart and mind, our faith, we know the bread as a sacramental sign, a window to a new reality. This is a much stronger reality than just imagining that Christ is looking back at us as if from behind a curtain.

Now if the sacramental sign is our opening to a real encounter with Christ, we need to make our signs well. The Eucharistic Congress is an opportunity for parish communities to understand how to make the sacramental signs more effective – to encourage communities to offer communion from the altar, not from the tabernacle; to use eucharistic bread which is substantial and which can be broken and shared among the people; to offer people communion from the cup at every Mass. The importance of actions like this are clearly explained in the Missal introduction. *By reason of the sign, it is required that the material for the eucharistic celebration truly have the*

appearance of food (GIRM 321). It goes on to explain the importance of the fraction rite as a sign of unity in sharing the one bread.

The Missal introduction explains how important it is to have communion from the cup. It is a fuller sign. It opens up the reality that the new covenant in Christ is ratified in his blood and it establishes a deeper connection between the eucharistic banquet and the eschatological banquet in the Kingdom of God (GIRM 281). These questions are by no means insignificant yet, at this point, the preparatory materials provided for the Congress do not address these questions or promote these liturgical practices.

CHRIST AS CELEBRANT

Given what we have said about the paschal mystery as the content of the liturgy, it is clear that it is Christ who is the celebrant of the liturgy. This means that the liturgy is celebrated by the whole Church, the Body of Christ. All the baptised are the 'doers' of the Eucharist. This is repeatedly affirmed by Pope Francis in *Desiderio Desideravi: The subject acting in the liturgy is always and only Christ-Church, the mystical Body of Christ* (DD 15). *Let us always remember that it is the Church, the Body of Christ, that is the celebrating subject and not just the priest* (DD 36).

The people are not participating in what the priest is doing; rather all the baptised (priest and people together) are participating in what Christ is doing. What then is the priest's role as an ordained minister? He presides! *The priest lives his characteristic participation in the celebration in virtue of the gift received in the sacrament of Holy Orders, and this is expressed precisely in presiding. [This is] ... a consequence of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit received in ordination which equips him for such a task* (DD 56).

This understanding of the eucharistic action emphasises the profoundly communal nature of the liturgy. Here

is another dimension not yet adequately expressed in the early documentation for the Eucharistic Congress. It helpfully emphasises contemplation and adoration but this easily falls into a personal and individual faith. Pope Francis offers a correction. *The action of the celebration does not belong to the individual but to the Christ-Church, to the totality of the faithful united in Christ. The liturgy does not say 'I' but 'we', and any limitation on the breadth of this 'we' is always demonic. The liturgy does not leave us alone to search out an individual supposed knowledge of the mystery of God. Rather, it takes us by the hand, together, as an assembly, to lead us deep within the mystery that the Word and the sacramental signs reveal to us. And it does this, consistent with all action of God, following the way of the Incarnation, that is, by means of the symbolic language of the body, which extends to things in space and time (DD 19).*

A communal awareness in the liturgy even gives us a new perspective on silence which ought to be an integral part of every liturgy. Silence belongs to the whole assembly. *Such 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. That kind of silence would contradict the essence itself of the celebration. Liturgical silence is something much more grand: it is a symbol of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit who animates the entire action of the celebration (DD 52).*

We still have a couple of years to go. The 2028 Eucharistic Congress is a unique opportunity for parish renewal. I have quoted extensively from Pope Francis' 2022 Apostolic Letter because I believe it has some key insights that we need to recognise in order to make our eucharistic renewal not just spiritual but also properly liturgical.



The Virgin Mary and the Liturgy

by Jenny O'Brien

MARY holds a special place in the hearts of most Catholics. We pray the *Angelus*, made up of scriptural references that direct our thoughts to the mystery of the incarnation. The Rosary focuses, for the most part, on events in the life of Christ, and concentrates our minds on the mysteries that we celebrate week after week in the Church's liturgy. How then does the Church understand the relationship between Christ and his mother and its own relationship with Mother Mary?

Where do we place her in the scheme of salvation and grace? Over the last century, Mary has sometimes been called 'mediatrix of all grace' or 'co-redemptrix' with Christ. In November 2025, these titles for Mary were explicitly rejected by the Holy See in a doctrinal note entitled *Mater Populi Fidelis*. Standing between the human race and God, between human weakness and divine mercy is Christ: he is the

saviour of the world, the one redeemer and mediator. Mary stands with us. She is the first and pre-eminent among the saints, a human being like us, our mother and a shining model for us. She takes us to Christ.

Throughout the liturgical year, the Church celebrates several solemn Marian feasts and many other commemorations for her. But in all instances, the honour afforded to Mary arises from her unique relationship with Christ in the history of salvation. As the one who gave birth to Jesus, she is both Mother of God and Mother of the Redeemer.



Never do we *worship* Mary. Nor is it appropriate to separate devotion to the Blessed Virgin from its primary source, Christ. This is what the Church emphasised at Vatican Council II. This is also why the Council decided not to produce a separate document dealing with Mary but rather to include its writing about Mary in *Lumen gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.

In 1974, Pope Paul VI issued an apostolic exhortation, *Marialis cultus* (MC), to clarify that, through its worship, the Church *adores* the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and *venerates* with special love Mary, the most holy Mother of God. It begins by pointing out that, because *the whole mystery of Christ from the Incarnation to the expectation of his return in glory* is spread throughout the liturgical year, it is possible *in a more organic and close-knit fashion to include the commemoration of Christ's Mother in the annual cycle of the mysteries of her Son (MC 2).*

Mary in Feasts and Seasons

Advent, which begins the liturgical year, includes many references to Mary, especially in the Christmas novena from 17-25 December. The first reading for the Fourth Sunday of Advent always recalls the ancient prophecies regarding the coming of the Messiah, while the corresponding gospel readings focus on the imminent birth of Christ. Here we see Mary as the one who listens, prays, responds, and opens her heart to God's will as she waits in joyful expectation for the birth of her Son. In this, she is a model for us as we commemorate the birth of Christ and wait in joyful expectation for his coming at the end of time.

Christmas time celebrates the extraordinary mystery of the Incarnation, when God becomes one with us in the human condition; it also reveals the moments where Mary is challenged in her carrying out of what God asks of her. There is no room at the inn when the time comes for her to give birth. What must Mary have been thinking when the wise men from the East visit their home and present Jesus with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh? How would she have been feeling when it became necessary for her to flee to Egypt to escape the cruelty of Herod? Over a decade later, she must have been confused when Jesus says that he 'must be in his Father's house'. To be the Mother of God was a privilege beyond compare, but it did call for complete trust and abandonment of self.

Celebrating the feast of the Annunciation of the Lord, we recognise the moment at which the divine nature and the human nature are indissolubly united, brought about through divine invitation and human consent/cooperation. Mary says 'yes', and the Word, the Son of God, becomes Son of Mary; the young virgin becomes Mother of God.

Mary as Mother of God (*Theotokos* in Greek) was declared a dogma during the Council of Ephesus in the year 431. This solemn feast is celebrated on 1 January. The Collect of the Mass affirms that, through Mary, the human race was found worthy to receive the author of life and so we seek her intercession on our behalf. In true motherly fashion she gently leads us on our faith journey so that true peace will flourish in our world.

The solemn feasts of the Immaculate Conception (8 December) and the Assumption (15 August) celebrate specific aspects of Mary's place in the story of the Christian community. The first refers to the understanding that Mary was, from the very moment of her conception, preserved free from original sin, a blessing given her by God in virtue of the role she was to play as Mother of God. She was to be part of God's unfolding plan for our salvation. Luke 1:28, which refers to Mary as *full of grace* provides for many scholars the scriptural basis for this feast (*Catechism* 490ff). The second feast commemorates her being taken up, body and soul, into heaven after she died. Thus, Mary participates in a particular way in the resurrection of Jesus and anticipates the resurrection of all other Christians (*Catechism* 966).

Both of these beliefs have long been part of the Church's tradition, although it was only in 1854 that Pope Pius IX declared the Immaculate Conception to be a dogma, and in 1950 that the Assumption was affirmed by Pope Pius XII as part of the Church's doctrinal heritage.

Mary, First among Christians

While our veneration of Mary stems from her unique place in the story of salvation, she is also the model for the rest of the Church to follow as we celebrate and live out the mystery of Christ each day and each week. MC 16-23 spells this out beautifully. Of all humans, Mary is the one most closely united to Christ. Firstly, she carried him in her womb for nine months before bringing him to birth, and secondly, because she is attentive to God's word, receives it with faith, and ponders it constantly in her heart. She is the one who thinks not of herself, but of the graciousness of God. She is amazed at the 'upside-down kingdom' that God brings about – her wonderful prayer, the *Magnificat*, recognises the 'greatness of God' in the raising up of the lowly and the humbling of the mighty, a countercultural concept if ever there was one! Mary is declaring, right from the beginning, the Church's option for the poor.

Mary displays the qualities and attitudes that are required in the Church. Within the womb of Mary, the body of Christ was formed; within the community of the Church, the Body of Christ continues to be formed through Baptism. There is a beautiful sentence in the Mozarabic (Spanish) liturgy that speaks of Mary as the one who carried Life in her womb while the Church is the one who bears Life in the waters of Baptism. Nurturing, caring, self-giving and extraordinary love are central to who Mary is and who the Church must be.

In our celebration of the Eucharist, we see that Mary is part of the fabric of liturgical prayer and is called upon to stand beside us and to intercede for us. In the Penitential Act of the Introductory Rites, the *Confiteor* calls on Mary, together with the angels and saints to pray for us to the Lord, our God. In the Eucharistic Prayer we seek to unite with Mary and the saints and pray that their merits might work in our favour. Eucharistic Prayers 2, 3 and 4 specifically ask that we might come to share in the eternal life that is our inheritance with the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints. Pope John Paul II noted that Mary is present in *every* action of the Church's liturgy because she is forever a member of the Church, the first and most exemplary disciple, the one to whom Christ entrusted his followers as she stood at the foot of the cross. (Pope John Paul's 1987 encyclical, *Redemptoris Mater*, is a rich document on Mary in the life of the Church and is well worth re-reading.)

Mary in Liturgical Music

Another way Mary is celebrated in the liturgy is in song. The Church has a rich heritage of Marian hymns, and it is important to know when and where

to use them. Songs specifically focused on Mary are most appropriate for Marian feasts. They highlight the characteristics of Mary to which we aspire in order to participate more fully in the liturgy or live more deeply as Christ's disciples. Marian hymns used at other times of the liturgical year ought to point us towards Christ and resonate with the season. In general, it is often most appropriate to use a Marian hymn for gathering or sending forth rather than at other times during the Eucharist.

A good place to start is to look at the section of your hymn book on Mary. *Catholic Worship Book II* has a rich repertoire:

- ◆ 407. *Gentle Virgin Mother* seeks Mary's intercession.
- ◆ 408. *Hail Queen of Heaven* is a traditional well-known hymn.
- ◆ 409. *Hail, holy Queen enthroned above* is a salutation to Mary.
- ◆ 410. *Holy Virgin, by God's Decree* comes with the refrain *Ave Maria*.
- ◆ 411. *Mary, Mother of Good Counsel* asks that we might share Mary's virtues.
- ◆ 412. *My Spirit Sings* is Michael Mangan's version of the *Magnificat*.
- ◆ 413. *O Holy Mary / O holy Dwelling Place of God*.
- ◆ 414. *Servant of the Word* is a good choice for general use.
- ◆ 416. *Immaculate Mary, we praise God in you* also uses the *Ave Maria* refrain.
- ◆ 417. *Sing we of the blessed Mother* is another good choice for general use.
- ◆ 418. *There is nothing told* captures the biblical narratives about Mary.

Catholic Worship Book II also has a section of metrical and chant settings of the *Magnificat* (CWB 210 – 214). It includes versions by Owen Alstott, Timothy Dudley-Smith and Joseph Gelineau. The *Stabat Mater* (*At the cross her vigil keeping*) is used at the Stations of the Cross (CWB 318). Other collections have other well-known Marian songs. For example, *Hail Mary: Gentle Woman* is popular and could be used at the end of Mass (*Gather Australia* 544). Finally, there are good Marian songs for use in liturgy with children. Here Michael Mangan's work springs to mind: *Mary Said 'Yes!'* (This is the Time/Sing Your Joy), *Mary, Show Us the Way* (1, 2, 3, God Loves Me), or the litany *O Mary, We Ask You* (Sing Your Joy). They are available at www.litmusproductions.com.

Care should be taken with the Marian repertoire at Mass. The Eucharist is the prayer of Christ prayed to God in and through the Holy Spirit. Mary is not the subject of our worship but one who worships alongside us. This is why those texts which address Mary might be best kept for the end of the liturgy. As *Mater Populi Fidelis* said so beautifully last year: *Mary acts with the Church, in the Church and for the Church* (37c).

Mary herself provides us with a fitting conclusion to our ponderings on her place in the liturgy. *My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord*, she sings in her *Magnificat*. As Mother of the Church, she helps each of us to open our hearts to Christ and the action of the Spirit. So we join with Mary to celebrate the mysteries of our redemption, to proclaim the greatness of the Lord and to rejoice in God our Saviour.

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Image: Mary, Undoer of Knots (St Antonio Parish, Makati City, Manila).

The VIRGIN MARY in the Liturgical Calendar

SOLEMNITY

Mary Mother of God – 1 January
 Our Lady, Help of Christians – 24 May (*Australia*)
 Assumption of the Virgin Mary – 15 August (*Holy Day*)
 Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary – 8 December
Plus the following diocesan patronal feasts:
Mary, Mother of Good Counsel – 27 April (*Cairns, Sandhurst*)
Mary, Star of the Sea – 28 May (*Broken Bay*)
Our Lady of Perpetual Help – 27 June (*Maitland-Newcastle, Wilcannia-Forbes*) and – 15 November (*Sale*)
Mary of the Southern Cross – 1 September (*Toowoomba*)

FEAST

Visitation of the Virgin Mary – 31 May
 Nativity of the Virgin Mary – 8 September

MEMORIAL

Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church – Monday after Pentecost
 Immaculate Heart of Virgin Mary – Saturday after Sacred Heart
 Queenship of the Virgin Mary – 22 August
 Our Lady of Sorrows – 15 September
 Our Lady of the Rosary – 7 October
 Presentation of the Virgin Mary – 21 November

OPTIONAL MEMORIAL

Our Lady of Lourdes – 11 February
 Our Lady of Fatima – 13 May
 Our Lady of Mt Carmel – 16 July
 Dedication of Basilica of St Mary Major – 5 August
 Holy Name of Mary – 12 September
 Our Lady of Loreto – 10 December
 Our Lady of Guadalupe – 12 December

The Virgin Mary also figures prominently in the Christmas and Easter cycles as well as Feasts of the Lord such as The Presentation of the Lord (2 February) and the Annunciation of the Lord (25 March). A commemoration of the Virgin Mary may also occur on free Saturdays in Ordinary Time.

CELEBRATING THE LITURGY WITH CHILDREN

A Vision for Engagement

by Clare Schwantes and Michael Mangan



The celebration of the liturgy with children is both a pastoral art and a practical challenge. It is a moment where formation and celebration meet, where children are introduced to the symbols, sounds, and gestures of faith that will shape their lifelong relationship with God. This article invites reflection on how we can honour the authentic structure and spirit of the liturgy while making space for the child's natural capacity for wonder, participation, and joy.

Our attention must necessarily turn to three key liturgical resources: the *Directory for Masses with Children* (DMC, 1973), the *Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children* (1975) and the *Lectionary for Masses with Children* (LMC, 1994). The Church has entrusted these documents to us to help mediate the full richness of our liturgical tradition with the particular needs of children and their families. When they are used well, these resources make liturgical celebration more accessible, more vibrant and more engaging for children and families.

The *Directory* was promulgated in 1973 as an official, authoritative document of the Church designed to support the liturgical participation of children, on the premise 'that some adaptations are necessary in Masses with children' (DMC 20).

A Vision of Belonging

The liturgy is the privileged place of encounter with Christ. And yet, for many children who gather for school liturgies, particularly those who are not regularly part of a parish worshipping community, the Mass can seem abstract, difficult to understand, or simply not intended for them.

School liturgies often become a child's first, if not only, experience of the Church's prayer. Many teachers and school leaders carry this responsibility with a deep sense of reverence. But they often feel ill-equipped. Many are not liturgically formed; some lack confidence even in planning a simple liturgical celebration. And for many priests, school liturgies can feel disconnected from parish life, or at times, frustratingly casual or improvised.

To help bridge this gap, we turn to the *Directory*. This is not a peripheral or outdated document. It

offers pastoral and liturgical guidance for situations where there are large numbers of children present including school liturgies, sacramental celebrations, and parish Masses where children and families are the primary assembly. There seems to be some uncertainty around the use of the *Directory*. It is important to repeat clearly that it is an official document of the Holy See; it is still fully in force; the adaptations are valid.

A Vision of Evangelisation

Recognising that the Catholic school is the primary or only place of contact with the Church for many families, the liturgies we celebrate with children in the school setting and with their

families at special occasions are among the most significant evangelising opportunities we have. It is sacred work.



Where the tone is unwelcoming, the language too complex and the symbols unclear, children quickly learn that this space is not for them. They may feel like spectators rather than participants, or worse, like outsiders in a celebration meant for someone else. Over time, these experiences can shape a quiet but enduring impression that the Church is confusing, irrelevant, or unwelcoming. In this way, inaccessible liturgy doesn't just miss an opportunity for encounter. It actively becomes a barrier to it.

The second paragraph of the *Directory* recognises that children can suffer spiritual harm if over the years they repeatedly experience in the Church things that are barely comprehensible (DMC 2).

Yet when liturgy with children is done well, with reverence, joy, and pastoral sensitivity, it can sow the seeds of lifelong faith. It communicates something of who God is, and what it means to be part of the Church. The DMC affirms that, 'in the liturgy, children will experience the presence of the Lord and be drawn to participate in it actively and with

joy' (DMC 12). When children experience liturgy as something that includes them, speaks to them, and engages them, they are far more likely to return and bring their families with them.

The *Directory*, the *Lectionary* (LMC), and the *Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children* are essential tools in this task. They don't replace the Roman Missal or the Lectionary; rather, they complement them, for a particular pastoral purpose in enabling young people to encounter the risen Christ.

Adaptations - Permitted and Encouraged

What kind of adaptations does the *Directory* permit and encourage? When a significant number of children are present, here are some of the recommendations:

- ♦ Simplifying or modifying words of invitation to the penitential rite, the prayer over the gifts, the Lord's Prayer, the sign of peace.
- ♦ Including short, pastoral explanations to help children understand what is happening.
- ♦ Drawing on the *Lectionary for Masses with Children* for more accessible scriptural language.
- ♦ Using the *Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children*, to support children's engagement.

This is not a matter of creative experimentation or local innovation. These official adaptations are grounded in the Church's ritual books and rich liturgical tradition. DMC 21 states that the *Directory* does not intend to provide an entirely special rite for Masses with children. Rather, it seeks to make the celebration of the Mass more accessible and meaningful for children within the existing Roman Rite. The adaptations do not detract from the mystery; rather they mediate it and bring the liturgy to life for children. It is not about diluting the Mass but about opening a door into it so that children can step in, understand, and respond.

Liturgy of the Word

DMC 41 reiterates that scripture readings form the main part of the Liturgy of the Word and, even in Masses with children, biblical readings should never be omitted. There is, however, a recognition that these readings must be 'suited to the capacity of the children' (DMC 43) and that there is little value in proclaiming scripture passages that cannot be understood by them (DMC 42).

The readings in the Lectionary were not chosen with children in mind, and the Jerusalem Bible translation is often not easy for them to comprehend. While these readings may sometimes be suitable for children there will be occasions when one or more of the appointed texts will clearly not resonate with, or be suitable for an assembly celebrating a school Mass or a parish family-focused Mass.

In these situations, the *Directory* allows and encourages considerable latitude in omitting or substituting readings in the interests of engaging children in the Liturgy of the Word, at their level and capacity of understanding. A number of possible scenarios are addressed.

If some of the readings of the day, even on a Sunday, will not be easily understood by children 'it is permissible to read two or only one of them', however a gospel reading must always be proclaimed (DMC 42). Alternatively, if one or two verses of a reading are problematic, these may be omitted as long as the meaning and intent of the text is not distorted (DMC 43).



Furthermore, if all the Lectionary readings of the day are judged unsuitable for children, it is permissible to substitute a completely different set of readings, either from another part of the Lectionary, or directly from the bible, as long as the liturgical season is taken into account (DMC 43).

The good news for those preparing Masses with children is that the Vatican-approved *Lectionary for Masses with Children* has already done the work, omitting or shortening some readings and providing alternative readings when deemed necessary.

The *Lectionary* uses the much more child-friendly *Contemporary English Version* translation of scripture and includes the readings for every Sunday and solemnity throughout the Church's three-year cycle of readings. It should be used preferentially for Masses in schools and sometimes even for Sunday parish liturgies where a significant number of children are present.

Masses in schools are generally celebrated on weekdays. While the *Lectionary* does not mirror the adult Lectionary by providing readings for every day



of the year, it does offer a wide selection of seasonally themed weekday readings for liturgical year. Apart from weekday solemnities, these themed sets of readings may be freely substituted for the appointed readings of the day for school Masses.

The *Lectionary for Masses with Children* has been out of print for some years. However all *Lectionary* texts are included in Liturgy Brisbane's online subscription liturgy preparation platform, *Liturgia*, (<https://aboutliturgia.com.au/>).

The Introduction to the adult *Lectionary* states that as well as being spiritually fed from the table of the Eucharist, the assembly is also fed from the table of the Word. It is the responsibility of those who prepare liturgies for children to embrace every available measure to ensure that the proclaimed scripture is palatable, digestible and nourishing for them.

Homily

Not surprisingly, the *Directory* provides that the homily explaining the word of God should be given great prominence in all Masses with children and suggests that the homily might sometimes become a dialogue with them (DMC 48).

It might also become an invitation to wonder, or a sharing of experience that helps children see their lives reflected in the gospel. With upper primary or teenage students, the word can be broken open to speak to their realities: friendship, stress, social media.

Perhaps one of the most underutilised permissions is found in DMC 24. It allows, in celebrations with children, for someone other than the priest to speak to the children after the gospel. In many cases, a classroom teacher or sacramental coordinator may have a particular connection with the children, a familiarity with their language, their questions, and their worldview. This is not intended to replace the priest's role in proclaiming the gospel, but to provide flexibility where pastoral need demands it.

The Eucharistic Prayer

The Church has provided three *Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children*, expressed in language and imagery that speaks to the child's heart.

These prayers preserve the structure of the Eucharistic Prayer (the thanksgiving, the epiclesis, the institution narrative, the anamnesis) but do so in a way that is accessible. They speak of God's love, of belonging, of Jesus' closeness.

The *Directory* also makes provision for adapting the other prayers of the Mass, particularly the presidential prayers, so that they are more intelligible to children. The priest is permitted to choose from the Roman Missal texts of presidential prayers more suited to children (DMC 50), and further 'if the given text is still not suitable, the text of the prayers of the Missal may be adapted to the needs of children' (DMC 51).

A carefully adapted Collect, for example, can help children connect the theme of the celebration with their own lives. A clear, short Prayer over the Offerings can remind them what is happening on the altar. A simple Prayer after Communion can help them give thanks in words they understand.

The Communion Rite

The Communion Rite is often the most powerful moment in a school Mass and also one of the most pastorally delicate. Many children present have not yet received the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Some are from other Christian traditions. Others may be unbaptised.

Yet the procession to Communion is an immensely powerful liturgical moment. It is physical, communal, and directed toward Christ. This is why many communities invite children who are not receiving Communion to come forward with their arms crossed for a blessing. For many young people, that moment of being personally acknowledged by a gesture or a quiet word prompts questions that lead to deeper faith: *What is happening here? What do I need to do to receive communion too?*

This simple gesture holds enormous pastoral and theological weight. It allows each child to experience a one-to-one moment with the priest or minister, a sign of being seen, named, and blessed. It gives them a sense of belonging in the ritual movement of the Church. It plants a seed.

Silence

In a culture saturated by noise, the liturgy offers something profoundly countercultural – silence. But in Masses with children, silence is often the first thing to go. It feels risky. Children fidget. Teachers get anxious. Celebrants wonder if it will fall flat.

And yet the *Directory* insists on the importance of silence to allow what was heard to take root (DMC 37). It reminds us that silence is not the absence of action; rather, silence *is* the action. Children are capable of entering into this silence, and they can learn to embrace it.

Looking ahead

The Church provides a rich theological and liturgical foundation for celebrating with children that honours their dignity, welcomes their participation, and supports their journey of faith and belonging. In the next issue of *Liturgy News*, we will turn from principles to practice, exploring concrete adaptations, ministries, and pastoral approaches that help this vision come alive in the liturgy.

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Latin Music and the Liturgical Assembly

A Pastoral Plan for Implementation

by Bernard Kirkpatrick

Full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy is the foundational principle of Catholic worship today. Since the Second Vatican Council articulated *participatio actuosa*, parishes have sought clarity, accessibility and communal involvement in their liturgical celebrations. Because the liturgy is the prayer of the whole People of God, its language and music must help the entire assembly to engage and pray with understanding.

The Council's encouragement of the use of the vernacular, together with relaxed rules around musical styles and instruments, was given to enable fuller engagement. The decision had a dramatic effect. Almost immediately, Latin faded rapidly from parish life, particularly in Australia, where it survived in a few cathedral choirs, some monastic communities, the odd Christmas Carol or an occasional *Ave Maria* refrain. For several generations, most Catholics rarely encountered Latin in the liturgy.

In recent years, however, Latin has re-emerged as an area of interest, especially amongst younger Catholics who never experienced the fully Latin pre-conciliar liturgy, and often regard the Roman Church's mother tongue without the same burdens or associations held by older generations. In addition, the growing cultural and linguistic diversity of many parishes—especially in metropolitan areas, but increasingly in regional centres—has

prompted renewed reflection on whether Latin might again serve as a unifying element in worship, and a mark of Catholic identity and tradition.

The Effect of Language on Participation

Language is never a neutral medium. It shapes perception, evokes memory and communicates meaning. When liturgy is celebrated entirely in the vernacular, comprehension is immediate. Introducing Latin, even briefly, changes the dynamic. Some experience Latin as universal, transcendent or connected to tradition; others may find it distancing or associate it with an era when understanding was not always prioritised.

Therefore, any reintroduction of Latin today must be undertaken with pastoral sensitivity and not with an ideological agenda. The guiding question is: can and does the use of Latin help the assembly to pray?

It should not signal a revival of pre-conciliar forms, nor merely satisfy nostalgia. Rather, it should be an intentional and selective use of the Church's ancient language where it can genuinely support participation and engagement in prayer.

Although Vatican II envisioned a continued familiarity with at least the Ordinary of the Mass in Latin, this expectation was not realised. Pope Paul VI's 1974 booklet *Jubilate Deo*, intended as a universal minimum repertoire of simple Latin chants for the faithful worldwide, had little impact in Australia, being relegated to the library shelf and overshadowed by an avalanche of old and new vernacular music. In today's context, recovering the full Latin Ordinary is probably not the best starting point for most parishes, often restrained by limited musical resources and limited expertise in this area. However, meaningful steps can still be taken to reintroduce some Latin in ways that enable participation.

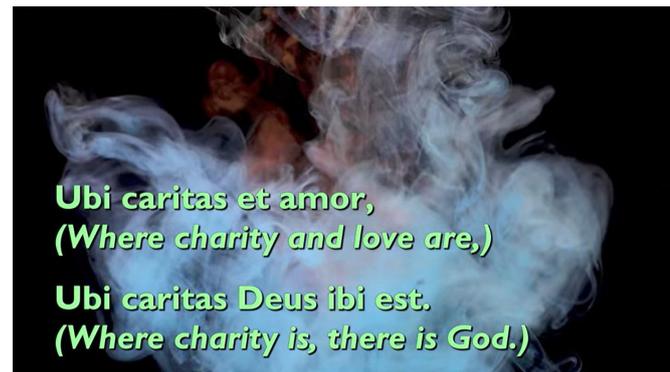
Practical Starting Points

1. Short Acclamations¹

The Roman liturgy frequently uses brief, dialogical texts that are easy for assemblies to learn. Using the Missal tones, parishes can introduce simple Latin exchanges such as:

- ◆ Greeting:
Dominus vobiscum – *R. Et cum spiritu tuo*
- ◆ Conclusion of Scripture:
Verbum Domini – *R. Deo gratias/Laus tibi, Christe.*
- ◆ Intercession response:
R. Te rogamus, audi nos
- ◆ Dismissal:
Ite, missa est – *R. Deo gratias*

Short litanic forms such as the *Agnus Dei* also work well, with a cantor singing the invocation and the assembly replying *miserere nobis* or *dona nobis pacem*. These brief, repetitive forms invite confident participation.



2. Repetitive Chants, Mantras, and Ostinatos²

Meditative repetition is an effective way to introduce Latin. Taizé chant is a well-known style in this category which can be effectively employed, combining simple phrases with accessible and pleasing melodies. Popular examples include:

- ◆ *Ubi caritas* (Holy Thursday/General)
- ◆ *Veni Sancte Spiritus* (Pentecost/Confirmation)
- ◆ *Magnificat* (Marian celebrations)
- ◆ *Laudate Dominum* (General/Adoration)
- ◆ *Christus resurrexit* (Easter)
- ◆ *Psallite Deo* (Easter)

Other pieces, such as Marty Haugen's *Adoramus te, Christe*, are ideal for Holy Week. These chants work especially well during communion processions, adoration or periods of silence when assemblies can sing from memory.

An 'ostinato' is a continually repeated musical phrase or rhythm. Ostinato refrains can be introduced gradually. Begin with the assembly singing the refrain between cantor verses, and once they are comfortable, layer the ostinato form as written. This approach builds confidence in singing the refrain, before elaborating the music with overlaid verses.

Duc in Altum – Going Deeper

3. The Ordinary of the Mass

Often the barrier to participation is not necessarily language but complexity or cognitive overload. Assemblies can manage Latin easily when the text is short and the musical setting simple. Most communities already know the structure of the Mass Ordinary.

Introducing Latin versions of familiar elements – especially the 'primitiva' tones of the

Missal—with shorter texts like the *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei* can be surprisingly intuitive and achievable. Seasonal introduction is an effective strategy for inclusion. Advent and Lent, with their simpler liturgical tone, are ideal times to introduce the Missal chant settings of the *Sanctus* or *Agnus Dei*. Their repetition across several weeks promotes familiarity and can mark out different seasons of the liturgical year. Since the Gloria is omitted in these seasons, there is no pressure to introduce longer or more challenging Latin texts.

On feasts and seasons where the Gloria is prescribed, a number of contemporary Mass settings are available which utilize a refrain and verse format, where the Latin "Gloria in excelsis Deo" is sung as a refrain between the tri-fold structure of verses sung by cantor or choir in English. Examples include my own setting *Mass of Christ the Redeemer*, or the *Mass of Our Lady, Help of Christians* by Richard Connolly.³

4. Latin Antiphons with English Verses⁴

Another useful option is the use of traditional Latin antiphons paired with English verses sung by a cantor or choir. The assembly learns only the refrain, while music ministers handle the more complex sections. Suitable examples of well-known chants include:

- ◆ *Attende Domine* (Lent)
- ◆ *Parce Domine* (Lent/Penance)
- ◆ *Ubi Caritas* (Holy Thursday/General)

More contemporary musical settings utilizing this technique can also be found, such as:

- ◆ *Christus Vincit* (Easter/Christ the King) – by Christopher Walker.

Seasonal repetition supports familiarity, allowing these antiphons to become a valued part of parish musical practice.

Ensuring the Meaning is Clear

Participation in liturgy requires entering into the meaning of the prayer. When using Latin, parishes should ensure that worshippers can understand what they are singing. Helpful approaches include:

- ◆ *Translations on screens or in booklets.*

For screens: English beneath the Latin in lighter weight but equal size font
For booklets: parallel columns of Latin and English

- ◆ *Brief spoken introductions* before Mass to explain a new chant's purpose.
- ◆ *Catechesis in parish bulletins* or on websites, offering simple explanations of why a Latin piece is being used. These small efforts foster understanding, acceptance, and appreciation.

Be Pastoral - not Ideological

The following principles can guide the careful reintroduction of Latin:

- ◆ *Keep the assembly at the centre.* If Latin enriches their prayer, it has value; if it confuses or alienates, the strategy may need review and adjustment.
- ◆ *Choose texts wisely.* Short, familiar, or easily grasped texts work best.

- ◆ *Provide meaning.* Ensure that translations and explanations are available and visible.

- ◆ *Form the community gently.* Occasional use builds familiarity and acceptance over time.

- ◆ *Less is more.* Use Latin as a colour on the palette, not the entire canvas.

What Latin Can Offer... when used well

Used thoughtfully, Latin can contribute genuine spiritual and pastoral benefits:

- ◆ *A sense of universality*, linking the parish to the worldwide Church.
- ◆ *A commonality of language* for prayer in multilingual communities.
- ◆ *A contemplative tone*, especially in meditative or repetitive chant forms.
- ◆ *Moments of solemnity*, marking particular feasts or seasons.
- ◆ *A connection with the Church's heritage.*

These values emerge when Latin is introduced with intention, clarity, and pastoral sensitivity.

Reviewing Implementation

Evaluation ensures that the use of Latin remains appropriate and supportive. Consider:

- ◆ *Audibility:* Can you hear confident congregational singing after a few weeks?
- ◆ *Feedback:* 'Did the translation help?' 'Too much/too little Latin?'
- ◆ *Inclusivity:* Who feels unhappy, alienated or unable to accept the transition?
- ◆ *Prayerfulness:* Does the assembly feel united, attentive and active in prayer?

Reflection and review help communities refine their approach and ensure that Latin strengthens, rather than impedes, participation.

Conclusion

The inclusion of Latin in the liturgy is a pastoral process that demands nuance, attentiveness, and accompaniment with the assembly on a journey of liturgical immersion. When used carefully, intentionally, and with proper support, Latin can help

draw worshippers into the mysteries of the liturgy and of our faith. When used indiscriminately, it can become a barrier viewed as a reactionary liturgical step or nostalgic indulgence. Ultimately, the goal remains the same as ever: to enable the People of God to pray fully, consciously, and actively.

■ Bernard Kirkpatrick is the Director of Music at St Patrick's Cathedral Parramatta and Music Director of the Seminary of the Good Shepherd in the Archdiocese of Sydney.

1. Chants from the Roman Missal (*Missale Romanum*) 2002/2008. © Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano. More convenient access to the Latin chants of the Sung Order of Mass (extracted from *Jubilare Deo* 1974) can also be found at <https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Music/Jubilare/JD-Mass.pdf> or *The Gregorian Missal for Sundays*, Solesmes, 1990 https://archive.ccwatershed.org/media/pdfs/24/07/10/05-38-06_0.pdf.

2. Taizé Chants may be purchased from the website at <https://shop.taize.fr/en/taxons/songbooks> or major music publishers such as IGA or OCP. The examples given here are available in Australian resources such as *Gather Australia* and the *Catholic Worship Book II. Adoramus Te, Christe*, M. Haugen © 1984/2009 GIA or *Gather Australia* 305.

3. *Mass of Christ the Redeemer*, B Kirkpatrick, © 2010 OCP, see *Catholic Worship Book II*, no. 24; or the *Mass of Our Lady, Help of Christians* by Richard Connolly, © 2010 CanticaNOVA, available through <https://willowpublishing.com.au/> or *Catholic Worship Book II*, no. 23.

4. *Attende Domine, Parce Domine, Ubi Caritas* : *Catholic Worship Book II*, 292, 299, 639. *Christus Vincit*, arr C Walker, OCP <https://choral.ocp.org/products/christus-vincit-51356>.

The nuts and bolts of THE EASTER VIGIL

by Tom Elich

THE EASTER VIGIL is the glorious high point of the entire liturgical year. It has a lead up of six weeks of Lent, and is then followed by seven weeks of the Easter season for us to bask in the joy of the resurrection. It is the night of nights.

But sometimes the liturgical celebration of the Vigil can be tedious and horribly mixed up. No one can just pick up the Missal and 'wing it!' It requires careful thought and preparation by the priest and the liturgy committee working together. How can the liturgy move with purpose, avoid blank spaces of waiting time, and engage the assembly in the excitement of the Paschal Mystery?

It is worth explaining to the parish that this is not the usual Sunday Mass they might expect on a Saturday evening. It is not the Sunday Mass with a few added 'trimmings'. One way of making this clear is to schedule it later when it is dark, say at 7.00 pm. Well celebrated, it should not extend beyond a couple of hours.

The first thing to understand is the four-part structure of the liturgy:

- ◆ The Liturgy of Light
- ◆ The Liturgy of the Word
- ◆ The Liturgy of Baptism
- ◆ The Liturgy of the Eucharist

Let us take each in turn.

THE LITURGY OF LIGHT

This is a truly magnificent way to begin the celebration of the resurrection: a bonfire burns in the darkness. It is a ceremonial bonfire (*rogus* in Latin), not just any old smoky flame. It should be burning fifteen minutes before the liturgy begins so that the people can gather round it. You will need a firepit, wood, and someone to look after it. It should not be too far from the church, perhaps in a paved forecourt.

The liturgy begins when the ministers arrive with the Paschal Candle. The priest welcomes the people, blesses the fire and traces the design on the candle. (Is there enough light for him to read? Do you have a stick to light the paschal candle? A wax taper will wilt.) Once the Easter Candle, symbol of the risen Christ, is lit, it leads the way into the darkened church. The people follow. Can obstacles be removed to let everyone through easily?

The people (but not the Elect) carry lighted candles. If it is windy, leave the lighting until the people are close to the church. The people will need to pass the flame from one to another so that the lighting does not take forever. Once the Paschal Candle is in place, while the last people are entering, it can be honoured with incense. Then, by wondrous candlelight, the great Easter Proclamation is sung. There are various versions, but the single voice plainchant is probably the most effective. The church lights may come on progressively as it is sung. It is a mistake to leave the church in darkness for the Old Testament readings. They are heard in light of the resurrection.

At the end of the Liturgy of Light, the people's candles are blown out. With a cardboard wax guard and careful instructions to the people (in the booklet or on screen) wax on the carpet should not be too much of a problem. Where it occurs, it will need to be scraped off and steamed clean after Easter. Dribble worries are not enough to ban real candles.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

The idea of a 'vigil' is that it is relaxed and takes time. We settle back to listen and tell stories. There are seven Old Testament readings, each followed by a sung Responsorial Psalm and a Collect. This already means that there is some variety – listening, communal singing, and standing for the Collect. Perhaps instead of singing the psalm, a time of silent reflection can be established. It is worth considering ways in which the proclamation of the readings might be varied, certainly alternating male and female voices, but also perhaps dividing a reading into parts with different voices.

In a parish setting, the number of these readings may be reduced. Normally there would be three or four. The story of the Exodus must be included along with the song which follows it.



The story of the creation is always a wonderful way to begin. The story of Abraham, which centres on human sacrifice, might be best omitted. There follow four readings from the prophets. One of the two Isaiah texts and at least the second half of Ezekiel would be good options.

The transition to the New Testament is dramatic. The altar candles are lit and the Gloria is sung by the people. While the Gloria is sung, bells are rung – perhaps the servers can walk through the church jangling the sanctuary bells at this time. The priest pronounces the Collect and then the reading from Romans links our baptism to the death and resurrection of Christ.

Joyous though the Gloria may have been, the Alleluias should be more exultant still. They introduce the resurrection story from one of the gospels.

The homily will be brief (say, five minutes). It has to be carefully crafted because it needs to draw together all that has happened so far and lead the assembly to the sacraments of Christian initiation – Baptism/Confirmation and then the Eucharist.

THE LITURGY OF BAPTISM

This section can be complicated and, it has to be said, *The Roman Missal* does not help at all. It envisages possibilities where no one is being baptised and where the font is not blessed, but water is. It refers parishes to

the baptism rites for infants and for adults. We will presume that the baptismal font is visible from the body of the church. It would be rare in Australia for the assembly to go in procession to a separate baptistry, singing the Litany of Saints. So, let us take the simplest and most important scenario first, namely the Easter Vigil with the initiation of adults.

The Elect are named. It is probably best if they simply stand up in their place with their godparents. Then all the people stand to pray for them by singing the Litany of the Saints (standing, says the Missal, because it is Easter). All may sit as the priest prays the prayer of blessing over the water of the font, touching the water or lowering the Easter candle into the water. The renunciation of sin and the profession of faith follow. (Do not do the anointing with the oil of catechumens

here – it is best done on Saturday morning as a preparatory rite.)

Each person is called forward to the font with their godparents; here they are immersed in water (or water is poured all over them). The rite points out that immersion is more suitable as a symbol of participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, although pouring water may lawfully be used (CI 22). If at all possible therefore, immersion should be used at the Vigil. The Elect are dressed simply, in sandals, shorts and a dark T-shirt or the like. After baptism, their godparent hands them a large towel and they watch while the other adults are baptised.

Then they all go out to get changed. A simple change of clothes (at least with a white shirt/blouse) should be ready in the sacristy or another place close by – one place for men, another for women. They cannot waste any time. There is no talk or congratulations. They dry themselves and change and quickly comb their hair. There is no time or need for complicated clothing, makeup, etc. They move directly to one of the church entrances.

Meanwhile, as the neophytes leave, the people relight their candles as a song is sung (3 mins). The priest now leads the whole assembly in the renunciation of sin and the profession of faith (2 mins). The people sing a baptismal song as they are sprinkled with water from the font (3 mins). There is a concluding prayer, the

candles are extinguished, and all sit (1 min). At this point the candidates need to be ready to re-enter the church, dressed in white. If necessary, an extra verse of the sprinkling song may be sung.

The newly baptised are welcomed back with applause and then stand before the assembly. The priest recognises their white garments with the text about their 'new creation' and they are presented with a candle lit from the Easter candle with the text about the light of Christ. (They have not held candles until this point in the rite.)

The Sacrament of Confirmation begins with an address and invitation. The bishop or priest lays hands upon each neophyte in turn (perhaps the godparent could hold the baptismal candle). The Confirmation prayer naming the gifts of the Holy Spirit is followed by the anointing with sacred Chrism. It is probably easier for the minister to go to each candidate rather than the other way round. The newly confirmed and their godparents go to their places for the Eucharist.

Other situations

All of this is tricky enough to celebrate clearly and strongly without further complications. If there are no adults or older children for baptism, infants may be baptised at the Vigil. Again, immersion is preferred. Infants will of course not be confirmed. But to try to baptise adults and infants together makes it difficult. For infants, the promises are directed to the parents not the Elect themselves, and some of the baptised are confirmed and some not. It is better to keep infant baptism for the Masses on Easter Sunday. This gives the Sunday crowd the opportunity to share in the rite of baptism as they renew their own baptismal promises.

There are exceptions, obviously. For example, one year we baptised the infant son of one of the adults who was being baptised. It was very moving. As the mother stood in the water of the font, the father handed her the new-born and he was baptised there in her arms. The father took the boy to dry and dress him while his mother was getting dressed.

What then of the baptised candidates who will be received into full communion, confirmed and admitted to the eucharistic table? It is strongly recommended that this occur at Sunday Mass later in the Easter season. The Second Sunday of Easter would be a good day – the gospel is always John 20:19-31 where the risen Christ stands among the disciples, bringing them peace and breathing the Holy Spirit upon them. After joining the assembly in the profession of faith, there is the simple formula of reception into the Church followed by Confirmation and their first communion at the Eucharist.

This way of celebrating the rites presumes that the baptised candidates have been treated differently throughout the time of the catechumenal process for the unbaptised. If no distinction has been made until this point in their journey, it will be difficult to separate them now.

If baptised candidates are to be included in the Easter Vigil, look at the running sheet in Appendix 1 of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. It shows how the two processes can be integrated. When the newly baptised

adults leave to get dressed, the already baptised candidates are introduced to the assembly. Holding candles, they renew their baptismal promises with the rest of the assembly. After the sprinkling with water, the very simple Act of Reception takes place before the newly baptised adults re-enter the church. Then all are confirmed together.

The Prayer of the Faithful concludes this part of the liturgy.

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

At last, we are back on familiar territory. The newly baptised may bring forward the gifts of bread and wine for the celebration. Dressed in white, they have places of honour with their families. They are mentioned by name in the Eucharistic Prayer (see the special texts on pages 1183-1184 of *The Roman Missal*). The sign of peace should be extended to them in a deliberate way.

Their first holy communion should always be given under both kinds – as Christ said: Take this bread and eat, take this cup and drink. This is particularly significant for the whole assembly at the Easter Vigil. *Holy communion has a fuller form as a sign when it takes place under both kinds. For in this form the sign of the eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident and clearer expression is given to the divine will by which the new and eternal covenant is ratified in the Blood of the Lord, as also the connection between the eucharistic banquet and the eschatological banquet in the Kingdom of the Father* (GIRM 281).

The newly baptised should receive communion with their godparents and family before the rest of the assembly come forward. A solemn blessing may be chosen for the end of the liturgy; the assembly is dismissed with Easter Alleluias.

CONCLUSION

What is it that will make a parish Easter Vigil liturgy powerful and engaging for all the people? Pacing is important, so that the liturgy is neither rushed nor dragging. Strong sacramental signs can be exciting for young and old. A real bonfire to begin, a baptism by immersion with water dripping on the floor, holy oil smeared liberally in Confirmation, communion from the altar with bread that has been broken into pieces and communion from the cup for all. After two hours, people should be going forth saying: *WOW... what a night... it was amazing! Alleluia!*

■ Rev Dr Tom Elich, priest of the Archdiocese of Brisbane, works at Liturgy Brisbane. He has been involved in liturgical education and renewal for 45 years.



Breaking Down Barriers Gently

by Helen Bachmann

I am a proud Munanjahli woman of the Yugambah language group. I acknowledge the deeply spiritual connection to Country of Aboriginal Peoples. I acknowledge Elders past and present.

For centuries, the Church has recognised the vital and life-giving role of the arts in shaping our worship and deepening our encounter with the divine. In the early Church, artistic expression served as a doorway into the story of faith for communities who experienced the gospel through images, drama, movement and song long before they encountered written texts. Across time, the beauty of visual arts, music, dance and architecture has opened hearts to God's presence and helped communities pray. Today, as media arts also take their place among these traditions, the Church continues to rely on artists to help reveal the richness of our faith. The contribution of the arts to our liturgical life remains indispensable.



©Helen Bachmann, Reconciliation Cross.

As Catholic communities continue to engage with the arts, revealing our story of faith, we also find ourselves in a moment of relationship-building with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. The art of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christians offers a way for our worship spaces to reflect this commitment. When approached with respect and genuine collaboration, such art, it is hoped, does more than adorn our liturgical environments. It helps to cultivate spaces of encounter, truth-telling and shared prayer.

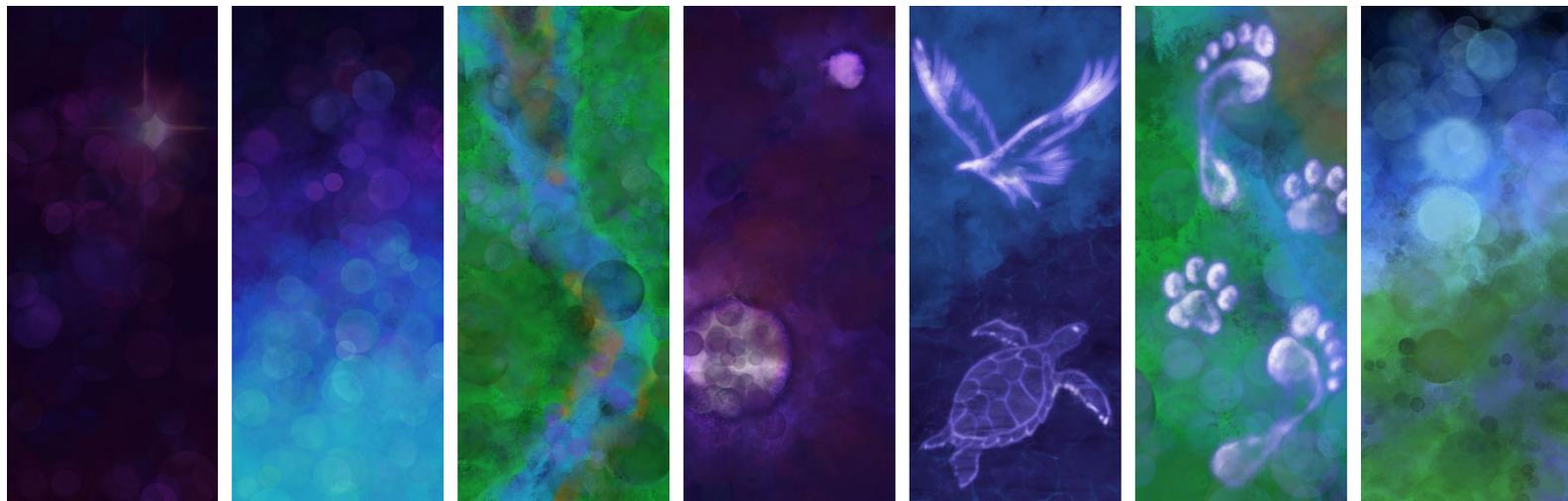
The Reconciliation Cross, shown above, is a piece of Aboriginal Christian art that uses symbol and story to express a commitment to reconciliation. Its imagery offers a gentle invitation into understanding why reconciliation matters, and why the Church in Australia is called to lead by example – as well as understanding how such leadership might take shape. The cross itself is crafted from native gum branches, respectfully gathered from

Country. These native branches represent the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, while the jacaranda seedpods (an introduced species that carries its own innate beauty) symbolise the people who came to colonise these lands. Together, the native and introduced elements form something beautiful, embodying the hope of right relationship.

The cross is rich in the symbolism of relationality. The horizontal beam signifies our relationships across the land: with one another, with community and with the natural world. The vertical beam points to our relationship with the divine. Christ's presence is shown through the stars of the Southern Cross. It is a constellation deeply significant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and familiar to all who dwell on this land. Painted in red, the five stars recall the blood Christ shed on the cross. Each time we look to the night sky, we are reminded of his enduring presence.

A painted journey winds along both the vertical and horizontal branches, representing all Australians walking the path to reconciliation – together, and with Christ at the centre.

The seven images below depict a story that will be familiar to many readers. Although some elements are expressed in abstract style, the narrative unfolds in a largely linear and literal way, echoing the mythic structure outlined



in Genesis 1:1 – 2:4. Because the Genesis creation story is so deeply woven into Christian memory and imagination, viewers can readily recognise and engage with the symbols conveyed through this artwork.

Thoughtful engagement with the image allows the artist to convey, and the viewer to receive, a deeper meaning. The image below is not striving for syncretism, nor does it rest in pluralism. It does not change the meaning conveyed from the original images; rather, it opens further layers of interpretation. It invites dialogue – a deep, rich and respectful interaction between two ancient ways of understanding creation. It reminds us that Christians in Australia receive scripture on this land, and that the theological imagination can be fruitfully engaged without minimising differences.

about through God's relational presence. The Aboriginal creation account witnesses to the relational way Aboriginal Peoples connect to Country.

The symbolism and meaning within artworks may speak to the viewer immediately, or they may unfold gradually. Time and experience can change the story one reads in art. Images invite the viewer into contemplation. How do these stories speak to one another? What new insights emerge? And what might this reveal about God's ongoing presence in these lands?

Liturgical or religious images that adopt this dialogical stance – between two ancient traditions – enable the essential work of dialogue that leads towards reconciliation. They create space for the wisdom of Aboriginal Peoples to be heard and valued, they

OUR COVER

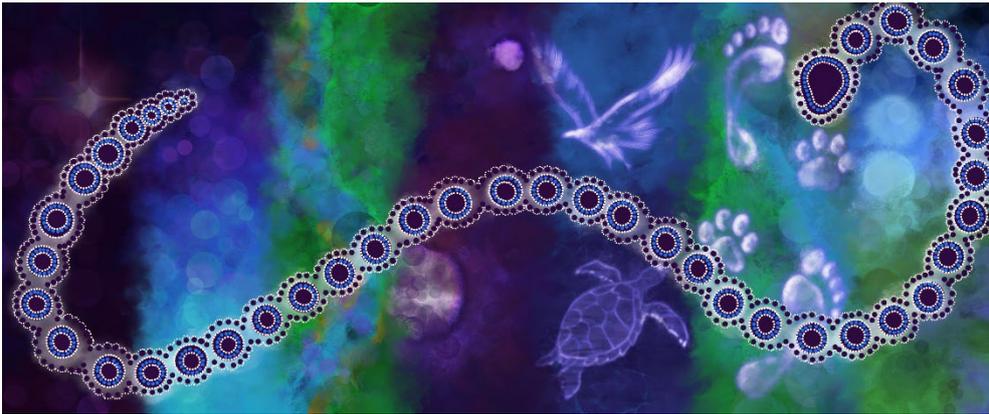
Parables of the Kingdom

This year (Year A), we follow the gospel of Matthew on the Sundays of Ordinary Time. The Lectionary concentrates on the parts of Matthew which are unique. Matthew's gospel presents Jesus as a teacher. So this year, the *Liturgy News* cover images will pick up some of Matthew's parables of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus' mission is to proclaim and inaugurate God's kingdom on earth.

The first of our illustrations is the parable of the weeds and the wheat (Mt 13:24-30) which we will hear in July on the Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time. The kingdom of heaven is compared to a farmer who sows good-quality wheat in his field, but who later discovers that an enemy has sown weeds in the ground as well.

When the wheat sprouts and grows, so too do the weeds. The farm workers ask if they should uproot the weeds. The farmer says 'no' because they might pull up the wheat as well. So he lets the weeds and the wheat grow together until harvest time when the weeds are to be burnt and the wheat harvested.

It is a powerful recognition that good and evil coexist in the world. At the end, there will be a reckoning. Evil will be punished and good rewarded.



The image of the Rainbow Serpent was chosen because, for many Aboriginal Peoples, the Rainbow Serpent is an ancestral being associated with creation and an ongoing connection to Country. I acknowledge that creation stories differ across Aboriginal countries of Australia; however, this story has been used here because the Rainbow Serpent is widely recognised as a creator and shaper of the land. Exploring different creation myths allows relationality to be a focus. *Myth* is used, not to diminish the importance of these stories, but to recognise that while a myth may not be a 'truth' in a literal sense, it often points toward deeper 'truth'. The Genesis creation account witnesses to creation brought

acknowledge that the Creator was already active in these lands long before colonisation and they open up an understanding of God's revelation through the stories embedded in Country. Importantly, incorporating Aboriginal Christian art into liturgy grounds theology – and we are all theologians – in the deeply spiritual soil of these lands. It becomes theology in Australia, for Australians.

■ Helen Bachmann is both an artist and an associate lecturer in the School of Theology at the Australian Catholic University.

© Helen Bachmann, *The Seven Days of Creation* (page 14) and *Creation* (above).

WORDS THAT WOUND

In his first Lenten message as Pope Leo, the Holy Father spoke of the path towards conversion that comes from listening and fasting together in a shared journey. His comments on fasting are particularly challenging. They help us, he said, *to identify and order our 'appetites', keeping our hunger and thirst for justice alive and freeing us from complacency.*

In this regard, I would like to invite you to a very practical and frequently unappreciated form of abstinence: that of refraining from words that offend and hurt our neighbour. Let us begin by disarming our language, avoiding harsh words and rash judgement, refraining from slander and speaking ill of those who are not present and who cannot defend themselves. Instead, let us strive to measure our words and cultivate kindness and respect in our families, among our friends, at work, on social media, in political debates, in the media and in Christian communities. In this way, words of hatred will give way to words of hope and peace.

ST JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

Canonised in 2019 and declared Doctor of the Church in November 2025, Cardinal



John Henry Newman has now been inserted into the General Roman Calendar with the rank of optional memorial. The date chosen for his feast day is 9 October, the date of his reception into the Catholic Church from Anglicanism in 1845. Newman (1801-1890) was an influential theologian and academic and has been named a patron saint for Catholic education.



THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Archaeologists working in Turkey at the ancient town of Nicaea (now called Iznik) have discovered a vaulted tomb with extraordinary frescoes. Dating from the 3rd century, the end wall shows Jesus as the Good Shepherd. The youthful, clean-shaven figure is dressed in a simple tunic and stands in a beautiful garden with flowers and birds which represents paradise. He is surrounded by goats and carries a horned goat over his shoulders. It is the backdrop to a raised slab where the deceased was laid to rest. The style of the painting shows how early Christian iconography drew on classical Roman models. (Images: Arkeolojihaber)

LITURGY CONSULTATION

The Synod on Synodality set up a number of working groups to examine certain difficult questions in more depth. When Pope Leo was elected, he added a study group on liturgy. This group has now sent out a number of questions to dioceses throughout the world. Happily, the consultation is not preoccupied with the use of the traditional Latin Mass – it is not the only issue!

Its first question related to diocesan synods and the attention given to liturgical issues, particularly the way in which liturgy is celebrated. The consultation was keen to discover what action has or has not been taken.

The second question related to Christian initiation and the order of the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist). It questioned dioceses on the unity of the sacramental process and the way in which initiation moved beyond merely imparting knowledge to introduce people to the experience of the faith and the life of the Christian community. Specific questions were related to the place of Penance in the process.

The third question related to experiences of liturgical inculturation – how it has developed, what difficulties have been encountered and what strengths have emerged. The Synod study group

wanted to know how inculturation could be carried forward.

The fourth theme dealt with preaching. What formation is available to encourage good preaching? Is preaching within and outside the liturgy entrusted to lay people? How can preaching become more 'synodal', that is, by broadening homily preparation or by incorporating the testimonies of others in a homily?

Finally input was sought on programs of liturgical formation for both the ordained and all the baptised. Specific questions were asked about the instituted ministries of acolyte, lector and catechist. The consultation extended to the liturgical life and formation in seminaries and houses of formation.

Responses are due at the Synod office in Rome by the end of March 2026.

GERMAN SYNODAL WAY

The new president of the German bishops conference, Bishop Heiner Wilmer of Hildesheim, will seek approval in Rome for the statutes of a synodal conference comprising bishops and lay people. He will also present measures to allow qualified lay people to preach at Mass in Germany. This subject was agreed by the bishops after a request made by the synodal assembly in 2023.

LITURGY AT CARDINALS' MEETING

In January, at the end of the Jubilee Year 2025, Pope Leo XIV convened a consistory (meeting) of all 170 cardinals. Four short papers prepared by cardinals in Rome were tabled, offering four topics for their discussion: 1. synodality, 2. reform of Church governance, 3. the *Joy of the Gospel* (2013 encyclical), and 4. the liturgy. The cardinals chose to discuss the first and third.

The liturgy paper was prepared by Cardinal Arthur Roche, head of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. Central to his concern was the polarisation in the Church over the use of the Latin Tridentine rite.



His two-page paper was a strong defence of Pope Francis' 2021 document, *Traditionis Custodes*, which severely restricted the use of the pre-Vatican II Mass and which caused outrage among traditionalist Catholics. Pope Francis was revoking the liberalisation of the rules concerning the traditional rite which his predecessor Benedict XVI introduced. Benedict had established the old rite as an 'extraordinary form' of the Roman Rite which was made available to all.

However, Francis judged that this free use of the old rite had become divisive, a rallying point for those opposed to the reforms of Vatican II and a point of resistance to movements in the Church such as synodality. He insisted that the liturgy as reformed by Vatican Council II was 'the sole expression of the *lex orandi* of the Roman Rite. Thus Cardinal Roche made a strong argument for continuity with the approach of Pope Francis.

The next consistory of cardinals is scheduled for the end of June 2026. It is not known if the liturgy will be a topic for discussion at that meeting, nor if the paper prepared by Cardinal Roche will be the starting point for their deliberations.

YEAR OF FRANCIS

To mark the 800th anniversary of the death of St Francis of Assisi, Pope Leo has announced a special Jubilee Year of St Francis which will run till January 2027. Australian Franciscan bishop, Vincent Long of Paramatta, wrote that *this Franciscan Jubilee invites the faithful to imitate St Francis' evangelical virtues of poverty, humility, compassion and service to the poor... The Franciscan vision of peace is not limited to the relations among human beings but also embraces the whole of creation. Francis, who recognises in every creature a reflection of divine beauty, reminds us that peace must be extended to the whole cosmos. This insight resonates with particular urgency in our time. Peace with God, peace among human beings and with creation are inseparable dimensions of a single call to universal reconciliation.*

TELEVISED MASS

The Irish public service broadcaster RTÉ (*Raidió Teilifís Éireann*) has made a significant decision which has been lauded by the Irish bishops. Beginning in January, its television transmission of the Sunday Mass has been moved out of a television studio to live worship from parish churches. For over thirty years, it was broadcast from a Donnybrook studio – parish and school groups would be brought there for the liturgy. Mass on television is a valuable service for those who are housebound or elderly but now they will be able to take part in the real worship of an actual parish community rather than assisting at an artificial television studio production. Technology has made this scenario possible.

One hopes that the Australian bishops will also review their longstanding 'Mass for You at Home' (programmed since 1971). It is now filmed in a real church rather than on a studio set, but it is still a Mass celebrated for the television camera. The empty church is set up with studio lighting and sound, and it is supervised by production personnel. Just a server and two readers are present with the priest. Music is pre-recorded. Given our extensive experience with live-streaming, is it not now possible to allow people to share in real time in the liturgy of an actual parish community at worship?

PAPAL STAFF

A new papal staff is being carried by Pope Leo. While it shows Christ on the cross, his raised arms emphasise his glorious resurrection. The pope's Office for Liturgical Celebrations pointed out that the Paschal Mystery is the gravitational centre of the apostolic proclamation. *It presents the wounds of the cross as luminous signs of victory that, while not erasing human pain, transfigure it into the dawn of divine life.* Gifted to the pope, it was crafted by Filipino artist Willy Layug.



LITURGY COUNCILS

The **Bishops Commission for Liturgy** has a new member to replace Bishop Paul Bird who has now retired from Ballarat; it is Bishop Brian Mascord of Wollongong. He joins on-going members Bishop Ken Howell of Toowoomba and Archbishop Patrick O'Regan of Adelaide who is the Commission chair.

There has also been a renewal of membership on Australia's liturgical councils. Those whose term of office has expired have been farewelled and new members have been welcomed.

New members of the **National Liturgical Council** are Fiona Dyball and James Cronin who replace retiring members Michael Fitzpatrick and Evelyn Parkin. Continuing members of the NLC are Louise Gannon, Cathy Murrowood, Judy Foster, Vincent Glynn and Kari Hatherell, and its chair Clare Schwantes.

The **National Liturgical Architecture and Art Council** is still chaired by Stephen Hackett. Continuing members Rene Sutherland and Sue

Orchison are now joined by Andrew Chaplin, Jesse Mowbray, Brian Nichols, Sarah Veas and Kerry Willison. Departing members are Elio Capra, Ursula de Jong, Anthony Doran, Andrew Kirkbride and Jill O'Brien.

The chair of the **National Liturgical Music Council**, Clare Johnson, has finished her term of office as well as Chris Willcock and Anthony Young. Joining continuing members Elizabeth Fort, Elizabeth Murray and Josie Ryan are Clair Stanelos, Dominic Perissinotto, and Gary Quinn, along with the new chair Daryl Barclay.

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

The final report of the Synod on Synodality study group on the participation of women in the life and leadership of the Church was released in March 2026. One of the ways this has been articulated in recent decades is in terms of a dual Marian and Petrine principle. A distinction, however, based on separate male and female qualities or identities is fraught with danger.

The study group, in fact, sidelines the masculine/feminine approaches to participation and instead affirms clearly the equal human dignity of all. Women's participation in authoritative leadership in the Church life is based on our common baptism. *From an ecclesiological perspective, it is therefore necessary to overcome an artificial separation between genders and roles, considering the shared dignity of all creatures made in the image and likeness of God as well as the common Baptism. By virtue of Baptism, every baptised person is a visible representative of the Church.* This is the basis of all synodality, collaboration and co-responsibility.

The Synod document is forthright in identifying a certain pattern of thought and behaviour identifiable as 'clericalism' or 'machismo', also called 'male chauvinism'. It sees clericalism arising from the tendency to transfer automatically the authority and unique role that properly belongs to the priest in the celebration of the Eucharist into all other areas of community life. However, this starting point is manifestly incorrect.

Rather, Church documents affirm that the Eucharist is celebrated by Christ, that is the Body of Christ – not just the priest as an 'alter Christus', but the whole body of all those baptised into Christ. The priest by virtue of his ordination is given the role of presiding. This is a service that draws the whole celebrating assembly into what Christ is doing. The priest facilitates everyone's active participation in the Paschal Mystery which is the content of the liturgical action.



J P Grayland, *Horizons: Essays on Synodality, Liturgy and Global Catholicism*

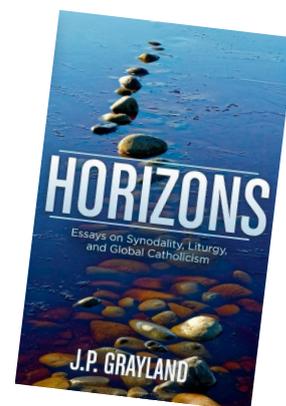
(Te Heparā Pai, NZ, 2025) 217 pages

by James Cronin

Joseph Grayland is a New Zealand priest and sacramental theologian currently teaching at the University of Würzburg in Germany. As its title suggests, this book is broad in scope, navigating the complexities of pluralism, globalisation and morality. *Around the world, Catholics are discerning how to live and express their faith in a world shaped by globalisation, technological connectivity, and cultural hybridity. It is a shift in identity, theology, and mission* (p. x). Drawing on synodal ideas of dialogue, discernment and listening, he deals with inculturation and pluralism, before going on to address more specifically liturgical horizons. In this book of essays, our author invites us to see what has and is happening as we journey through many changes to a new place.

Grayland sees the liturgy as the central axis of transformation for a Church grappling with diversity and dissent. While he theologises about many modern trends, he does not always give concrete examples of the zeitgeist he is exploring. However, he does strongly hold that liturgy is the sleeper in Church-world interaction: *While the synodal process emphasises dialogue, inclusivity, and reform in governance and clericalism, it has generally sidelined liturgical issues despite liturgy's central role in Catholic life* (p. 135). Bad liturgical praxis can undermine belief in subtle but powerful ways. As the axiom has it: 'As we pray, so we believe'. He gives the example of 'functional clericalism', naming the unwillingness of priests to consecrate enough hosts for the people at Mass so that all can be fed from the eucharistic table at the Eucharist they attend. *Instead, just before communion distribution, he trots off to the tabernacle to bring pre-consecrated hosts from a week ago for the people. At the same time, he eats and drinks from the eucharistic meal at which he presides. This functional clericalism declares: Father matters most: the people can have what's left over* (pp. 47-8).

Language is a key to understanding culture and therefore what is effective and appropriate liturgy. Pope Benedict's *Liturgiam authenticam* (2001) led a decade later to a Missal with clunky, arcane and 'churchy' expressions galore. Pope Francis challenged this 'reform of the reform' with *Magnum*



Principium (2017) and set a new direction. Part of the ongoing controversy involves inclusive language. *Rejecting inclusive gender terms and usage reflects a larger rejection of social development* (p. 191), notes the pope, which puts the Church in a place that seemingly does not want to engage with the world, but wants to live on its own. Yet, says Grayland, *the Church remains the 'agent of salvation' because of the liturgy. The liturgy is the experiential contact between the mystery of faith, the deposit of faith, and the world. Through the liturgy, celebrated in various languages and contexts, the Church remains an 'agent of salvation' by adapting 'more closely to the needs of our age those institutions which are subject to change'* (pp. 80-81). We preach with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other!

Way back in 1998, Pope John-Paul II gave us a wonderful vision of both Eucharist and Sunday in his encyclical *Dies Domini*. Nowadays, Sunday has become a day for shopping, entertainment and sport. *The problem is that the Church is not dealing with the critical theological and liturgical issues coherently and systematically* (p. 196). It is one thing to develop ideas of lay presiding and review notions of the parish as a geographical and financial structure, but the *issue being avoided is the nature of the sacrament of orders* (p. 197). *The increasing number of communities of believers that are unable to participate in the Eucharist on the Lord's Day is an international phenomenon that risks the breakdown of Catholicism as a sacramental community* (p. 195).

Other themes weave in and out of the essays – travail over liturgical language, linking liturgy with justice and the needs of the poor, and the hate speech found even in Church circles. Issues surrounding Latin and the 1962 Missal figure prominently.

Sexual abuse within the Church is addressed several times. Grayland laments the way apologies for this scandal are inappropriately inserted into Sunday Mass during the penitential rite, the homily or intercessions. This is a complex and delicate area, and three steps are recommended. *First, ask survivors what an authentic act of penance would look like. Second, ask survivors and parishioners what a genuine act of restitution for survivors might look like. Third, ask survivors, parishioners and perpetrators what a healing form of public reconciliation might look like* (p. 57). We have done a lot of work putting together safeguards for children and vulnerable adults. We have not been so good at understanding the goal of our rites of penance in this area.

Synodality moves us in the direction of a communal understanding. It extols the virtues of active listening, communication and dialogue across cultures and mind sets. It is lamentable that Western Christendom suffers so deeply from individualism. *Catholics understand morality, forgiveness, and restitution as a personal or privatised affair* (p. 43). Just as we believe Jesus died for all, so our prayers and rites must be all about bringing all humanity together in unity.

The writing and structure of this book is loose. Yet there are important critical insights. *Ultimately, this collection serves as both a commentary and an invitation. It offers no definitive answers but reflections that aim to inspire thoughtful engagement. It challenges the reader to consider how the Church can be faithful to its tradition while courageously facing new questions* (p. 207).



Volume 56 Number 1
AUTUMN ♦ March 2026

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ISSN 2653-0090 (Online)

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