

# The Rite Way

Office for Worship  
Diocese of Norwich  
**Summer 2008**

Welcome, one and all, to another edition of *The Rite Way*. This marks the first time we are able to send the newsletter directly to parishes, as well as have it posted on the diocesan website. Our topic in this issue is “just” liturgy. Just some very basic ideas about how and why we celebrate together, and some pointers on how important the details are in assuring our parish celebrations are the best they can be.

If you find the content of the newsletter interesting, please direct your friends and other liturgical ministers to it. Also, contact the members of your Diocesan Liturgical Commission (listed on the last page), and give us some feedback. Our goal is to be of service to liturgical ministers in all our parishes. Let us know what would be helpful

Sister Elissa Rinere, C.P.  
Office for Worship



## **Why Liturgy At All?**

**Susan Berry, St. Patrick's, East Hampton**

In his book, *A New Song for the Lord*, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, reminds us that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines the word *liturgy* as, “service in the name of/on behalf of the people.” Cardinal Ratzinger continues that, when Christians adopted the word *liturgy* from the Greek Old Testament, they eventually used the term to mean, “the participation of the People of God in ‘the work of God.’”

In his discussion about the roles of the priest and the assembly in the liturgy, Cardinal Ratzinger states, “...we can say that neither the priest alone nor the community alone is the celebrant of the liturgy, but the whole Christ is the celebrant, head and members...In every liturgical celebration the whole Church- heaven and earth, God and humans- is involved...The more the celebration is *nourished* from this knowledge and from this experience, the more concretely will the liturgy become meaningful.”

These words might cause all of us to pause amid the sometimes rote planning of our parish liturgies, or the sameness of our responses and various postures from our pews or seats. The reason why we have liturgy at all- the reason why liturgy is even important at all- is because we, priest, deacons and assembly together, are all part of Christ's body, together for the purpose of celebrating our unity in Christ.

For most of us, who are members of the assembly, our role takes on a brighter hue through this lens provided by then Cardinal Ratzinger. If the “whole Christ” is the celebrant of the liturgy, then it follows that the absence of one of its parts causes the liturgy to be less meaningful. Is it possible that an assembly with minimal participation could make our liturgy less meaningful?

As part of the whole “celebrant” of the liturgy, the assembly cannot simply “choose” to respond, to sing, to stand, or not. After all, if the “priest part” of the whole “celebrant” of the liturgy chose not to read the gospel, or chose not to say the Eucharistic prayer, quite a few heads would turn in the assembly! We need to have that level of expectation of the assembly’s role, and those of us who have been given the gift of teaching about liturgy, need to present this to our parishioners. It is we who, in the words of our current Pope, are asked to *nourish* this knowledge.

The “assembly part” of the whole “celebrant” is an active role, expressed in assertive responses, prayerful singing and gestures, and attentive listening. The assembly is the community of God and, as such, we enjoy the “high point” of our role when we join in the communion procession, standing and singing as we go to the table of the Lord!

This means that, as liturgists, we do everything possible to encourage the active listening of our assembly, by ensuring that our scripture readings are articulated clearly, with pauses for reflection. We choose sacred music for the entire assembly, not just the choir, during the communion procession. We *nourish*, or teach, the assembly about liturgy- *the participation of the People of God in the work of God*-and the fact that their active presence makes it meaningful.

For more information, see: Ratzinger, Joseph. *A New Song for the Lord*. The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 1996, pp. 169-172.



## **SILENCE – GOOD LITURGICAL BALANCE**

**Father James Carini  
St. Matthew Parish, Tolland**

Someone once suggested to me that we could shorten our liturgies if we didn’t have so many pauses in them. Perhaps this person felt that Mass was too long and was trying to be helpful. My response was that we need some silence in our liturgical celebrations so that there is a good balance and rhythmic flow.

To illustrate, I suggested the person consider to a piece of good music. I am not a musician, but I do know that rests within a musical score are as essential as the notes themselves. A rest is the opposite of a note; it is a moment of silence. Without rests we wouldn’t have any rhythm in music. It is the same with our liturgy.

In his June 2003 address to the Denver Liturgical Conference, Francis Cardinal Arinze, prefect of the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship, addressed this principle of good liturgy. *“The sacred liturgy provides for many moments of quiet listening, personal reflection and silent prayer so that the worshipper praises God not just with the lips but with mind and heart (cf. Is 29:13; Mt 15:8; Mk 7:6). The priest celebrant should favor such moments that promote personal prayer. And the choir should not try to fill every quiet moment with a song.”*

We live in a culture that is filled with noise. Many people have difficulty with silence and so they keep the TV in the house or the radio in the car blaring to fill the time with sound. We also live in a very fast moving society that doesn't like to wait. From fast food to instant credit we are used to getting things done quickly. So, when it comes to our Eucharistic celebrations we are conditioned one way through our culture, while our worship rituals invite us into another realm.

Even before the celebration begins, the Church recommends (GIRM #45) that silence be observed in certain areas of the church, such as the vesting room, so that those carrying out the sacred rites may be properly disposed. Other designated times, the Penitential rite, the invitation to prayer, at the conclusion of a reading or the homily, and after Communion, call for a sacred silence. The purpose of each is determined by the time that it occurs in the Mass.

The Liturgy of the Word ought to be celebrated in a way that fosters meditation. Haste in proclaiming the word is an enemy of recollection. Times of brief silence should be included, so that *“at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, the word of God may be grasped by the heart and a response through prayer may be prepared.”* (GIRM #56)

The period after Communion is a very important time for silent prayer. It has a long history of being recommended, from St. Alphonsus Liguori who urged a half hour of prayer, to Pope Pius XII who strongly recommended that both the priest and faithful converse with the Divine Redeemer for a short while. It was also written in Canon Law that a thanksgiving after Mass be made. Now the Order of Mass provides that time after Communion to pray silently and give praise to God in our hearts.

This period of sacred silence after Communion should be ended by the Prayer after Communion and not interrupted by announcements. Until more recently there was a custom of giving announcements at the end of the homily, but now they are to be made following the Prayer after Communion, at the beginning of the concluding rite.

Good liturgy needs moments of silence to maintain a proper balance between action and contemplation. It is in the stillness of our hearts that God wants to speak to us. The Eucharistic assembly needs these quiet moments to facilitate fruitful listening and quiet praise.





**Singing During Communion**  
**Sister Elissa Rinere, C.P.**  
**Office for Worship**

Our current liturgical norms make it clear that not just music, but a singing congregation, is an essential element in good liturgy. A singing congregation is participating, attentive, joyful and prayerful.

At Communion time, the singing congregation is especially important. Some may find this contrary to the commonly held belief that Communion time is a time of quiet and private prayer, and singing at Communion is something left to the choir or the cantor. Well, believe it or not, our liturgical norms don't agree with this!

The GIRM states that the purpose of the Communion song, which all are supposed to be singing, is to give expression to the spiritual unity of the people, show "joy of heart" and highlight "the communitarian nature of the procession to receive Communion" (n.86).

To accomplish these purposes, the Communion song is to be familiar and simple to sing. Ideally, it should be a psalm or other song that has a repeated antiphon. The Communion song accompanies the action of the procession, so it shouldn't require books, since these tend to distract from the act of processing. The favored plan is that the choir or cantor sings the verses, and the people sing the refrain.

The Communion song also provides order for the procession. If the whole congregation is joining in the song, individuals might be less inclined to "cut the line" or to leave early, before the procession and the rest of the Mass are completed. With good singing, the act of coming forward to share the Eucharist is more clearly a community action that flows from being at the celebration itself. The period of silence after Communion, when all have returned to their places, is the time for private prayer and thanksgiving.

How close to the ideal is your parish music program? Are the people encouraged to sing, especially at Communion time? Do the music selections make participation easier? Is there good musical leadership that the people can follow? Is it generally understood and accepted that Communion time is not a time for choir solos, or even instrumental music, although a meditation hymn after Communion is fine?

Liturgy is the most important ministry in the life of a parish. It requires constant attention to detail, and constant improvement in how we celebrate together. To improve or encourage singing during the Communion procession is not undertaken for its own sake, but to provide the people with the opportunity to experience another piece of the richness of the Mass. (For more resources, see: Lawrence Johnson, *The Mystery of Faith*, page 117).



**Posture When Receiving Communion**  
**Sue Myshraal, Office for Evangelization**

In certain aspects, the liturgy is choreographed, just like a dance. During Mass, we use different postures and gestures to enhance our participation. By standing, sitting, kneeling and bowing at the proper times, we are engaging our bodies in prayer, as well as our hearts and minds. However, we do not change the prescribed posture according to our own preferences. The common postures and gestures are a symbol of the unity of the worshipping body. Through our common actions, we witness to our belief that we are, indeed, the Body of Christ, united in spirit.

At the time for the distribution of Communion, the people approach the altar. The Church understands this action as the Communion Procession, a sign of the Pilgrim Church on the way to entering the joy of the eternal Kingdom. The procession to receive Communion is supported by the Communion hymn. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*(2002) directs that this hymn should begin as the priest is receiving Communion, and continue until the distribution of Communion is completed. During Communion, our common action is singing.

Also, the bishops of the United States have directed that our common posture when receiving Communion is standing. Standing is a sign of respect and honor, and an acknowledgement that by Baptism we have been given a share in the life of God. Our bishops have also directed that our common gesture before receiving the Eucharist is a slight bow of the head. This bow of the head is intended to be a sign of reverence for the Eucharist, as well as a sign of prayerfulness on the part of the one receiving.

These liturgical norms about common actions, posture and gestures during the Communion Procession are only a few years old, so some reminders through liturgical catechesis might be appropriate in some parishes.



## RESOURCES

Check out these websites for news or liturgical tips

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops: [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org)

For official documents and the BCL newsletter

Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions: [www.fdlc.org](http://www.fdlc.org)

For new publications and workshops

National Association of Liturgical Musicians: [www.npm.org](http://www.npm.org)

For music resources and workshops

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### Your Diocesan Liturgical Commission

Susan Berry, St. Patrick Parish, East Hampton

Father James Carini, St. Matthew Parish, Tolland

Deacon Peter Gill, St. Coleman Parish, Middlefield

Nancy Mignault, St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Preston

Father Paul Murdock, Sagrado Corazon Parish, Windham

Susan Myshrall, Office of Evangelization and Catechumenate

Sister Elissa Rinere, C.P., Office for Worship

Father Stanley Szczapa, Sacred Heart Parish, Vernon and St. Maurice Parish, Bolton

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This newsletter is for you! Let us know if you find it helpful. Send us suggestions for changes or improvements, and most importantly, let us know what kinds of articles would be helpful in your ministry. Send e-mail responses to: [worship@norwichdiocese.net](mailto:worship@norwichdiocese.net). Mail to Office for Worship, Bishop Flanagan Ministry Center 1595 Norwich-New London Tpke., Uncasville, CT 06382. Thank you!



This newsletter is also available at [www.norwichdiocese.org](http://www.norwichdiocese.org)