

FULL, ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE LITURGY

We often hear people say they are bored at Mass. Perhaps the reason being that they do not understand what 'full and active participation in the liturgy' means.

Paragraph 48 of Sacrosanctum Concilium states:

'Christ's faithful when present at the Eucharist....should be instructed by God's Word and be nourished at the table of the Lord's body; they should give thanks to God; by offering the immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should also learn to offer themselves; through Christ the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect unity with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all.'

The Vatican II document Sacrosanctum Concilium talks of being fed and nourished at the table of the Word and the table of the Eucharist. That Word needs to be broken for people so that like the disciples on the road to Emmaus we can say: *'Did not our hearts burn within us as he opened the scriptures to us.'*

We need a deeper understanding of the parts of Mass so that we can truly participate in the Liturgy rather than being an observer.

INTRODUCTORY RITES

As the priest processes through the congregation to reach the sanctuary what does this action say to us?

Prior to this action the congregation are a group of people waiting for the Liturgy to begin. By processing through the congregation, the priest is preparing the people for worship. This congregation are the gathered people of God preparing to encounter Christ through Word and Eucharist.

Scripture reading: Nehemiah 8: 2-6 8-10

Ezra brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all the children who could understand what was being read. It was the first day of the seventh month. Ezra read the book before all of them from early morning until midday in the square facing the Water Gate; and all who heard were attentive to the Book of the Law.

Ezra, the teacher of the Law, stood on a wooden platform built for that occasion.

Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was in a higher place; and when he opened it, all the people stood. 6 Ezra blessed Yahweh, the great God; and all the people lifted up their hands and answered, "Amen! Amen!" And they bowed their heads to the ground.

They read from the Book of the Law of God, clarifying and interpreting the meaning, so that everyone might understand what they were hearing.

Then Ezra, the teacher of the Law, said to the people, "This day is dedicated to Yahweh, your God, so do not be sad or weep." He said this because all wept when they heard the reading of the Law. 10 Then he said to them, "Go and eat rich foods, drink sweet wine and share with him who has nothing prepared.

This day is dedicated to the Lord, so do not be sad. The joy of Yahweh is our strength."

What is happening to the people gathered to hear the Word of God? What do you think the people are thinking about? What joys and sorrows do they bring? As we gather to worship, we bring with us many joys and sorrows and we prepare ourselves to bring them to God, offering our whole being.

PENITENTIAL RITE

As we gather to celebrate the Eucharist, we reflect on how we experience God's mercy. St. John in his first letter tells us: *'This is the love I mean not our love for God but God's love for us.'* Where do I need to experience the mercy of God? As we prepare to encounter Christ in Word and Eucharist, I need to experience the healing I need that God's mercy brings. There is always the invitation from God: *'Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest.'*

Scripture reading: Revelation 3: 20 -22

Look, I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my call and open the door, I will come in to you and have supper with you, and you with me. I will let the victor sit with me on my throne just as I was victorious and took my place with my Father on his throne. Let anyone who has ears listen to what the Spirit says to the Churches."

As we open our hearts and prepare to celebrate the Eucharist let us open the door of our hearts and welcome the Lord for food and nourishment and experience the healing presence of the Lord. What would prevent me from turning to God's mercy?

The Gloria is said or sung to give praise to God for all he has done for us and all that he gives us.

The collect prayer is when we pause in silence and reflect on what we need to bring to the Lord in this Mass. The priest then gathers all our intentions to include them in the opening prayer of the Mass.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

During the Ordinary Sundays of the year we listen to the first reading which comes from the Old Testament. The Psalm reflects a theme or themes from that reading. The second reading is always from one of the letters in the New Testament usually from St. Paul. Over a period of weeks, we listen to the whole of that letter. The Gospel is linked to the Old Testament reading. The seasons of Advent, Christmastide, Lent and Easter have readings relating to those seasons. It is important to listen to the Word of God. Through his Word God may have a message for you. Listen with a disciple's ear. If you are able to, it would be good to have read the readings prior to coming to Mass so that you are allowing that Word to speak to your heart.

Scripture reading: Lk 4: 16 – 22

When Jesus came to Nazareth where he had been brought up, he entered the synagogue on the Sabbath as he usually did. He stood up to read and they handed him the book of the prophet Isaiah.

Jesus then unrolled the scroll and found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and new sight to the blind; to free the oppressed and announce the Lord's year of mercy."

Jesus then rolled up the scroll, gave it to the attendant and sat down, while the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he said to them, "Today these prophetic words come true even as you listen."

All agreed with him and were lost in wonder, while he kept on speaking of the grace of God

Notice how attentive the people are as Jesus reads the scriptures. We need that stillness and openness to be touched by the proclamation of God's Word. What would help me to encounter Christ in his Word?

HOMILY

The point of the homily is to break open the Word of God to help people relate that Word to their everyday lives. The Word of God is alive and active as the author of the Letter to Hebrews tells. That Word is as relevant today as it was when the inspired scribe put pen to paper. It is useful to take home with you the Mass sheet with those readings printed on it. Pray and meditate on that Word during the week to allow the Holy Spirit to draw you deeper in understanding what God is saying to you.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

Profession of Faith – After the homily, and in response to the proclamation of God's Word, we profess our faith by reciting the ancient Nicene Creed (325 A.D.). We confess our faith in the Triune God (One God in three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit), and in God's redeeming work on our behalf.

(A creed is a formula or statement of faith or belief.)

UNIVERSAL PRAYERS (bidding prayers)

Prayers are offered on behalf of our Church and church leaders, our world, and local needs. There is time for private prayers and conclude with prayers for the dead.

PREPARATION OF GIFTS

The Corporal is placed on the altar. This is to show by a gesture that this congregation are invited to home in on a new sacred space. The corporal has the gifts of bread and wine placed upon it. We move from the sacred space of the congregation to this piece of white cloth where the bread and wine will be transformed into Christ's Body and Blood.

The bread and wine is usually brought to the altar in procession. This gesture is to show that as the gifts of bread and wine are brought to the altar, so we too bring all that we want to offer to God in this Mass; our lives, our gifts and talents. Just as the bread and wine will be changed, transformed into Christ's Body and Blood so may our lives be transformed as we participate in the liturgy. This is another way where we participate fully in the celebration. We are not bystanders but participants.

Scripture reading: Lk. 19: 1 – 10

When Jesus entered Jericho and was going through the city, a man named Zaccheus was there. He was a tax collector and a wealthy man. He wanted to see what Jesus was like, but he was a short man and could not see because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed up a sycamore tree. From there he would be able to see Jesus who had to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zaccheus, come down quickly for I must stay at your house today." So Zaccheus hurried down and received him joyfully.

All the people who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to the house of a sinner as a guest." But Zaccheus spoke to Jesus, "The half of my goods, Lord, I give to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will pay him back four times as much." Looking at him Jesus said, "Salvation has come to this house today, for he is also a true son of Abraham. The Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost."

This is a wonderful story of a person's encounter with Jesus. Jesus sees beyond Zacchaeus' sins and failings. He sees what he could become. Jesus stays with him and as a result of the encounter Zacchaeus is transformed. Do I allow the Lord to see beyond my failings and allow him to transform me?

PREFACE AND EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

In the preface we are reminded of the things God has done for humankind in general. The next part of the preface informs us of what God does for us now. We are then invited to join the angels and saints in praising God. What a wonderful image of this congregation being invited to join the angels and saints in praising our heavenly Father.

The Eucharistic prayer is a wonderful prayer to reflect on. Take some time in praying that prayer and rejoice in what it is revealing to us.

The Holy Spirit is invited to come upon the gifts of bread and wine that they may be transformed. The gesture of the priest placing his hands over the gifts reminds us of God creating the world, Mary being asked to be the Mother of God. The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the laying on of hands in the sacraments and the many occasions when Jesus laid his hands on the sick and forgave sinners. Reflect too on the many times the disciples were prayed over before a mission.

The **Amen** at the end of the preface is our chance of saying our yes to everything we have heard. During this prayer we are being taken up and are part of the drama unfolded.

Scripture reading: 1Cor 11: 23 – 27

This is the tradition of the Lord that I received and that in my turn I have handed on to you; the Lord Jesus, on the night that he was delivered up, took bread and, after giving thanks, broke it, saying, "This is my body which is broken for you; do this in memory of me." In the same manner, taking the cup after the supper, he said, "This cup is the new Covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do it in memory of me." So, then, whenever you eat of this bread and drink from this cup, you are proclaiming the death of the Lord until he comes.

Therefore, if anyone eats of the bread or drinks from the cup of the Lord unworthily, he sins against the body and blood of the Lord.

The actions of taking, blessing, breaking and giving take place at the consecration. These actions are revealed to us through the different parts of the Mass. To be a Eucharistic people I need to reflect on those actions in my

life. He takes me and blesses me through the sacraments and the many graces he bestows upon me. He breaks me of my failings and sinfulness and sends me forth from Mass to live out that which we have celebrated.

Communion Rite and Dismissal

We have already eaten from the table of the Word. As we process to receive Holy Communion it is recommended that some simple chant should be sung which is linked to the Liturgy of the Word to remind us that we now prepare ourselves to be fed with the Eucharist. To process reminds us that we are a pilgrim people on a journey.

Silence after Holy Communion is important showing the link with the silence at the end of the Liturgy of the Word. Moments of silence are important in our liturgy. It gives God a chance to speak to our hearts. The Bishops of England and Wales have produced a document highlighting silence in the liturgy.

The dismissal at the end of Mass instructs us to go out and put into practice what we have celebrated. We are to be a light in the darkness and salt of the earth.

Scripture reading: Lk. 24: 13 – 35

That same day, two of them were going to Emmaus, a village seven miles from Jerusalem, and they talked about what had happened. While they were talking and wondering, Jesus came up and walked with them, but their eyes were held and they did not recognize him.

He asked, "What is this you are talking about?" The two stood still, looking sad. Then one named Cleophas answered, "Why, it seems you are the only traveler in Jerusalem who doesn't know what has happened there these past few days." And he asked, "What is it?"

They replied, "It is about Jesus of Nazareth. He was a prophet, you know, mighty in word and deed before God and the people. But the chief priests and our rulers sentenced him to death. They handed him over to be crucified. We had hoped that he would redeem Israel.

It is now the third day since all this took place. It is true that some women of our group have disturbed us. When they went to the tomb at dawn, they did not find his body; they came to tell us that they had seen a vision of angels who told them that Jesus was alive. Some friends of our group went to the tomb and found everything just as the women had said, but they did not see him."

He said to them, "How dull you are, how slow of understanding! You fail to believe the message of the prophets. Is it not written that the Christ should suffer all this and then enter his glory?" Then starting with Moses and going through the prophets, he explained to them everything in the Scriptures concerning himself.

As they drew near the village they were heading for, Jesus made as if to go farther. But they prevailed upon him, "Stay with us, for night comes quickly. The day is now almost over." So he went in to stay with them. When they were at table, he took the bread, said a blessing, broke it and gave each a piece.

Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; but he vanished out of their sight. And they said to each other, "Were not our hearts filled with ardent yearning when he was talking to us on the road and explaining the Scriptures?"

They immediately set out and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and their companions gathered together. They were greeted by these words: "Yes, it is true, the Lord is risen! He has appeared to Simon!" Then the two told what had happened on the road and how Jesus made himself known when he broke bread with them.

Reflect on this passage and see the connection to our celebration of Mass. The disciples encountered Christ in Word and Eucharist. Share your journey of encounter with someone you trust.