

# The Eucharistic Prayer and Communion Rite: Receiving Christ

## The Church makes the Eucharist but the Eucharist makes the Church

Recent teaching on the Liturgy of the Mass has emphasised the unity of the whole celebration. It is a unity comprised of different parts, principally the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, but even so those different parts are interlinked in many ways, and they form a single action: The Mass.

Often people make use of the 'Emmaus story' as they try to describe the relationship between the two parts of the Mass. That story, found in chapter 24 Luke's gospel, tells of two disciples travelling from Jerusalem on the very day the Lord has risen from the dead, finding themselves joined in their journey by a stranger. The stranger asks what they are talking about, and they tell him of the events of the passion, and their dashed hopes that Jesus might be the one who would set Israel free. He leads them to a new-hearing of the scriptures, and shows them how the scriptures can help them accept and begin to make sense of what has happened, and regain hope. Night draws in and the two disciples decide to rest in an inn, and persuade the stranger to join them. At the meal he takes and blesses the bread and in that action all the pieces in the puzzle fall into place for them. They recognise Jesus, even as he vanishes from their sight. Those using this story to describe the Mass observe that it is through the deeper hearing of the scriptures that the disciples are helped to recognise the risen Lord, even to receive him. And having found this new union with him, the disciples have received their mission, so they rush back to Jerusalem to share the good news with their friends.

In our parishes, one of the most important ways of preparing people for the Liturgy of the Eucharist, for the offering of the sacrifice of the Mass, and for receiving Holy Communion, is our celebration of the Liturgy of the Word. If that is done in a way that engages people, and leads them to personal prayer, and a new desire for union of life with Christ in the Church, then they will enter the Liturgy of the Eucharist ready to take their full part in all that follows. If the Liturgy of the Word is celebrated in a way that does not engage and does not lead people to personal prayer, and a

desire for union with Christ in the Church, then by the time they come to the Liturgy of the Eucharist they will have been in Church maybe for half an hour, are perhaps bored, and at the least one expect their attention to have started to wonder. They are most unlikely to have been prepared by what has happened to take up their proper part in the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and the Mass as a whole will be experienced by most present as somewhat flat and not at all the celebration and enabler of faith that it should be.

In this season of *At Your Word Lord* the liturgical focus is on the Eucharistic Prayer and the Communion Rite - but the challenge for the Liturgy Preparation Group, and all the parish's ministers, is to ensure that the whole of the Mass is celebrated well, that it all hangs together in a way that will help it to be most fruitful for the community of the parish.

## Refreshment by reflection on the Eucharist

The work of looking at the Liturgy of the Eucharist began in Season III, with the focus on the rites of Preparation which begin this part of the Mass. So already the Parish Liturgy Group has made a start on what is being addressed in Season IV.

The Eucharist is such a rich reality, it connects with so many different dimensions of Catholic Christian life that it is to be hoped that the particular focus of the Liturgy Group over this season can connect with the things that others are doing - and not only as part of *At Your Word, Lord* season IV.

Every group in a parish - pastoral, spiritual, educational - can find in new reflection on the Eucharist fresh encouragement to greater Catholic authenticity in what it is doing.

The Eucharist is something that each priest has to take special care to deepen his love and understanding for. At his ordination he receives from the Bishop bread and wine to be used in the offering of the Mass. The Bishop says to him:

- Accept from the Holy People of God the gifts to be offered to him.
- Know what you are doing, and imitate the mystery you celebrate:

- model your life on the mystery of the Lord's cross.

The Eucharist is a rich theme for catechists and others with responsibility for adult formation in the parish to reflect on. It is important to ensure that there is an understanding of Catholic teaching about the presence of Christ in the sacrament (and the other presences of Christ in the liturgy), but also about the eucharistic dimension of Catholic living. It is not the priest alone who is called to imitate the mystery he celebrates.

### Understanding comes from good practice

One of the principal places in which we learn about the Eucharist and how to be a eucharistic people is of course the liturgy. Every celebration of the liturgy is formative of faith and life. Good celebrations deepen faith and promote more authentic Christian living. Poor celebration may de-form our faith and leave us less able to live authentic Christian lives.

It is a mistake to think that celebration is formative only when there is explicit teaching, for example about the Eucharist. Good celebration is its own formation, and works less by explicit content, more by drawing us into patterns of behaviour, imbuing us with its values and ways. It teaches us to be a people who find ourselves as individuals in the gathering of the Church; teaches us to be a people who learn from listening to scripture and praying to the Lord; teaches us to be a people who are not self-sufficient but need the food and drink that comes from the Lord.

We need both forms of teaching, of course, and the homily at Mass can offer both. It can offer explicit teaching which develops some aspect of the readings from the day's scripture readings or from the other texts of the Mass. It can offer implicit teaching through its highlighting the community's sharing in common values by the way it lives, and through the quality of the pastoral relationship between the homilist and the assembly. Always though the homily is to be an integral part of the liturgy, rather than a tacked on bit of 'teaching'.

### Recent key writings on the Eucharist:

A number of authoritative documents have been published recently which offer a rich resource

for personal reflection on the Eucharist, and for material to share in groups, or for newsletters and other information/reflection sheets for use in the parish.

*One Bread One Body* is a document produced by the Bishops of England and Wales, Scotland, and Ireland which especially addresses issues of eucharistic sharing between Roman Catholics and Christians of other Churches and communions. Part 2 of *One Bread One Body* offers a straightforward, concise, but rich presentation of Catholic faith in the Eucharist, likely to be of abiding use to parishes.

*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, a recent encyclical by Pope John Paul II, is a sometimes very personal reflection by the Holy Father on the place of the Eucharist in his own life and in the life of the Church. It is not something that all people will find easy to read and make sense of, as it stands. But it is so rich that those who make the effort will find it very rewarding. They might then select paragraphs and sentences to explore in preaching or catechesis, or newsletters.

In *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* Pope John Paul expressed concern that the Church's celebration of the liturgy should be faithful to the tradition, and bear fruit in the lives of the faithful. He asked that a supplementary document be prepared to promote good quality celebration. This document has been prepared by the relevant Roman congregation, and was published last year. Again, like *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, *Redemptionis Sacramentum* is not the easiest document to read, but it offers very valuable encouragement to best practice. It offers a rich understanding of the collaborative work that is celebration of the Mass, and it highlights some of the ways in which we can get things wrong sometimes. The publicity given to the document prior to its publication will have persuaded some that *Redemptionis Sacramentum* would have nothing helpful to say. Far from it. All parishes can learn from its encouragement to ensure that the liturgy is prepared well and celebrated reverently. However because it is a document addressed to the Universal Church when it comes to address particular failings, some of these might be found in some form in any particular parish - and then they should be addressed, and the liturgy group has a role to play in that - but others will not.

Further details of these and other publications on the Eucharist and the celebration of the Mass are given in the Bibliography, Appendix A

## The Liturgy of the Eucharist

### A. *The Preparation of the Gifts*

The first part of the Liturgy of the Eucharist is the Preparation of the Gifts, and as noted above, this was the liturgical theme of Season III of *At Your Word, Lord*

It is worth revisiting what was written about this in the Liturgy Preparation book for Season III, and considering how far you were able to put its suggestions into practice. For it addressed the basics, which form the foundation for all that follows. And unless the foundations are right, the value of all that follows will be compromised.

#### Key elements include

- The relationship between the assembly and this bread, this wine, these other offerings (of money, of other foods etc)
- The quality of the bread and the wine being used - the authenticity of the symbol
- The readiness of the assembly for, and its commitment to, the thanksgiving and sharing in communion which follow

If, in revisiting the material for Season III you recognise that something is still not as it should be, please don't ignore it. Try again to address what ever it is which is proving to be a particular challenge before Season IV gets under way. And if all else fails, be prepared to adapt the material for Season IV as proves necessary.

### B: *The Eucharistic Prayer*

The Eucharistic Prayer is a glorious outpouring of the Church's thanksgiving to the Father, in which it remembers and is made present to, and re-presents the ultimate offering of thanksgiving which was Christ's life offered to the Father at Calvary. United in and with and by Jesus, his Son, the Church sings to the Father a new song of praise and thanksgiving; it is a song of the Church which is made effective by the Holy Spirit.

#### What prayers may we use?

*Eucharistic Prayers I-IV* are the principal prayers and are for use throughout the liturgical year. Eucharistic Prayer IV has a fixed preface and so may only be used when a Mass has no preface of its own and on Sundays in Ordinary Time.

*Eucharistic Prayers for Masses of Reconciliation I and II* express thanksgiving in the context of the reconciliation won by Christ. They are particularly appropriate for use during the season of Lent and may be used at other times when the mystery of

reconciliation is reflected in the readings or other texts of the Mass or is the reason for a particular gathering of the faithful. Since the publication of the 3rd edition of the Roman Missal, in April 2003, the prefaces to these prayers have been able to be substituted by a number of alternative Prefaces, including those of Lent, which permits their freer use in the season of Lent

*The Eucharistic Prayer for Masses for Various Needs and Occasions* comes in four forms. The first focuses on *The Church on the Way to Unity*, the second on *God Guides the Church on the Way of Salvation*, the third on *Jesus, Way to the Father* and the fourth, *Jesus, the Compassion of God*. Its four forms make this Eucharistic Prayer suitable for use in a variety of different pastoral circumstances. Its proper prefaces and closely related intercessions make it particularly suited to use with the formularies of the 'Masses for Various Needs and Occasions' to be found in the Missal. The times when 'Masses for Various Needs and Occasions' may and may not be celebrated are indicated on the Table of Rubrics, to be found on the Liturgical Calendar section of the Bishops' Conference's Liturgy Office website ([www.liturgyoffice.org.uk](http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk))

There are three *Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children*. These may be used at Masses when children constitute a significant proportion of the assembly. These texts are for the purpose of enhancing the participation of children in this central prayer of the Mass and of preparing them to take full part in Masses with adults. The Eucharistic Prayers for children, with their variety of acclamations, will be most effective in engaging the children when these are sung. The three prayers use different levels of language. Prayer I may be more suitable for those only recently introduced to the Eucharist. Prayers II and III may be more appropriate as children grow in sacramental awareness and in familiarity with the Eucharistic liturgy. The texts are rich in catechetical themes which may be drawn upon when preparing children for the Eucharistic celebration and as the basis for reflecting with them afterward on, for example, the nature of the Eucharist as thanksgiving for creation and salvation, the role of the Spirit and the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the Church, the concepts of sacrifice, sacrament, and meal.

There is also a *Eucharistic Prayer for the Deaf* approved for use in England and Wales. It may

## The Eucharistic Prayer

<b>Dialogue/ Acclamation</b>		
Preface Dialogue		<i>The opening dialogue gathers the priest and the assembly together in the shared work of the prayer</i>
	Preface	<i>The Preface names the particular reason for this celebration - a particular saving work of God, or sometimes the memory of what God's grace has achieved in one of his saints.</i>
Sanctus		<i>The prayer of the Church on earth, is joined with the prayer of the Church in heaven.</i>
	Thanksgiving	<i>The thanksgiving began in the Preface, and continues in this first section after the Sanctus.</i>
	First Epiclesis	<i>The Holy Spirit is called down on the gifts of bread and wine to transform them into the Body and Blood of Christ. ('Epiclesis' is from the Greek for call down on)</i>
	Institution Narrative	<i>An account of the Last Supper, including the words by which Jesus instituted this rite, commanding that it be done by the Church in memory of him. Although the whole of the prayer has a consecratory function, it is these words in particular that are seen as bringing about the consecration of the gifts of bread and wine.</i>
Memorial Acclamation		<i>The Assembly joins in professing the Paschal Mystery, the saving events of Christ's passion, death and resurrection. Each of the acclamations in their different way name those events, name their present reality and name the glory that is still to come.</i>
	Anamnesis	<i>The memory of the saving death and resurrection of Christ is once more the focus of the prayer. ('Anamnesis' is from the Greek for remembering or memorial)</i>
	Second Epiclesis	<i>The Holy Spirit is invited to come upon the Church and to unite her more fully with Christ.</i>
	Intercession	<i>The needs of the Church and the world, of the living and the dead, are prayed for.</i>
	Doxology	<i>The whole of the prayer is directed to the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit. That direction of our prayer is made explicit in the Doxology. ('Doxology' is from the Greek for words of praise and glory)</i>
Amen		<i>The assembly puts its seal on the prayer with the Great Amen. ('Amen' is a Hebrew word meaning 'So be it' or 'It is so'.)</i>



only be used in celebrations where a significant number of deaf people are present and where the prayer can be signed by the priest celebrant.

It is never permitted to use a Eucharistic Prayer which has not been authorised by the Bishops of England and Wales, and recognised by the Holy See. With such a wide selection of prayers already available it is difficult to see why anyone would want to.

### Selecting the 'right' prayer

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* indicates that the liturgical texts for any particular celebration should be chosen while respecting the liturgical norms to correspond as closely as possible to the needs, spiritual preparation and capacity of the participants. Those responsible for preparing the liturgy should pay attention to the common spiritual good of the people of God, rather than their own inclinations. (GIRM 352) *Redemptionis Sacramentum* puts it even more strongly - such careful preparation is what Christ's faithful have a right to expect. (RS 58)

The same can be said about the choice of music for any particular celebration.

### The Structure of the Prayer

The Eucharistic Prayer is a single prayer, but it is composed of many parts. It is useful to know the names and the function of each of these parts. Not because it will help us at some future liturgical quiz, but because it is one aspect of the technical skills that members of a liturgy preparation group should be developing. It makes talking about the prayer in the group easier.

There is a slightly different structure in the different Eucharistic Prayers, but what follows is typical and can be observed quite easily in Eucharistic Prayer III, for example.

Knowing the different parts and their functions helps the group and the parish's ministers to be clearer as to what each part is there to do, and can help people to try and address problems when and if they arise.

### *Lex Orandi Lex Credendi*

#### (What we pray is what we believe)

The Latin tag *Lex Orandi Lex Credendi* reminds of the importance of our prayer, not simply because it is our prayer and our offering to God, but because the prayer of the Church is a primary witness to the faith of the Church. The Eucharistic

Prayer is the most substantial prayer of the Mass, deeply theological, and broad in the matters it addresses. Being alert to how this prayer has us pray is one of the ways in which we can learn about how all prayer might be.

- There is an ecclesial dimension to our prayer. This is most evident at the end of the Preface and in the intercessions. This is a prayer of the Church in this particular place, but united with the Church throughout the world, united with the Bishops, and especially with the Pope, Bishop of Rome. In this prayer the Church of here and now is united with the Church through all the ages.
- There is a cosmic dimension to our prayer. Again, we usually hear this expressed in the Preface and in the Intercessions, but also in the Words of Institution. We remember Christ's words that his self-offering is not just for the few but for all. We are fed by his Body and Blood not just for our sake but for the work of being witnesses to the Gospel which is entrusted to all of us. Always we pray for the world in the Eucharistic prayer.
- There is a pneumatic dimension to our prayer. The whole prayer is offered by the Church in and with the Holy Spirit. This is most clearly expressed in the two epicleses (see above), and in the Doxology.
- There is an eschatological dimension to our prayer. 'Eschatos' is Greek for 'the last thing': in the Christian context 'eschatological' refers to the coming of the Kingdom, to the Day of the Lord, that time when the value of everything that is will be revealed through the judgment of God. At the end of the Preface, we acknowledge that this prayer we offer is already joined with that of saints and angels in the presence of God. The prayer is itself a witness from the Church that it is focussed not on the values of the world, but the values that endure beyond this world, the values of the Beatitudes, the values of the Kingdom.

### The unity of the Prayer

As we have just seen each Eucharistic Prayer is a complex text, made up of different parts which do different things. But at the same time, for all this diversity each Eucharistic Prayer is fundamentally one single prayer.

One of the challenges in celebration is: can we hold this whole thing together, so that it can be seen as being sum of its parts, as well as something very much greater? Or is it seen as 'bits' which don't really seem to have much to do with one another.

#### • Preface

The language we use does not always help. For example, calling the first part of the Prayer,

the Preface. In other contexts the Preface is something we might often skip over in order to get to the meat of a book. But the Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer is not an optional extra, but is integral to the Prayer. Indeed, when we use Eucharistic Prayer II it is more or less the Thanksgiving of the Prayer - because the rest of the Prayer is brief and has other matters to concern itself with.

Always the Preface names our reason for giving thanks in the prayer that follows. Sometimes it is because of the particular feast we keep, sometimes it is because of the particular mystery of faith we focus on in our prayer this day.

The Prefaces offer a rich resource for our prayer, and not only in our common prayer at Mass. The words of thanksgiving they offer can easily be adapted and find a home in our private prayer. Such a link between the liturgy and our private devotion can be a mutually enriching one.

- **Said or sung**

The Eucharistic acclamations are one of the principal elements of the Liturgy that should be sung (GIRM 40, 79; also *Singing the Mass*).

There is also every encouragement given to the singing of the Preface, and simple tones are provided in the Missal.

Where both elements are sung, there should be a certain compatibility between the musical settings used. When we move from Preface to Sanctus it is still the same prayer, just a distinct part of it. Sometimes the introduction of a new musical style of form is so marked that it breaks the sense of a unity. The use of a through composed prayer, for example the Mass of Creation, achieves this, as does the use of the Missal tones for Preface and Sanctus. There is further discussion of how this sense of compatibility might be achieved in Appendix A.

When only one element is sung, ie the Eucharistic Acclamations, then the challenge remains of establishing and sustaining the sense that this is a single prayer, albeit prayed in two different modes. The priest has a responsibility for helping the transition from speech to song and back again, and the usual way of fulfilling his responsibility is by the tone of voice. His tone must in some way anticipate and respond to the musical setting, creating an aural link. The musicians have a similar responsibility - and they will fulfil it if they do not allow there to be a

gap between spoken prayer and the beginning of song. Sometimes the musical line needs to be heard during the last spoken phrases before the acclamation - sometimes to assist the priest get the pitch right, for example for his singing 'let us proclaim the Mystery of Faith', sometimes to alert the congregation as a whole to prepare to sing, for example before the Sanctus.

- **Giving time to the assembly to change its posture.**

The unity of the prayer is achieved best not simply aurally, but by the experience of priest and community united in a common action. This too requires a certain attentiveness on the part of the priest, if it is to be achieved.

It is all too easily lost at those times when the assembly changes posture, for example from standing during the Sanctus, to kneeling immediately after for the remainder of the Eucharistic Prayer. Unless the priest pauses as the assembly kneels, there is inevitably communicated the sense that 'we've done our bit and now the rest is down to him.'

### Praying the Prayer

The Eucharistic Prayer is the prayer of the whole Church, not just of the presider who gives voice to it. But letting it be experienced as the prayer of all the baptised is not easy, since it can simply seem to be the prayer of the priest alone, with occasional sung responses for everyone else.

How might one people develop a healthier understanding of things?

- **Presider**

Given the prominence of his role, the priest presider inevitably has an important contribution to make. He needs not simply to say the words, but by the way he says them to communicate to the congregation the intelligibility and meaningfulness of what is said.

It does not matter that these prayers have been heard again and again, so that the whole congregation might feel it could recite them by heart. If anything that means there is all the more need for the presider to speak them as if they were newly coined. This should not mean that the presider should exaggerate and over-emphasise elements of the text. Simply that the text should sound fresh from his lips, and not be tired or boring.

There is much to learn from actors here. If we

hear an actor proclaim a familiar soliloquy from Hamlet, we know the words already but the way that he proclaims them gives fresh expression to their meaning. A poor actor will draw attention to how hard he is trying to make it sound different and new; a skilled actor we will hardly notice, his skill will draw all our attention to the words and what they mean.

In a recent book Sir Peter Hall speaks of the formality and rhetoric of Shakespeare's language. What he says can also be applied to the formality and rhetoric of the Eucharistic Prayer.

'Today, rhetoric is not trusted. It is no longer taught in schools, nor do most of us listen to its rhythms in a Sunday morning sermon. This is partly why there are no longer any accepted standards for verse speaking...

In our society, to be rhetorical is a term of abuse. A hundred years ago a politician would depend on rhetoric in his public speeches in order to stress his points. He would use repetitions, balanced answering phrases and antitheses. It was his way of defining a clear and formal argument. Today politicians want to be seen on television, chatting away like any other man in the street, with as many "you knows" and "reallys" as they can muster. Informality is thought to be honest; formality is considered artificial and untrustworthy.

But if ...form is observed, an audience is still held; if it is not observed, the audience's attention strays and strays very quickly.' (Peter Hall. *Shakespeare's Advice to the Players*. Oberon Books, London, 2003. p 10-11.)

The advice of Hamlet to the players has stood the test of time:

'Speak the speech I pray you as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue; but if you mouth it as many of your players do. I had as life the town crier had spoke my lines.'

The presider needs to give thought to the structure of the prayer, what each section 'does', and how each section relates to the others. He needs to give expression to these differences, and yet indicate their unity. His praying of the prayer cannot be just a saying of it, and it needs to lead others into prayer also.

It is a good deal to ask, but not too much, for it is a key element of the ministry of the priest.

### • Assembly

The assembly's role in the praying of the Eucharistic Prayer is often not clear. The Priest gives voice to the whole prayer; and it should be clear that the congregation gives voice to the acclamations, but what does it do during the rest of the prayer? Time was when often people would say their private prayers, perhaps pray the rosary or meditate on the Passion. But now?

What the Church says is this: 'The priest invites the people to lift up their hearts to the Lord in prayer and thanksgiving; he unites them with himself in the prayer which, in the name of the entire community, he addresses to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.' (GIRM 78)

Now the congregation is encouraged to join itself with the work of praying the whole prayer, not by saying the words reserved to the priest, but by allowing the action of the prayer and the words it is expressed in, to give pattern and form to their own prayer too.

People do this in different ways. For example some listen closely to the words and pray each word, each phrase as it is said or sung by the priest. Others will find themselves drawn to prayer by certain phrases or intentions in the prayer. They will take those particular words or intentions to heart, ponder them, and pray them. Still others will be more attentive to the action of the prayer, and find the gestures and actions of the priest - for example his extending his hands over the gifts as he calls on the Holy Spirit to transform them into the Body and Blood of Christ, and the elevations of the Body and Blood. At a particular Mass, some will be particularly focused on the fact that they are offering prayer for a particular person, or particular intention. There is no right or wrong in this, different people will do different things, and the same people will do different things at different times. What is important is that all seek to find food for their prayer in the Eucharistic Prayer, so that it may in fact be the prayer of the particular gathering of the Church in this particular place, as well as of the Church Universal including the communion of saints.

Often people do not seem to have been helped to learn much about the Eucharistic Prayer - what it is, how we pray it and why. As noted above there are many ways in which such help can be given. Once good catechesis and formation has been provided even for part of a parish, mutual example and encouragement can go a long way in

helping it spread more widely, for the benefit of all

### • Musicians

Musicians are of course members of the assembly and join in the praying of the prayer, together with everyone else. In addition through their skills they can assist to a richer praying of the prayer. Through the careful selection of appropriate musical settings they can bring a sense of texture and development to the prayer, assisting the whole assembly to find common voice in the singing of the acclamations.

Musicians can also assist priests (who are not always musically-gifted) to grow in confidence in singing the Preface and other parts of the prayer - to the enrichment of the whole Eucharistic action.

### • Servers

Servers have an important role in assisting the priest in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Making sure things come to the altar at the right time and in the right order is important. As too is the proper preparation of the thurible, and the ringing of the sanctuary bell when these are used.

Servers also have an important role in assisting the prayer of the whole assembly at this time. They do this principally by doing what they do, simply and unfussily, making sure that their exits and entrances, and what happens in between does not distract the assembly from the central actions. This way they help those central actions to be performed strongly and clearly.

## B. Communion Rite

After the Great Amen, the Eucharistic Prayer is ended, and the Communion Rite begins. These two things are very different. The first is a great act of thanksgiving, the second is a rite comprised of many different moments. There is a change of gear as we pass from the first to the second, because each invites us to two very different things. Apart from anything else we should feel the need to gather ourselves together again after the exertion of praying a prayer as long and as powerful as a Eucharistic Prayer, before we begin the communion rite. In addition, in most parishes, there needs to be a pause while the congregation rises to its feet after kneeling during most of the Eucharistic Prayer.

## The Lord's Prayer

The whole assembly prays this together. In some parishes, as a way of indicating inclusivity, there has been an invitation to all to hold hands at this point. Apart from the impracticality of this when people are in pews, such an invitation can place undue pressure on individuals to participate in a way that is not mandated by the Church, and may feel distinctly uncomfortable with the practice and the perceived pressure to conform.

An alternative way of deepening the sense of union at this point can be achieved, by inviting everyone to raise their hands to the 'orans' position during the Lord's Prayer, and again during its doxology (after the priest's words: 'Deliver us Lord, from every evil...') It is already quite common to see many people adopt this posture at the Lord's Prayer - extending an invitation to all to do the same, would extend the practice but still leave others the freedom not to do so, without feeling they were inconveniencing others.

A sense of deeper union can be still more easily produced by familiarising the congregation with a dignified sung setting of the Lord's Prayer, such as the Russian setting used at the *At Your Word, Lord* launch mass at Wembley. In Appendix A there is discussion of the pros and cons of singing the Lord's Prayer.

## The Sign of Peace

This action is one that changed its meaning somewhat in the reform of the liturgy after Vatican II. Previously the sign of peace had been given by the presiding minister to a lesser minister, who passed it down the line to a still-lesser minister and so on. This strongly hierarchical practice was judged untrue to the Church's understanding of the equal dignity of all the baptised. And so the guidance offered was that each person in the assembly should offer the sign of Christ's peace only to those nearby, and it is their exchange of peace with each other that is the symbol, not a holy sign passed from one to another to another.

The authenticity of the sign can be challenged when priests or others feel the need to give the sign of peace to more than those nearest to them. This can reintroduce a hierarchical quality to something which is intended to speak of something quite other.

The exchange of the Sign of Peace is intended to a relatively simple, gentle exchange with those standing closest to us. It is not intended to be,



as in some other rites, a sign that establishes us in communion, a sign of reconciliation being achieved within the community, forming community. In the Roman Rite, that reconciliation is achieved throughout the Mass, from the Penitential Rite where we ask for one another's prayers, and pray for each other; through our listening together to the word of God and allowing it to move us to shared prayer and shared profession of our common faith.

At this point in the Mass, our focus is towards the altar and the sacramental food and drink it bears. The Sign of Peace should not distract us from it.

### Breaking of Bread

In Luke's account of the disciples at Emmaus, it is at the breaking of the bread that the disciples recognised Jesus. 'The breaking of the bread' was one of the earliest names for what we now call 'The Mass'.

The breaking of bread is a significant symbolic action in our celebration of the Mass, for it shows how we who are many are fed of the one bread. It also gives expression to the sacrificial self-offering of Christ, by whom we are fed.

The symbol is most expressive when it is one bread broken for all. The work that was encouraged in Season III of ensuring that the symbol of bread used at Mass was an authentic symbol pays dividends here, if it has been done.

At a Sunday mass with several hundred present, breaking a single loaf into sufficient portions will take a long time, and can unduly distort the shape of the liturgy. The rubrics warn against this.

However even if a single loaf is not used, then using at least one large bread that can be broken into some dozen or more pieces will signify something more of the mystery in which we share than will a priest's host simply broken into two and then consumed entirely by the priest.

Always the priest should wait until the members of the congregation have finished exchanging the Sign of Peace, and is again still, attentive to his actions, before breaking the Eucharistic Bread.

The sign can be supported and its meaning be drawn out through careful use of sung settings of the Lamb of God. Further guidance on the singing of this text is given in Appendix A page ?

### Distribution of Holy Communion

The mind of the Church is that at Mass the faithful should be fed only from the bread consecrated

at that Mass, and not from what remains from a previous celebration, reserved in the Tabernacle for the purposes of taking communion to the sick or for emergency situations.

It is strange indeed to have gone to all the effort of the Mass, and then feed people with the Body of the Lord, already present from before Mass. It is not permitted that priests communicate this way. The Holy See strongly and repeatedly encourages better practice with regard to the communion of the lay faithful also.

'It is most desirable that the faithful, just as the priest himself is bound to do, receive the Lord's Body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass and that, in the instances where it is permitted, they participate in the chalice, so that even by means of the signs Communion will stand out more clearly as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated.'  
(*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 85, cf *Redemptionis Sacramentum* 89)

- **Communion under both kinds**

Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it is received under both kinds. For in this manner of reception the sign of the eucharistic banquet shines forth more completely and the divine will by which the new and everlasting covenant is ratified in the Blood of the Lord is more clearly expressed, together with the relationship of the eucharistic banquet to the eschatological banquet in the Father's Kingdom.

(*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 281)

Encouragement for Holy Communion to be distributed under both kinds at all parish masses was given in the Liturgy Handbook for Season III. It is a matter returned to in the pastoral notes for Season IV.

- **Ministers**

The ordinary ministers for ministering Holy Communion are the ordained ministers. It is regularly the case at parish celebrations that there are not sufficient ordained ministers present to ensure that communion, particularly under both kinds, be ministered in a reasonable time. Therefore the Church encourages the use of lay ministers to assist with the distribution of Holy Communion so that the liturgy may be celebrated in the most worthy way possible.

'For the good of the community and of the whole Church of God, some of the lay faithful

according to tradition have rightly and laudably exercised ministries in the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy...'

(*Redemptionis Sacramentum* 43, cf 154-160)

The word 'extraordinary' is applied to these ministers in Roman documents, and it there has a technical meaning which is quite the opposite of what extraordinary means in ordinary English usage. For us the word means 'special' or 'higher/more important'. The Roman usage means simply 'not the ordinary (minister)'. It is perhaps best rendered in English by the word 'commissioned'.

The mission, in this sense, the ministry of the Eucharist belongs to the Bishop, the priest and the deacon. Other ministers are invited to share in that ministry, as and when the need arises.

The development of this ministry over the past thirty years or more has been of the greatest assistance, not only in the celebration of the Mass itself, but also in the much greater frequency with which communion has been able to be taken to the sick and the housebound.

'For this we should give thanks to God... for the ministries exercised by lay people and the responsibilities that they have assumed in virtue of the common priesthood into which they have been initiated through Baptism and Confirmation; for the radiant vitality of so many Christian communities, a vitality drawn from the well-spring of the Liturgy.'

Pope John Paul II, *Vicesimus quintus annus* 12,2

The number of people needed for the distribution of Holy Communion at any particular Mass should be determined ahead of time and scheduled accordingly. By rule of thumb one minister of the Body of Christ should be provided from every 75-100 communicants, and two ministers of the Precious Blood. However other circumstances may also need to be taken into consideration.

Lay ministers assisting in the distribution of Holy Communion need careful training, not only to deepen their appreciation for the mystery of the Eucharist, but also for the practical demands of what it is they are asked to do.

### • Communion Procession

Many of our diocesan churches were not built with the expectation that a whole congregation would come forward to receive communion at a single Mass. We sometimes forget that. Because they were not built with this in mind, often the aisles are too narrow, and the space before

the sanctuary too skimpy for communion to be distributed in a prayerful and dignified way without careful planning of how the congregation comes forward and how it returns to its seats. The lay members of the Liturgy preparation group will probably have more experience of the pushing and shoving that sometimes mars what should be a Procession to Communion but which is more often a Communion queue and sometimes a Communion mêlée.

The Church's rites call for the faithful to make an appropriate sign of reverence before they receive communion. The Bishops' Conference of England and Wales has specified that the sign of reverence should be that of walking solemnly in procession. This is a sign that imposes a certain discipline on the whole assembly, it challenges it to respect the presence of Christ in each one present, as well as in the sacrament of his Body and Blood.

Again much more could be done in most parishes to assist the Communion Procession to have the dignity and prayerfulness that it should have. Different groups have their part to play here - the musicians through their choice of Communion Song, those who distribute communion, the ushers, and the liturgy preparation group. There needs to be a common vision established in the parish, committed to by those with ministerial responsibility, and then shared amongst the whole worshipping community.

### • Silence and Song

Much is written in Appendix A about the Communion Song and the Song after Communion, and the difference between them and the importance of each. However silence as well as song needs to be part of our experience at Mass. A time of silence may replace the Song after Communion, and if it does not there should be such a time of silence after that song.

This time of silence is to allow each one present to make their own private praise and prayer to God in their hearts. Good presiding, and good music ministry can help such times of silence be experienced as powerful and sustaining moments in a liturgy.

### Post Communion Prayer

The Liturgy of the Eucharist, and the Communion Rite both come to an end with the Post Communion Prayer. It is important to note that this Prayer is not the first prayer of the end of the Mass, and neither should it come after parish

notices. It should conclude the time of intense and prayerful silence after all have received Holy Communion and offered their praise and prayer to God in thanksgiving.

## The role of the Liturgy Preparation Group

How we pray Eucharist is too important to be left to chance.

The Liturgy Preparation Group has an important role with regard to the Eucharistic Rite. It will have its usual role with regard to helping informed choices to be made regarding the selection of texts and musical settings. But beyond that it is likely that every parish community would do well to review how the Liturgy of the Eucharist is celebrated and how it is being prayed.

Talking about the issues in a small group can help us to discover together what issues need considering. Sometimes that group might be a mixed group in a parish, of clergy and musicians and others. Sometimes though it can be better for a wider deanery group of just musicians or just clergy to look together at the things that particularly concern them. (This can be particularly helpful if we become aware that personalities are an issue within the parish context. Peer group reflection can help provide space to relieve some of the tensions we might encounter.) If outside help is needed to assist the group, then recourse can be had to the Liturgy Commission or any number of individuals with particular expertise.

There are likely to be considerable sensitivities to take into consideration. It will be to no-one's benefit if the first discussion on these matters focuses on 'failings'. (Some Better by far to look at what common ground exists between priests, members of the group and others concerning objectives and principles.

For example, is it agreed that everyone in the assembly has a role to play in the praying of the Eucharistic Prayer? If so what are the understandings of those roles? How might the ministry of the priest or of the music group or the servers offer still greater service to others in the parish? If there is agreement on what might help, what might the next steps be? Is there need for training or formation? What are the most useful ways this can be arranged.

Another example is whether it is agreed that the Communion Procession is intended to be a time of communal prayer and an opportunity to show our reverence and care for the sacrament and the people we worship with? If so what are the things which presently help or hinder us in doing this? Once we have had a first stab and identifying these, we will want to build on our strengths and try to overcome our weaknesses. So which are the principal issues we want to try and work with first? How will we try and share our understanding and priority with the rest of the congregation, so that they can also share in the responsibility for trying to do things as well as we can.

There are no marks for rushing things. Careful thought and planning between all of those most directly concerned are likely to achieve the very best results. And doing the very best we can is what all are invited to do in the service of the Lord, and our ministry to his Church.

## Conclusion

The whole action of the Mass builds towards the celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. And it is the Liturgy of the Eucharist that provides the Catholic community with the sacramental food it needs to go out from its celebration to bear witness to Christ in the world.

That sending out is the liturgical focus for the next season of *At Your Word, Lord*. This season the invitation is make sure that what happens before we are sent out is so substantial and engaging that it might indeed help us to become ever stronger in faith, ever more united in Christ and with each other.

**Liturgy  
Office**  
ENGLAND  
& WALES

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