

## CELEBRATING SUNDAY LITURGY

by Thomas A. Kane

A few years ago I saw an subway poster for an active parish in a large metropolitan city. In big bold print, the ad proclaimed: "SUNDAYS WILL NEVER BE THE SAME!". The ad campaign amused me yet it contained a theological point worth considering: Sunday liturgy in the parish can be powerful. Sunday is a special day of worship, capable of changing and transforming us. This parish worked hard at their worship and wanted to share their good news with the city at large.

Can most American Catholics respond in such an affirming and enthusiastic way about their Sunday worship? We can probably all name a special parish or center with lively or creative worship, but sadly, the answer often is NO! Granted there is a great diversity in parish celebrations from diocese to diocese and within the same geographical area, yet many Catholics I meet are dissatisfied. Some parishioners experience Sunday as a day of drudgery, boredom and obligation. Sunday remains a passive event with congregations spoonfed their faith in drab sermons and indifferent planning. Sunday is not special and transformation within worship rarely happens, at least on a conscious or felt level. Our renewal efforts strive to help us be aware that our Sunday celebrations are the Church at prayer.

Now that the texts are complete and the reform of the liturgy somewhat set, we as local Church, as parish or community, must work on developing strategies to integrate our theology with our liturgical practice. The Notre Dame Study points out how we have progressed as a worshipping Church and indicates how reform has taken hold. As the liturgical renewal continues in our Post Vatican II Church, Sunday still seems the same for many of us. To glimpse the Church at prayer, let's review Sunday in the parish and examine when we celebrate, explore who celebrates and consider why we celebrate.

### WHEN WE CELEBRATE: SUNDAY

Sunday is the day of the Lord, the Christian day of worship. The full meaning is captured exactly in the latin word for Sunday, *dominica* and the spanish, *domingo*. Sunday is special in our tradition because as the first day of the week, it is the day our Lord rose from the dead. Sunday is Son-day, the day to remember Christ's resurrection. Every Sunday eucharist celebrates the Easter event, as the catechism wisely reminds us, "Every Sunday is a little Easter". As the Lord's day, Sunday connects us with the power of the Christ's resurrection, a day of new life. Sunday becomes the day for the community to come together and gather around the table to hear the challenging Words from the scriptures and to break and share the Bread of life in the eucharist. On Sundays, the Christian community assembles to remember and celebrate the presence and power of the Lord and to bring that power into our lives.

As a Christian Sabbath it is a day of rest, a time to gather strength and be renewed. While our theology proclaims this specialness, our society counters rest with commerce.

Unfortunately, for many of us Sunday has become another day of the week, another day to work. The challenge is to be counter-cultural in the best sense of the word and to reclaim our Sabbath. By making Sunday special, we highlight the day when the local community gathers to experience God and become the Body of Christ.

At Sunday's table, the local church takes shape and joins with the larger Church throughout the world proclaiming and living Christ. By experiencing the power of being Church, we can appreciate how unique Sunday really is. While Sunday gives us the day and context for our celebration, we need to pay attention to the shape, style and quality of our celebration. The questions that arise are more "how" than "what". They tend to be more practical and require us to apply our newly refined liturgical theology to our experience of Sunday. How are we local Church? How do we gather at the table? How is the word proclaimed and preached? How are we expressing our deepest selves in our religious rituals? How do we connect what we do in Church with what we do in our everyday lives?

#### WHO CELEBRATES: COLLABORATION

Sunday worship is no longer the task of the celebrant alone, but the work of the community as a whole. Before Vatican II, the Mass was the priest's prayer and people came to hear Mass. Today the eucharistic liturgy engages the entire community in celebrating the mysteries of faith. Gathered together from different parts of the parish, the community assembles to remember and renew its salvation in Christ. In the new liturgy, the community has a celebrant role because the liturgical action is rooted in community participation. The faithful actively join in worship by voicing prayers, singing and meditating quietly.

At the same time, we have to deepen our understanding of participation beyond frenetic activity and look at how the community is led in prayer by acclamation, response and silence. This participation is not a frill or the icing on the cake, but rather essential to an understanding of a celebrating Church.

To symbolize this community action, some parishes are consolidating their Mass schedule or varying the celebrational styles based on congregational analysis. But whether the celebration is folk, traditional or classical, community participation must be fostered. Space speaks. The U.S. Bishops Document on "Art and Environment" establishes new criteria for the use of liturgical space and the effect space has on a congregation. On the whole, we need to develop a stronger liturgical aesthetic that will not only reinforce the sense of hospitality but enable congregations to join in more fully. Many church buildings of the pre-Vatican II era work against participation by their very structure and encourage passivity.

The ways misaltes are used in some communities also work against engaging the assembly in the liturgical action. Booklets can take the congregation's attention away from the action and emphasize the text, downplaying the congregation's role and reinforcing passive attitudes. Communities need to be guided in the proper use of these liturgical aids.

Ideally, Sunday brings together all the ministers. Readers, eucharistic ministers, ministers of hospitality, musicians, preachers and artists all join forces with the presider to express the prayer of the community. As ministry opportunities open up, parishes may need to explore the range of new ministries and develop practical models for working together liturgically.

Liturgical ministers require careful nurturing and training. Ministry is not a reward for church attendance, but a way to express our service within the community. The key, however, is collaboration with the aim to enhance people's participation.

The community can also participate in planning the liturgy. Gathering to share the scriptures can provide the preacher with a variety of homiletic insights, ground the liturgy in the scripture readings and help shape the liturgy around the seasonal or festal theme. The planning process should also take into account the culture of the region in selecting the music, art and environment. Recently I was encouraged by a wonderfully active parish in the Southwest, where they used various symbols, textures and artforms that reflected their faith through the mix of native American, Mexican and local artists and artisans. Thus, the liturgical community is not only able to be Church, but to express itself as Church.

#### WHY CELEBRATE: TRANSFORMATION

We gather on Sunday to remember, to hear again the stories of faith, "being nourished by word and sacrament. Through remembering, sharing and eating together, we enter into transformation. We become what we eat. We become the body of Christ, broken and shared food to satisfy our hungry hearts and souls.

However, our liturgical participation is not confined to singing songs, or taking communion. Remembering has a deeper and more significant edge. By remembering and receiving, we are all called to be broken and shared for our world. Eucharist is not a safe haven, a rest stop or a picnic area for the weary. Eucharist is a challenge, a call to celebrate and make real what we celebrate.

The closing dismissal at Mass connects the action of the assembly in the Church to the action of Christ in the world. As Christians, we are all called to be missionaries, bearers of the Word. One critique of our renewal efforts is the failure to connect Sunday worship with the social dimensions of the gospel. Liturgists seem to be one side and social justice people on the other. Yet our theology and mission call us all to be attentive to the social ministry of the Church, rather than "a specialized ministry of the few". If Sunday worship takes hold, then the faithful will be moved, inspired and challenged to make the Gospel visible. To experience God beyond the assembly and extend the Body of Christ to the poor and oppressed is the radical dimension of eucharist as a transforming event.

Renewing the Sunday liturgy requires courage and energy. Liturgy is definitely work and we must be aware of the burn-out potential. Renewal requires a change of heart and a challenge to enter more fully into the mystery of God. It is more than turning around the

altar, singing new songs or making the liturgy beautiful. If we grasp the deeper dimensions of community worship and encourage our communities to share the living Body of Christ, Sundays will never be the same.