

Sunday, September 2, 2007

Reflection on the Church at Prayer

The Communion Rite – Part 1

The mystery of the union of the Assembly and the bread and wine now professed as the Body of Christ, enters the Rite of Communion. The Communion Rite has several parts:

- The Lord's Prayer: The communal prayer celebrating the unity of all believers for service to the Kingdom of God.
- The Sharing of the Peace: The ritual sign of the believer celebrating reconciliation and unity before approaching the Lord's Table.
- The Breaking of the Bread and Pouring of the Cup: The sign of sacrifice of the Lord and the cost of discipleship of how we must be broken and poured out for others. This action is covered by the ancient prayer, "Lamb of God".
- The communion of the ministers as a commission from the priest to feed others, reflecting the commission of Jesus to the disciples to feed the many.
- The Communion of the Faithful: In this, the faithful process in song to meet Christ in two dimensions – 1) minister to communicant, in which a profession of faith is made stating our belief that we are the Body of Christ, and 2) the sharing of the sacred elements signifies our sharing in communion with the risen Lord. In this action the ministers and communicants proclaim a horizontal communion with each other in the Body of Christ and in the taking and consuming of the elements, that we also participate in the person of the risen Lord.
- Meditation: Song, instrumental music, or silence might accompany a time of reflection of so great a mystery. How Christians are in communion with the Lord and one another.
- The Communion Prayer is a summary prayer acknowledging the mysteries we have shared and the commission we have to go forth, nurtured and strengthened for service to the world because of our communion with Christ and all believers.

The Rite of Communion is a sacred action responding to the Proclamation of the Gospel in both the Liturgy of the Word and the Eucharistic Prayer. The richness of these sacred actions are as holy as the faith they profess. The Body of Christ! Amen.

Sunday, September 9, 2007

Reflections on the Church at Prayer

Communion Rite – Part 2

In the previous article, Part 1 of the Communion Rite, we considered the theology of our "Encounter with Christ" in the ritual actions of the Eucharist. While the congregation processes to the altar to enter into communion with the ministers of bread and cup, they also prepare to receive the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ. As discussed in Part 1, this communion is two fold: 1) A profession of faith between the communicant and minister that we are the "body of Christ" and 2) we share in the sign of that faith eating and drinking according to the command of Jesus.

The procession of the faithful is accompanied by music: A song of faith celebrating God's love for us, the presence of Christ among us, our commission to serve as we are being served, and a celebration of the unity that is ours in the Body of Christ, the Church. Instrumental music may be used, however, singing of the communicants is preferred as a more active participation in the procession.

Music sung during this procession is often between a cantor and congregation. This repetition of a familiar refrain supports the prayer and allows for movement. The entire assembly supports the action taking place, thus enhancing our coming together as one in Christ. Thus the hands are free while the voice, body, mind, heart, and spirit are engaged in approaching the altar.

Sunday, September 16, 2007

Reflections on the Church at Prayer

Rites of Blessing and Dismissal

The close of every liturgical prayer of the church has a blessing and a dismissal rite. This action both summarizes the purpose of our gathering and commissions us to go forth to serve. This commission celebrates God's having been with us in our prayerful assembly and that we are sent forth in God's name to serve the Kingdom.

The "blessings" are a celebration of what we confess as believers that we live in Christ. The "dismissal" is our being sent forth with our commitment to be Christ to the world and one another. To each we say, "Amen"!

This is often when we are packing up our kids, buttoning coats and jackets. Some actually ignore it completely as they duck out early. This time is so often taken for granted that it lacks impact and response. Yet, if we do not heed the commission given and take the blessings to heart, then why did we gather in the first place?

Some churches dismiss the congregation when the ministers get to the door. Standing at "the open doors" they dismiss the congregation with the direct command to "love and serve the Lord". This image clearly conjures up a more real sense of the Rite of Blessing and Dismissal.

Just as we discussed what the Lord's Day would mean to us on our way to prayer, on our way home we should discuss and consider what we experienced in prayer this day and through the week.

Proper liturgical etiquette at liturgy is to arrive early, and to leave when the ministers have departed from the building. To do otherwise is to cause distraction from the assembly to oneself, to distract from the proclamation of the scriptures, and leaving early says our final rituals of prayer are not important.

This has been a series of Reflections on the Church at Prayer by Fr. Charles Zabler; assisted by Shawn Rochon, Director of Liturgy and Music, Our Lady of Good Hope.