

SEPTEMBER 2006

*Articles for faith and mission*



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# ‘With You Is Wisdom’

*Blessing and commissioning teachers, students and catechists*

By DAVID PHILIPPART

*With you is Wisdom, she who knows your works and was present when you made the world.*

*She understands what is pleasing in your sight and what is right according to your commandments.*

*Send her forth from the holy heavens, and from the throne of your glory send her, that she might labor at my side,*

*and that I might learn what is pleasing to you.*

*For she knows and understands all things, and she will guide me wisely in my actions and guard me with her glory.*

— Wisdom 9: 9-11

A simple yet powerful way to mark the beginning of the academic year and to link liturgy with the rest of life is to bless teachers and students in late August or early September. Include all teachers in the parish — from child care aides to university professors. Bless all students, from preschool to graduate school. The 1989 Book of Blessings (#522-550) offers a simple rite, in long and short form, that may be celebrated at Mass or on its own as part of a liturgy of the Word. When the blessing is celebrated at Mass on Sunday, the readings and prayers of that Sunday are used. When this blessing is celebrated as part of a liturgy of the Word outside of Mass, particular scriptures are suggested in the rite itself.

In either context, the blessing follows the reading of the Gospel, the homily and the prayers of general intercession. Teachers and students can be invited to come forward and face the assembly, with the presider standing among the assembly to pronounce the blessing while all extend both hands towards those being blessed. (And all should raise both arms and use two hands to keep this gesture of blessing from looking like a Hitler salute!) Although the



Julie Lonneman

Book of Blessings does not suggest it, the group of teachers and students could be sprinkled with holy water at this point in order to remind them of their baptism. More simply, the teachers and students can be asked to stand or kneel in place while the assembly stands, either stretching out both hands in blessing or laying hands upon the head and shoulders of the teacher or student close by. (But only if such touching is appropriate in your community.)

Inviting the teachers and students either to come forward or stand or kneel in place can be done in general. The deacon or priest says something like, “Let all in this church who teach and all who are students ...” Individuals can be called by name, of course, but that requires knowing which teachers and which students are at which Mass. (See below for a suggestion as to how this might be organized.) But the number of students in the community might make calling each one by name too lengthy a prospect. And the danger is that someone’s name inadvertently

is left off the list.

The idea here is that being a teacher or student is a direct response to the Word of God just proclaimed. The scripture represents and articulates a commission given to teachers and students. In turn, they stand in the midst of the church as signs of that commission being accepted and lived out. At Sunday Mass, this is most evident and effective when the readings speak somewhat directly to the vocation of teaching and learning as part of baptism’s calling and empowerment.

A different point in the liturgy where this blessing would work well is the concluding rite, just before the blessing and dismissal of the entire assembly. Here, the blessing serves as a “sending forth,” a reminder that being a teacher or student is how these particular baptized people “go in peace to love and serve the Lord.” This works well especially on Sundays when the scriptures might not speak specifically to teaching and learning.

Following the prayer after Communion and the announcements, teachers and students can either be called forward or asked to stand or kneel in place. The blessing is prayed as described above. Then the final blessing of the entire assembly and the dismissal are given. If they have been called forward, the teachers and students could join the procession out of the assembly, following the cross bearer. While the Gospel book or Lectionary is not usually carried out in procession, perhaps on this occasion it is, with teachers and students literally following God’s Word out into the world.

## Some good Sundays

The 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B — August 20, 2006 — is an ideal time. The first reading from Proverbs speaks of Wisdom building her house and preparing her feast.

The Gospel passage from John has Jesus telling us that life—and the aim of wisdom if to live fully—comes from eating and drinking the Eucharist. On this day, the blessing is both a response to the Word of God and an invitation to Christ’s paschal feast.

The 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B — September 3, 2006 — also has readings that suggest blessing students and teachers after the general intercessions. The first reading from Deuteronomy has Moses encouraging the people to “hear the statutes and decrees I am teaching you to observe that you may live ... Observe them carefully for thus will you give evidence of your wisdom and intelligence ... for what great nation is there that has gods as close to it as the LORD our God is to us?” The second reading from James calls us to “humbly welcome the word [of truth] that has been planted in [us] and that can save [our] soul[s].” And then James commissions us to do what all our teaching and learning should lead us to: “Be doers of the word and not hearers only.” The Gospel from Mark speaks of interior conversion—again the connection between teaching, learning and baptism. Sept. 3, 2006 falls during Labor Day weekend in the United States, however.

### Commissioning catechists

All of the catechists in the parish — from those in the Sunday nursery to those working with adults undertaking initiation—can be included in the blessing above. In addition, since their work is an ecclesial ministry as well as a baptismal vocation, a specific blessing and commissioning for catechists is worthwhile. It’s best to schedule the commissioning of catechists apart from the blessing of teachers and students, then. In the United States., Catechetical Sunday is September 17, the 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B. Jesus’ powerful question in this day’s Gospel — “Who do you say that I am?” — is compelling. Peter’s answer reminds us of the ultimate aim of catechetical ministry: to grow in our relationship to God and to each other by continually grappling with Jesus’ fundamental and enduring question. The Book of Blessings (#491-508) has

a separate rite for catechists. It’s the same structure as the blessing for teachers, but with specific texts.

When a parish invests energy and money in a school, the faculty should be included in the commissioning of catechists. While all members of the parish school’s faculty and staff do not teach religion class, all are entrusted with teaching charity and justice by example. The parish is their employer, and has good cause to request the teachers’ participation. In turn, the teachers will benefit from this expression of the parish’s support and appreciation. Justice suggests that the teachers be given commensurate time off later.

Even teachers who aren’t Christian can be included by exercising a bit of sensitivity to their particular situations. They, too, are charged with teaching by example. The prayer of

blessing could be adapted to speak to God as Creator, without explicit reference to the Trinity if that seems more appropriate for non-Christian teachers, for example.

Some kind of social after this celebration would be helpful — perhaps an “open house” in the school building and/or religious education center. This becomes an opportunity for parishioners who do not have school-age children to be acquainted with the people, programs and facilities that support catechesis as an integral component of the parish’s mission. And for all, this might be an opportunity that inspires someone to volunteer, another to make a donation and so on.

### Preparations

Two or three weeks before blessing teachers and students and commissioning catechists, run notices in the bulletin and on the parish Web site. (See the sidebar for an example.) Invite the catechists (including the school faculty) immediately upon confirming the date on the parish calendar for the commissioning rite. The director of religious education, the religious education committee, the principal of the school and members of the school board could extend personal invitations. Prepare a brief memo for the teachers and catechists to use as they encourage their students to attend Mass on the weekend that the blessing is celebrated.

The blessing can be celebrated with this minimum of preparation: It isn’t necessary to have teachers and students sign up, or even to have a list of names. The good thing about organizing a sign-up, though, is that it allows for the names of teachers and students to be listed in the bulletin and on the Web site in conjunction with other intentions, encouraging people’s prayers on their behalf now and even throughout the academic year. This makes it possible for the homebound to keep teachers and students in their prayers as well.

From a list of names, prayer cards could be made as a way of facilitating prayers throughout the semester. The card could contain a scripture passage such as the one at the start of this article, Wisdom 9:9-11, or a short

*Bulletin insert for two or more weeks before the Rite of Blessing*  
*Fill in the italicized parts with information specific to your parish celebration.*

#### **With You Is Wisdom: A Blessing for Teachers and Students**

On [date,] we will celebrate a blessing for all parishioners who are teachers and all who are students — in any and every school. This simple rite will take place after the homily at all the Sunday Masses. We will offer prayers for you and ask Christ the Teacher to bless you with holy wisdom as you begin a new school year. [If sign-up will be done, add this part:] All teachers and students are asked to sign the rosters located [in the gathering space/at the entrances]. Your name will be listed [in the bulletin/in the parish book of prayers/on a prayer card] so that we can pray for you at other times, too. But you need not sign up to participate in the blessing.

*Repeat bulletin insert on the Sunday before the rite.*

verse from a psalm, such as Psalm 24:5: "Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation." A non-scriptural prayer text could be used instead. A simple sentence including one of the names of the teachers or students, or perhaps the name of one teacher and one student, completes the text part of the card: "Pray for *Name*, who is a teacher, as a new school year begins." Or: "Pray for all students in school, especially *Name*." Or: "Pray for all who teach, especially *Name*, and for all who study, especially *Name*."

If the number of students in the parish is too vast, perhaps cards could be made for students at critical junctures: preschoolers or kindergarteners going to school for the first time, eighth-graders graduating this year from the parish school, first-year high school students or those college students who are going away to school.

These cards could be distributed at the end of the celebration of the blessing and then made available for the whole month of September. Those who visit the homebound could bring a card to each person they visit.

### Follow-up

To invoke God's blessing in this way suggests that beyond the ritual, we work as a parish to support teachers and students in other ways as well. If the parish has a school, the finance council can work unceasingly to pay teachers just wages. The pastoral council can examine the allocation of resources for the religious education and Christian formation of all parishioners and decide to make priorities that will better train catechists and increase student participation. The social concerns committee might look for ways that parishioners could become more involved in local public school matters, making sure that all children in the neighborhood have access to a quality education. In these and many other ways, we put into practice what the Teacher of us all would have us learn: "Love one another as I have loved you."

David Philippart is a parish liturgy director and itinerant catechist in Chicago. Contact him at [davidphilippart@hotmail.com](mailto:davidphilippart@hotmail.com).

## A Blessing for Departing Students

*During the last two weekends of August and the first weekend of September, a simple blessing could be prayed over those leaving for college. Such a small gesture might assure departing college students of the parish's love and support, and impress them enough to return for breaks and holidays, especially the Paschal Triduum.*

*When parish leadership knows which college students are going away to school, a few phone calls to ascertain when they are leaving and which Mass they will attend prior to that can provide the necessary preparation. But if there are a number of young people leaving for college, the blessing might work as simply as this: After the post-Communion prayer and announcements, a minister (either the deacon, the religious education director, the pastoral council president, the person who would normally make announcements) asks: "Are there any among us leaving soon to attend college or university away from our parish community? If so, please stand."*

*If no one stands, the presider continues with the blessing and dismissal of the entire assembly. If departing students are present, the presider and all stand, and the presider invites all to extend both hands over the student nearest to them. The blessing and the dismissal of the entire assembly immediately follows.*

*The Book of Blessings contains an Order of Blessing for Travelers and Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers contains an order of prayer for a family or household to pray before leaving on a journey. Below is an adaptation of texts from both of these sources for use in blessing and sending forth college students:*

**Presider:** The Lord be with you.

**All:** And also with you.

**Presider:**

Let us entrust to the hands of the Lord these young adults who are leaving us to study. Let us pray that God will keep them safe, that Holy Wisdom will labor at their side, and that when it is time to rest and to celebrate, they will return us happy and healthy.  
[Pause]

**Presider** [extends hands over students]:

All powerful and ever-living God, when Abraham and Sarah left their own land and departed from their own people, you kept them safe all through their journey.

Protect these students, who likewise seek you: Be their companion on the road and their refuge in every adversity.

May they seek you at the heart of all that they study and meet you in teachers, friends and roommates.

May they carry the light of faith to all whom they meet, and experience divine goodness in the hospitality they receive.

We ask this through Christ, our Teacher and Lord.

**All:** Amen.

**Presider** [with hands still extended]:

In paths of peace may the Lord God guide you!

May the holy angel Raphael accompany you on your way, that safe and sound, in peace and in joy, you may return to those who love you!

**All:** Amen!

**Presider** [to the whole assembly]:

And may almighty God bless you ...

# ¿Fe viva o filibusterismo?

*El culto y la vida para el mes de septiembre 2006*

PATRICIA DATCHUCK SÁNCHEZ  
y RAFAEL SÁNCHEZ ALONSO



*Nos presenta este reto:  
Den peso a sus  
palabras; den manos  
y pies a su fe; que su  
fe viva para los demás.*

Los que saben de política y cómo funciona un gobierno, comprenden bien el poder del filibusterismo o discursos obstruccionistas parlamentarios. El filibusterismo es “el uso de tácticas obstruccionistas que, mediante largos discursos, retardan o desvían una acción legislativa.” Los políticos usan esta táctica para obstruir o destruir las ideas y objetivos de otros partidos. En vez de colaborar para conseguir el bienestar y proteger los intereses del pueblo, muchos políticos usan el filibusterismo para fines partidarios que fomentan la división e impiden que el partido opuesto consiga algo positivo.

Santiago, en las segundas lecturas de este mes, presenta su punto de vista, todo un reto que debemos enfrentar: ¿Vivimos totalmente nuestra fe o no? ¿Profesamos con nuestra vida lo que dicen nuestros labios o practicamos el filibusterismo? Es decir, ¿hablamos y hablamos y no conseguimos nada para Cristo, para la Iglesia o para los más necesitados de este mundo? Usando expresiones diferentes Santiago dice que el camino del infierno está pavimentado con intenciones buenas pero muertas porque no se hacen realidad, no se convierten en obras al servicio de los demás. Santiago afirma que si estamos dispuestos a hablar con convicción de Cristo y del evangelio debemos pasar del dicho al hecho; debemos vivir nuestro compromiso con Cristo: la fe viva se traduce en obras.

Santiago nos aconseja que concentremos nuestros esfuerzos en la Palabra de Dios; que nuestra fe sea viva; que la Palabra de Dios eche raíces en nosotros y así tenga un poder salvífico; que pongamos en práctica esa Palabra porque, si solamente la confesamos con los labios, estamos usando el filibusterismo y nos estamos engañando a nosotros mismos. Santiago afirma que si la fe

nos mueve a servir a los demás — es decir, si cuidamos a los huérfanos, a las viudas, a los necesitados, a los pobres y a los marginados — eso es tener una fe viva, eso es celebrar “un culto puro sin mancha.” Que su fe sea real y sencilla. Que su vida sea una liturgia en la que Dios es realmente alabado (3 de septiembre).

Santiago (el 10 de septiembre) nos pide que no nos rebajemos antes los poderosos mientras que ignoramos a los necesitados. ¿Qué es más placentero, servir a quienes parecen ser buenos, tienen buena presencia y huelen bien ... o servir a quienes llegan andrajosos, agobiados por un pasado de luchas y reveses de la vida o huelen mal? Si discriminamos, si jugamos a favoritos, perderemos la oportunidad de servir a Cristo que llega a nosotros disfrazado en los más pequeños y necesitados.

Santiago subraya (el 17 de septiembre) que se peca de hipocresía si saludamos a los necesitados diciendo: “¡Buena suerte!”, “¡Que sigan bien!” “¡Cuidense!”, pero no hacemos nada para que esos deseos y palabras bonitas sean realidad. Nos presenta este reto: Den peso a sus palabras; den manos y pies a su fe; que su fe viva para los demás. Desear el bien o la buena suerte a quien no tiene con qué vestirse o no tiene comida es ser hipócrita. Los buenos deseos debenes-

tar acompañados de algo que les ayude a protegerse contra los elementos y calme su hambre. Una fe viva, auténtica, tiene que traducirse y expresarse en obras, cuidando con cariño, dando generosamente, compartiendo lo que somos y lo que tenemos.

El 24 de septiembre pide que nos comprometamos a hacer obras de justicia y de paz. Donde éstas se cultivan — dice — hay amabilidad, no hay violencia; hay armonía y respeto, no hay disputas. Santiago comprende bien que cada uno de nosotros, aún teniendo el mismo objetivo o meta — la de inculturar el evangelio en todas las capas o estratos de la sociedad — actuará de manera diferente, lo hará realidad mediante los dones únicos que ha recibido de Dios. En su excelente artículo, “La opción preferencial por los pobres: una ética para santos y héroes” (en la revista *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 59: 1993) Stephen J. Pope expresa elocuentemente las ideas de Santiago: No todos están llamados a hacer lo mismo. Hay vocaciones diferentes como hay carismas, servicios y ministerios diferentes. Lo importante es que todos y cada uno traduzca su fe en obras. Para algunos, eso significa vivir y trabajar al lado de los pobres, ser uno de ellos, ser uno con ellos. Para otros, eso exige colaborar e influenciar el poder legislativo para que las leyes cambien y se transforme la sociedad. Otros lo harán de otra forma, escribiendo, trabajando o dando un testimonio personal; así predicán el evangelio y viven su fe.

Cualquier forma o dirección que nuestro servicio a los demás tome, las palabras de Santiago seguirán impulsándonos a recibir la palabra del evangelio y a vivir nuestra fe de una manera práctica, enfocada e inmediata, hoy.

Patricia Datchuck Sánchez y Rafael Sánchez Alonso han provisto de comentarios y homilias a *Celebración* desde 1979.

# Fully Lived Faith or Filibuster?

*Lectionary themes for September 2006*

By PATRICIA DATCHUCK SÁNCHEZ  
AND RAFAEL SÁNCHEZ ALONSO

Anyone with half an eye on the workings of government knows the power of a filibuster to hamper the political process. Defined as “the use of obstructionist tactics, especially prolonged speechmaking, for the purpose of delaying or obviating legislative action,” the filibuster is a bipartisan tool used by politicians to make their opponents’ visions grow dim and their goals unattainable. Rather than leading people to work together to serve the best interests of all, filibusters often foment divisiveness and rarely accomplish anything worthwhile.

During this month, James (second reading) will offer his take on the subject as he challenges believers to choose whether or not we shall live our faith fully. Shall we profess with our lives what we profess with our lips, or shall we merely filibuster — talk and talk but do nothing for Christ or the church or this world’s needy?

Without putting it into so many words, James will remind us that the road to hell is paved with good intentions that are not realized in authentic service. Those willing to talk the talk of conviction as regards Christ and the Gospel, says James, should be also willing to walk the walk of commitment and lived faith that translates talk into action.

To that end, James remains very practical in his exhortations. Before all else, James reminds believers that all our efforts at lived faith begin in the word of God. Welcome God’s good word as gift, he advises; let it take root with its power to save. Then, act on this word. If we listen only, or we talk only, if we filibuster, then we are deceiving ourselves.

Then, James goes so far as to call the service we render in faith, service such as looking after orphans and widows, the needy and the margin-



*Give weight to your words, challenges James. Give hands and feet to your faith; let it become alive in you for others.*

alized — James calls this aspect of lived faith “pure worship without stain.” Make faith real, says James, keep it simple; take care of the poor. Let your life become liturgy and God is duly praised (Sept. 3).

Continuing his penchant for the practical (Sept. 10), James will counsel against kowtowing to the well-to-do while neglecting the needy. Who is more pleasant to serve, asks James, those who look good, present themselves well and smell nice? Or those who are tattered by tough breaks and visibly burdened by life’s struggles? If we discriminate and play favorites, might we not miss the chance to attend to Jesus, disguised as God’s least ones?

Growing even more frank in his exhortations, on Sept. 17, James will underscore the inherent hypocrisy in wishing another well with greetings like “Good luck!” “Stay well!” and “Take care!” while doing nothing to translate those wishes into reality. Give weight to your words, challenges James. Give hands and feet to your faith; let it become alive in you for others. Good wishes for those without clothing or food must be accompanied by something to protect them from the elements and nourishment that will ease their hungers. In order to

be authentic, faith must be translated into attentive caring, generous giving and a willingness to share who we are and what we have.

James will round out his instructions on Sept. 24 with a call for the faithful to commit themselves to the works of justice and peace. Where these are cultivated there is kindness, not violence; harmony and mutual respect rather than contention.

Obviously James understood that while each of us may share the same goal — the inculturation of the Gospel into every strata of society — each of us will approach that goal in a practical manner that is unique to us and our God-given gifts.

In his excellent article “The Preferential Option for the Poor: An Ethic for Saints and Heroes?” (*Irish Theological Quarterly*, 59: 1993), Stephen J. Pope gives eloquent and contemporary expression to James’ ideas: Not all, says Pope, are called to do the same thing. Vocations differ, as do charisms and services and ministries.

What matters is that all, in their own way, are called to translate their faith into action. For some, it will be working alongside the poor, as one of them, one with them. For others, it will mean influencing fundamental legislative change so as to transform society. For others, it will be through their writing, work and witness that the Gospel will be preached and faith will be lived.

In whatever direction our service takes us, the words of James continue to urge us onward to welcome the word of the Gospel, to listen to it and then, in faith, to act on it practically, purposefully, promptly.

Patricia Datchuck Sánchez and Rafael Sánchez Alonso have been collaborating to provide Lectionary commentaries and homilies for *Celebration* since 1979.

# James Lays It on the Line

*The word that confronts us also shows us the Gospel path ahead*

By GABE HUCK

*This homily and the next three homilies that will appear in Celebration from October-December have a common thread: the rituals of the household (be that one person or many). Perhaps placing these homilies in the fall will build on the cultural sense that September is in many ways the beginning of a new year in people's lives. The four homilies will, as usual, spring from the liturgy and the scriptures of a specific Sunday. The text below, an initial reflection on rituals of the home, is presented for Sunday, Sept. 17, the 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B. It calls attention to the Letter of James (this is the middle of five Sundays when the church is reading that letter). In the following three months of 2006 these homilies will deal more specifically with scripture reading, morning and evening and night prayer, and meal prayer. How do these relate to the Sunday liturgy? How do they become good habits? How do they shape our lives for Gospel deeds?*

We are today in the middle of the five Sundays when, every third year, the church grinds its teeth and reads that short and disturbing part of the Bible called the Letter of James. We began it two weeks ago today and we'll conclude two weeks from today. This is a letter that some churches judged too eccentric to be included in the Bible or read in the liturgy. But for us, here it is. The whole letter is only a few pages long. The writer had strong ideas and opinions about how the followers of Jesus ought to live. James doesn't beat around any bushes and doesn't deal in generalities. Though writing during the very first generation of Christians, the author knows that already Christians find it hard to let the Gospel shape their lives. So this James makes an impassioned appeal to the church, a down-to-earth look

at how Christians might live their lives day by day.

We had a good taste today of how direct and perhaps even sarcastic James can be. We heard this: "If a brother or a sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,' but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it?"

If that made people squirm all those centuries ago, all the more it makes us squirm now when we know full well what multitudes on this earth live without even "the necessities of the body." We may not even trouble to say, "Go in peace, keep warm, eat well." We just change the channel because it isn't our fault, is it? James doesn't care that we know the creed and come to church. James wants to see some action from those who have accepted the Gospel. If we are waiting for justice to come from the rich and powerful of the world, we'll wait forever.

Nor is James easy on us for our deference to the wealthy and the powerful. Remember what we heard last Sunday from James: "If a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, 'Have a seat here, please,' while to the one who is poor you say, 'Stand there,' or 'Sit at my feet,' have you not made distinctions among yourselves?" James has observed what we all observe, the thousand ways we bow and smile before those with more wealth than ourselves and ignore, or worse, those with less. James would not have been surprised at how today we give such attention in the media and in conversation to the celebrities. But what interest do we have in the dull misery of immigrants, inmates, AIDS victims, sweatshop workers and on and on? James wants to pull the blinders from our eyes, saying that we have things upside down:

"Is it not the rich who oppress you?" James asks us.

James wants the church to figure out what the Gospel means when it comes to there being rich and poor in the world. James clearly has cast his lot with the poor. In one place he writes: "Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom?" As for the rich, he says: "In the midst of their busy lives, they will wither away." Two Sundays from now we will be reading from the concluding paragraphs of the Letter of James and we will hear a final and vivid word to the rich: "Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire."

The last we'll hear from James until fall of 2009 is a sentence that sounds meant for us, for the churches of the United States. Perhaps it will stay in our hearts: "You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter."

Is this day, our day, these times we live in, such a day of slaughter? By every way of counting, yes. Is it also a day when many within the world's mightiest military power are living in luxury and in pleasure? By any fair comparison to the lot of most people on earth today, we are. In a day of slaughter by weapons old and new, by hunger and by AIDS, by prisons and by torture, by bad water and new diseases and the calamity of global warming, in such a day we mostly mind our own business, guard our own borders, look out for our own futures, and have no ears and no patience for fiery preachers like James. Besides, whatever difference could any of us make?

Thanks be to God that James and his like were not expelled from the scriptures. Somehow these wild-



eyed but clear-sighted preachers and prophets are still being heard when the church gathers to do the Eucharist. And what James is saying is what we need to hear when we gather here to do our thanksgiving to God over bread and wine, and our sharing in the body and blood of Christ at this table. The people who have died to sin and are alive now in Christ Jesus — that is, ourselves — together lift our voices in intercession and bold complaint to God, and then again make a thanksgiving that contains even lamentation, and then together break and share one bread and drink from one cup, eating and drinking to proclaim that death by which we have life. Perhaps we know that these deeds are images of what we long for and what James longed for, the world a common table where all share and share alike.

But our deeds here on Sunday are necessarily so brief, just this time together on Sunday. And that needs our attention. Are we agreed that we are first and last members of the body of Christ who have accepted the Gospel, and only as such are we anything else, be it teachers or students, laborers or professionals, citizens or members of organizations? But if we are ever to figure out how to do that, we will have to find and hold onto ways that this scripture and this Eucharist on Sunday are echoed in the little rituals of our everyday. Christians, like other believers in this world, have now very little sense for what was once just common sense. That is, the coming and going of every one of our days needs its moments of prayer, alone or with others in our households. If we take James and all the others seriously, if we take this Eucharist seriously and our baptism too, we need rhythms to our days when we rehearse and echo our assembly's Sunday Eucharist.

What we hear in the scriptures here on Sunday and what we must do around this table, these are like some strenuous athletic event where there are no spectators. Every one of us must be training to do these deeds. If one such deed is attentive listening to God's word in the scriptures, then are we training for that day by day with Bible open and passages long and short to be read? If another such deed

is naming all the troubles of the world, interceding for all the suffering in the world, then who can do this except by daily exercising, daily practicing, daily clamoring for God's attention? And if another such deed is lifting up our hearts and giving thanks to the Lord our God, where are we daily exercising that deep thanksgiving? This is the thanksgiving that Christians learn to make not by pretending that all's well with the world, but by facing head-on that all is not well, that the sounds of our helpless lamentation must be somehow woven together with the sounds of our everlasting thanks to God. This thanksgiving is our right and it is our duty as those who are baptized.

We are in the midst of September. For many of us, the rhythm of family and work make September like the beginning of a new year, a month to adjust the routines and find the rhythms that will take us through fall and winter and spring. Could we make beginnings this September by creating one or two simple habits? From our tradition, we can name what might be the elements of these habits. (From time to time this fall we will reflect more carefully on each of these. For now, just an overview of the tradition.)

Those habits of prayer attach themselves to the moments that have to come every day, to those little passages that get us from here to there and there to here. We get tired and we sleep and we rise. That basic rhythm, the to and fro of sleep and waking, has seemed to many people the necessary moments of ritual, of prayer. We all know waking, rising, taking care of our bodies. The time and the mood may alter with weekday and weekend, with sickness or good health or life's worries, but still this is a passage we're likely to make every day. And our tradition has been to mark this daily passage with words and gestures that relate to both the sleeping and the waking. Through the centuries Christians have made the prayer of early morning a prayer of praise, a eucharistic prayer of simple thanksgiving that we and the world have come to morning. Whatever else it may be, we proclaim that the new day is God's gift.

And when the day has passed and the body is weary, the passage is toward rest, toward sleep. Many of us learned as children the prayer, "Now I lay me down to sleep ..." And that prayer for safety in the night and for a good death at last is what the Christian always prays at night in a variety of ways. But there is more to the night. We pray for family, friends, those in distress, peace, hope. We pray as Jesus taught us to pray. And each night we cannot help being aware that the ending day has had its hard moments and its failures, and we pray for God's mercy.

All our days have another transition that comes simply from our need to eat. This also is a passage: from hunger to nourishment, and often from being alone to being with others. How are to mark this moment, whether we are alone or with family? What do we learn here at this altar table that prepares us for all the other tables where we eat and drink?

Within the daily ways of praying we need time also when we open the book that the church always carries, the book we read here each Sunday, our Bible, our scripture. Listening to God's word here, together, was never meant to be the only time we open the Bible. Rather, the reading here becomes vital and provocative and lively only when many of us are reading that book day by day, discovering its poetry, complexity, stories, letters, parables, on and on. The scriptures are not riddles, are not the private domain of scholars and preachers. They belong to all of us and they are part of a conversation we joined at baptism.

Have we wandered far from that Letter of James with its no-nonsense approach to how to live a Christian life? Or have we wandered right into the middle of James' exhortations to turn our lives to Gospel paths? Here in the daily prayers of Christians we can come to the strength to take that hard path, the joy to know what matters and what does not, the love we have for this world that God loves.

Gabe Huck writes and speaks about liturgy and justice issues. He is currently living in New York City: [GHuck24282@aol.com](mailto:GHuck24282@aol.com).

# Don't Just Feel Sorry for Us!

*Getting old has advantages, too*

By CAROL LUEBERING

Everywhere you go, you see red hats. They are on fabrics and dishes, umbrellas and pillows, dishes, sweatshirts and shoes. They are the emblem of the Red Hat Society, a loose organization of women 50 and over whose sole purpose is to enjoy themselves. The group takes its name from "Warning," a poem written by Jenny Joseph in 1965. It begins: "When I am an old woman I shall wear purple/ With a red hat that doesn't go ..." and goes on to list all the delightful eccentricities the author looks forward to enjoying.

I wasn't old enough to qualify for membership in the society when I first encountered Joseph's poem. Like the author, I was counting my pennies because the kids were in college and trying to set a good example for them. Besides, any hint of eccentricity on my part embarrassed them beyond belief. They were mortified any time I failed to match the wallpaper.

No more, folks! Certainly there are drawbacks to advancing in years. Energy level falls in direct inversion of the grandchildren's; health worries abound and we go to the funerals of too many dear friends. You listen to our troubles and express sympathy for us, and that is a grace we sorely need.

But please don't feel sorry for us all the time. Getting old has some rather sweet advantages as well. For one thing, as the poem insists, it is possible to have a lot more uninhibited fun. People look at our gray hair and see a harmless old fool. We can flirt outrageously with someone young and good-looking without fear of being taken too seriously. We can give voice to whatever wicked thought crosses our minds and waste time without a qualm. Whenever I see someone with a tiny tot, I can identify myself as the state baby



*The years have taught me that feeling in control is always nothing more than an illusion. Life is sure to go spinning off in an unexpected direction at any moment.*

inspector without threat. We are, in other words, free to be ourselves — free at last!

Growing old has other advantages as well. For the first time since we were tiny tots, our days are relatively free of constant demands. We have ample leisure time to acquire whatever skills we always wished we had or to rediscover activities that have always given us pleasure but that we seldom had time for in previous years.

We have also gained a bit more wisdom than we had earlier. I have a young friend who is always telling me she is going to get her life under control. I probably shouldn't laugh at her, but as a friend my age always says, "Don't *should* on me!" The years have taught me that feeling in control is always nothing more than an illusion. Life is sure to go spinning off in an unexpected direction at any moment.

That's just one of the bits of wisdom that makes the elderly the elders of the tribe. Experience does breed wisdom if we take the time to reflect on it — and we have a lot of experience under our belts. Perhaps the only oft-repeated experience

from which we hate to learn is our inability to control other people. Some people are never able to shatter that one. Firmly convinced that their way is the only right way, they insist on trying to whip everyone else into line. Before you pass judgment, you'd do well to remember how hard you have sometimes struggled (and failed) in the same attempt, as we all do from time to time.

Our relationships with members of the younger generations are another plus. We worry about them, of course, but we can relax and enjoy them a lot more than we could when we were responsible for how they turned out. We trace family resemblances that younger folks cannot see — not just physical traits, but also the amazing likeness of personality. One of my grandkids is just like her mother (as Mom well knows). She also reminds me a lot of my favorite aunt, whom she never knew.

To these young people, we are walking history books. For a class assignment, a sixth-grader once interviewed us about what life was like when we were kids. She was amazed to hear about such things as doctors who made house calls; begging chips from the ice man and shoveling coal into the bin; listening to plays on the radio; watching our mothers shove wet clothes through the wringer and hanging them out to dry. And we are the custodians of the family history. The stories my grandmother told enabled my mother to trace her ancestors back to colonial days, and I have written out the narrative for the next generations.

So sympathize with our sad stories. But please have a little fun with us too!

Carol Luebering is a regular contributor to *Celebration*. Contact her by e-mail at [jncluebering@juno.com](mailto:jncluebering@juno.com).

# Sabbath

*We honor both God and ourselves by observing this day of rest*

By KAREN DIX

We arrived in Jerusalem on a Friday, in the late afternoon. The pinkish stone of the Old City gleamed in the setting sun. It seemed like we were driving into a painting. We got to our hotel and found that dinner was to be a problem, for it was now the Sabbath and food preparation was not allowed. Later we headed out for our first exploration of this sacred city. As we walked down the street, everyone we saw greeted us with “Happy Shabbat!” It was not said like the routine “Have a nice day” we hear constantly. It was easy to see that behind the greeting was genuine joy. Peoples’ voices seemed to say “Finally, here comes the Sabbath. A day to treasure, a day to savor. A day of rest. A gift from God for me to enjoy.”

No one here has ever wished me “Happy Sunday!” Instead we say “TGIF!” Because in our culture the world revolves around the work week and the school week, thus it is the whole weekend that is valued.

We look forward to our weekends, seeing them as respites, which is what we want them to be. In reality however our weekends have become a time to catch up. Laundry, home improvement projects and shopping. At least I know that’s the way it is for many, especially working parents. Our culture is not likely to change in terms of our hectic pace. So we must carve out our own niche of rest and refreshment.

Some of us can look back with nostalgia on another era when Sunday was a day spent quite differently. For my family it started with morning Mass — wearing our Sunday best, followed by an early Sunday dinner and lazy afternoons that often included a nap. Sometimes we would take a Sunday drive into the country or along the coast. We often visited other relatives. One



cousin always had spaghetti for all her bachelor brothers and any one else who wanted to drop by.

By the time I was raising my children, the world had changed a bit. But we did have certain rituals that were a part of this special day: always Mass — a non-negotiable for my kids. It was the day we often went for walks or bike rides. During the seasons of Advent and Lent, we would have special prayers at our Sunday night meal. With schoolchildren, Sunday night is often consumed with homework.

For Americans, our favorite television shows and specials have traditionally been scheduled for this last restful evening before the work week. Somehow, an hour with the “Sopranos” or “Desperate Housewives” does not seem like the best way to end the Lord’s Day, and certainly not with the kids. But clearly, the point of our Catholic emphasis on honoring the Sabbath is to take time to worship God, and then show God how much we really honor creation by recreating ourselves.

In past times, this Sabbath rest

meant that overworked folks could simply have a day off. The idea extends beyond us human beings, to the work animals and the earth itself. Today, the needs of the average family may be different. But we must take time to just be still, or we can drive ourselves to illness. Never has family time been more important. It is scandalous how little time many parents actually spend with their children in conversation. Many experts believe that the best thing we can do for our families is simply to eat together. Thus, bringing back the Sunday family dinner is both a great way to honor the Sabbath and to improve our family life.

Many modern Catholic families seem comfortable with missing Mass once in a while. It is challenging when soccer matches, hockey practice or school fundraising activities are scheduled on Sundays. Parents need to do what they tell their children to do — stand up to peer pressure and just say no. They need to explain the value of gathering with the faith community to their children. Assembling as the body of Christ transforms each of us individuals into something bigger, something more. It takes our focus from our daily activities to the higher gifts of faith, hope and love. In praying with one another we give ourselves over to the Holy Spirit. And of course, it is where we are nourished for our spiritual health.

No one can tell a family when or how this Sabbath rest will happen for them. Each family needs to look at their own schedule and then evaluate what changes can be made. Everything goes back to the family, the domestic church. It is where we are schooled in all things of value.

## RESOURCES

*At Home with the Word* and *Take Me Home*, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago.

*Seasons of a Family’s Life*, Wendy Wright, Jossey-Bass.

Web sites, such as the U.S. Bishops site ([www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org)), offer daily and Sunday scripture readings. Many publishers of religion textbooks offer Web sites with ideas for parents to connect liturgy with family life.

Karen Dix is a religious educator at St. Vincent Ferrer Church in River Forest, Ill. Contact her at [Kjdixsvf@yahoo.com](mailto:Kjdixsvf@yahoo.com).

# Perfect Joy

*Loss is gain on the paradoxical path to Christian fulfillment*

By RICH HEFFERN

*If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.*

— Mark 9:35

This famous story is told of St. Francis of Assisi: He was going with his assistant Brother Leo from Perugia to Saint Mary of the Angels convent. It was winter and they both shivered from the cold. Francis called to Brother Leo: “Brother, if it were to please God that the friars should give, in all lands, a great example of holiness and edification, write down, and note carefully, that this would not be perfect joy.”

A little further on, Francis added: “Brother Leo, if the friars were to make the lame to walk, if they should make straight the crooked, chase away demons, give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, and, what is even a far greater work, if they should raise the dead after four days, write that this would not be perfect joy.”

As they walked Francis kept adding to this litany describing places where perfect joy would not be found. Finally after several miles of that, it is said that Brother Leo “wondered much within himself,” and then blurted out: “I pray thee teach me wherein is perfect joy.”

Francis, thinking perhaps: “Aha! Thought you’d never ask!” answered Leo, “If, when we shall arrive at Saint Mary of the Angels, all drenched with rain and trembling with cold, all covered with mud and exhausted from hunger; if, when we knock at the convent gate, the porter should come angrily and ask us who we are; if, after we have told him, ‘We are two of the brethren,’ he should answer angrily, ‘What you say is not the truth; you are but two impostors going about to deceive the world, and take away the alms of the poor; begone I say.’ If then he refuse to

open to us, and leave us outside, exposed to the snow and rain, suffering from cold and hunger until nightfall, then, if we accept such injustice, such cruelty and contempt with patience, without being ruffled and without murmuring, believing with humility and charity that the porter really knows us, and that it is God who makes him to speak thus against us, write down, Brother Leo, that this is perfect joy.”

Francis wouldn’t leave it alone, adding further: “And if we knock again, and the porter comes out in anger to drive us away with oaths and blows, as if we were vile impostors, saying, ‘Begone, miserable robbers, for here you shall neither eat nor sleep!’ If we accept all this with patience, with joy, and with charity, O Brother Leo, write that this indeed is perfect joy.”

Like Jesus’ parables, I think this Franciscan story about the joy of loss is meant to turn our world completely upside down, upset our apple cart and get us on the road to an authentic and boldly effective spiritual life. It’s a story too that illumines the falsity of our desire for continual happiness and sheds light on the Gospel tenet that the first shall be last, and the last first.

Poet and men’s movement guru Robert Bly has talked at length about this spiritual dynamic. He said once in an interview:

The question is: Who is this whiny one inside us who wants to be happy all the time? In the Muslim tradition, that whiny one is called the *nafs*, which is the greedy soul. You can also call it the insatiable soul, the rapacious soul. That’s who’s running the war in Iraq right now, for example. The Sufis say the *nafs* is part of our ancient animal-soul, which is determined to have food, power and sexuality and to stay alive,

even to the detriment of those closest to us. So our spiritual life is a constant battle between the part of the soul that loves others and the part of the soul that will gladly eat them up in a moment.

In his book of poems *The Night Abraham Called to the Stars*, Bly writes:

I live very close to my greedy soul.  
When I see a book written two thousand years ago,  
I check to see if my name is mentioned.

This emphasis on the struggle between the rapacious and the true soul is found within our Catholic spiritual tradition as well. A key tenet of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, written in the 1500s, is that the human soul is continually drawn in two directions: drawn toward Godliness, and at the same time tempted toward selfishness and baseness. Consistent with Roman Catholic theology, the Exercises make numerous references to the belief that humankind’s highest purpose is to glorify God and not one’s self. Accordingly, they provide several illustrations of how one might best be able to refrain from satiating one’s lower desires and instead how one might find a means to redirect one’s energies toward the fulfillment of one’s higher purpose in life.

The greedy soul is abashed when we lose. What feeds the true soul, over and over, is something being taken away. It stands on their heads our American values of competitiveness and winning, of always wanting to be happy.

Rich Heffern is a regular contributor to *Celebration*. Contact him by e-mail at [rheffern@ncronline.org](mailto:rheffern@ncronline.org).

# Hand or Tongue?

*Which body part will receive the body of Christ?*

By MELISSA MUSICK NUSSBAUM

The majority of the seminarians in our diocese receive Communion on the tongue. The majority of the laypeople in our diocese receive Communion in the hand. I wonder about the divide. I read the articles from each camp, the appeals to church history and the appeals to canon law. There is, of course, no argument that we will follow the command of Christ:

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body."  
(Matt 26:26)

We are host for the Host; created by God and for God, we take God into our very flesh. The question then becomes, "Which part of the human body will receive the body of Christ, the tongue or the hand?"

We can thank Saint Paul for his wondrous description of the church as a body, made up of many parts and yet working together as one. Paul disdains nothing. Every part of the body is necessary. He writes, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I do not need you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I do not need you.'"

Paul does not play favorites, but James, another New Testament letter writer, does single out one body part for warning and chastisement. He calls the human tongue "a small member (with) great pretensions," and writes:

Consider how a small fire can set a huge forest ablaze. The tongue is also a fire. It exists among our members as a world of malice, defiling the whole body. ... For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no human being can tame the



tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

(Jas 3:6-9)

Yes, I think, exactly so. I consider the evil I have done, most of it with my tongue. I have gossiped and lied and spread bad news about those I dislike or envy with something like glee. I have made dinner-party chatter out of my children's bedtime confidences. I have passed on words spoken to me in private that were never meant to be shared. I have enjoyed the power of the secret, and the power of passing it on. I have passed off as a joke or a tease — "What's the matter? Don't you have a sense of humor?" — words meant to wound.

Then I look at my hands and see in the wrinkles and age spots their history: The cooking, the cleaning, the soothing, the stroking. My toddler grandson lifts his arms and says, "Carry you, Ma-Maw," and I scoop him up, my hands snug about him. If strangers come, or he has bumped his head, or a dog growls, Luc cries, "Carry you, Ma-Maw," knowing he is safe in my hands.

I use my hands to help my mother from her chair, to steady her as she walks, and I see that my hands, day by day, look more like hers. My hands show the years of work, and I am grateful, knowing their part in most of the good I have ever done.

In the preparation of the altar at Mass, the priest prays:

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation.

Through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made.

Earth gives forth the wheat and human hands grind the wheat and mill the flour and make the bread. "It will become for us the bread of life."

In the story of Israel's wanderings in the desert, it is God who feeds them, telling Moses:

I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day.

(Exod 16:4)

Into their hands, they gathered God's manna.

When the risen Christ appeared to the disciples in Jerusalem, he invited the wondering disciples to touch him, to feel with their hands his flesh and bone. When he encounters the skeptical Thomas, Christ invites him: "Bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe."

I hear the gossip circulating through our parish. But on Sundays, our chatter is stilled, replaced by the graceful words of the liturgy. "Lord, have mercy. Christ have mercy." That is what I hear.

This is what I see: Hands, everywhere, doing the works of mercy. I watch the deaf signing with their hands "Alleluia," and "Peace be with you." I watch people cradling children with their hands and guiding them. I see an elderly man supporting his blind wife, the two of them side by side in the Communion procession. These are the hands of the church — empty and outstretched to receive the body of Christ.

Take and eat. Taste and see how good the Lord is.

Melissa Musick Nussbaum lives in Colorado Springs, Colo. Her e-mail address is [mmnussbaum@adelphia.net](mailto:mmnussbaum@adelphia.net).

# Wrapped in Light and in Love

*Faith formation can help free children from undue fear*

By DORIS MURPHY

Recently my brother's three young grandchildren spent a weekend with him. The rule was that on those beautiful days they had to play outside — no television or computers. They were to use their imaginations. On one of the evenings during their visit, they stopped at my home. When I asked what they had done all day with their grandfather, they excitedly told me Grandpa had helped them build a fort out of “real wood.” They told me they would probably sleep in the new fort that night. I asked them if it would be cold? No. Would they be afraid? After some hesitation, they assured me they would not be afraid if they had blankets for cover. They didn't need them for warmth, but they wanted blankets for security. Lights and blankets make children feel safe and unafraid; they wrap the children in love.

Jesus has wrapped us in words of love and security as well: “Deliver us from evil.” Children learn the “Our Father” without much difficulty, as they hear and pray it weekly at Mass — and, one hopes, at home. They pray to be delivered from the real evil that surrounds them: the evil of each one's own sinfulness, which even children can recognize. To a child, evil is being bullied by another, losing something precious, having a pet die, missing a parent who lives elsewhere, not getting chosen for a game. Or they can experience even more damaging evils such as accidents, pain, poverty, hunger, fighting, death, unemployment, sickness, abuse, sadness, loneliness, lying, stealing, injustice. Children usually have no control over these things.

Evil, unfortunately, is part of life. However, in the psalms, we read: “Deliver us from the fear of the enemy [evil].” It is the *fear* of evil, the fear of imagined enemies that takes away our courage, makes us unforgiving, vengeful and untrusting of



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others, and paralyzes us. Dorothy Day once wrote that fear makes us cowards. Perhaps this is why children become bullies and join gangs — they fear what evil might happen, what enemies may be lurking, what power they may lose, and they want to protect themselves from the fear of the unknown.

A few weeks ago I went to a production of “West Side Story” and again indulged in the wonderful music of Leonard Bernstein. I realized that not much has changed since the '60s except the names, colors and perhaps intensity of the gangs.

Are we setting our children up for fear when we tell them they cannot go anywhere alone, cannot be adventuresome, always need a car ride? School will soon be starting again. Imagine how it would be if all the children in a neighborhood walked to school together (with a parent guide, if that is more comfortable). Children

of various ages can keep one another safe. A few days ago, I drove behind a bus on its route picking up children for school. In three cases, mothers waited while the children got on the bus, then the mothers joined one another and began their morning walk — in the direction of the school less than a mile away. I tried to sort out that scenario in my head without much luck. (And schools struggle with ways to save money.)

We all manufacture fears that we pray will never happen. In the “Our Father,” we do not pray to be delivered from the *fear* of evil — that is of our making. This prayer that Jesus gave us is rich in wisdom. We praise God, we thank God, we recognize our dependence, we ask forgiveness — all unselfish gestures. And then finally we humbly ask to be delivered from evil.

Instead of using time to engender fear, we can use our time to care for one another, get to know the unknown, generously share talents with others, help children in need. We can teach them not to fight, even banning such words as “you can't play with us.” Truly accepting and getting to know children who have differently colored skin or who speak another language is a way to make “thy kingdom come, thy will be done” on earth. We all need safe places where the Spirit of God helps us distinguish evil from the fear of evil.

As school begins, let us imagine how we can work to make schools places without fear, without prejudice, but rather full of great opportunity and love. Children can be encouraged to abandon fear, for the Lord is their shepherd, nothing shall they fear; they shall not want, nor shall they walk in the valley of darkness, for he is at their side.

Doris Murphy is director of faith formation at St. Bridget's Parish in River Falls, Wis. E-mail her at [dhmurphy@presenter.com](mailto:dhmurphy@presenter.com).

# The Spirituality of Teaching

*Catechesis requires good pedagogy but also personal witness*

By RONALD NUZZI

Teaching is hard work. Multiple demands present themselves constantly in the classroom, requiring no small level of skill on the part of the teacher. Mastering the content to be taught is only the beginning. Teachers need to be sensitive to the overall structure of the learning environment, the special needs of their students, and the social and interpersonal challenges of productively managing the behavior of a diverse group of learners. For all these reasons, classroom management techniques, organizational theory, and various pedagogical approaches are now standard topics in the professional preparation of those who would be teachers.

Teaching is such a public, extroverted ministry, it is no wonder that most teacher preparation focuses on the skill set needed to help students learn. But another area, often neglected, has an important part to play in teacher effectiveness — the spirituality of the teacher. Focusing on the spirituality a teacher brings into the classroom acknowledges that the life of faith has value, makes a contribution to both the teacher's skill and attitude, and can help shape the learning environment in productive ways.

Teachers do not simply teach curriculum; they teach who they are. Their identity, values, convictions, and beliefs easily come through in the many exchanges they have with their students. In fact, everything the teacher does teaches. How conflict is handled, how surprises are managed, how challenges to authority are addressed, the frequency of displays of joy, laughter, anger, and frustration all teach, and often enough these lessons are more enduring than the instruction provided.

The spirituality of the teacher is in full view through all classroom exchanges. Teaching can be thought

## Helpful Hints for a Healthy Spirituality for Teachers

- Make time in your schedule for things you enjoy for relaxation, fun, and the typical socializing with friends and family that everyone needs.
- Make personal, private prayer and communal prayer a part of your routine.
- Pray for your students, and their parents and families.
- Lead a balanced life and take care of your own, manifest needs.
- Prepare your heart, as well as your lessons, before you teach.

of as the outward manifestations of these inner, spiritual dispositions. Thus, it is essential that teachers prepare—not only their lessons, but also their souls.

How can teachers nurture and grow their own spirituality in ways that positively impact their teaching? What are the characteristics of a spirituality that support good teaching? First, teachers should remember what is perhaps the oldest spiritual maxim: “No one gives what they do not have.” In order to be a role model of virtue and faith for others, one must first be a person of virtue and faith. To be patient with the errors, immaturity, even the sinfulness of students, teachers must cultivate that patience in their own lives and hearts. It is the spiritual equivalent of what we hear on every airline flight regarding what to do in the case of emergency: secure your own mask first, then tend to the needs of those around you. Thus, the first principle of the spirituality of teaching is need for self-care on the part of teachers. Teachers need to take care of themselves—physically, intellectually, socially, psychologically, spiritually — not so that they

are the most well-cared-for people in the building. The principle of self-care for teachers has an orientation to ministry to others. Teachers need to care for themselves so that in their teaching they are able to be present to their students in helpful ways.

A second practice, found often throughout history in successful teacher-student relationships, is for teachers to pray for their students. Such authentic prayer opens the hearts of teachers to the true needs of their student, invites God's help and participation in the educational effort, and places teaching within the proper context of ministry. Teachers are certainly indispensable agents in the educational process, but they are not the only agents. God works in and through good teachers, blesses their efforts, multiplies their successes, and divides their sorrows. Praying for one's students is also a way to situate teaching in the overall educational ministry of the church. Teachers, as ministers of the Gospel, minister in the name of the church. We are fond of saying things like, “my classroom,” “my students,” or “my school,” but the truth is that all belongs to God.

Finally, gentleness is a sign of those who are spiritually strong. Teachers who make themselves spiritually strong can find the inner strength to be gentle with others. Anyone can yell and raise their voice, chastising their charges for whatever imperfections. But gentleness with the weak is a sign of spiritual strength. Teachers will serve their students best when they make themselves strong so that they can be gentle with others, especially those who may not be particularly deserving of such compassion.

Rev. Ronald Nuzzi is director of the ACE Leadership Program at the University of Notre Dame.

# A Fresh Start

*September marks a good time to evaluate and renew goals*

By J. MICHAEL McMAHON

The liturgical year may begin officially on the First Sunday of Advent, but pastoral musicians and many others involved in parish life regard September as the real beginning of the church year. Even in parishes where music programs continue throughout the summer, September nearly always brings increased activity and a sense of fresh start.

September is a good time to re-evaluate the sung participation of the assembly. Why not gather the various music leaders of the parish to reflect on some simple questions and to reflect critically on assembly song at the Sunday Eucharist and other major liturgies? The following questions are merely suggestions. You may think of additional questions appropriate for your community.

## What are we singing?

- Are people joining strongly in the acclamations of the liturgy and in the short responses sung in dialogue with the priest and other ministers?
- Is the responsorial psalm sung consistently with refrains that are easily sung by the assembly?
- Do the people of our entire parish know at least one or two settings of the unchanging Mass parts (e.g., Gloria, Sanctus) that can be used at all-parish celebrations?
- Does the song during the Communion procession always include a refrain that is well known to the community? Does it express the communitarian nature of the communion procession and give voice to joy of heart?
- Do the songs chosen for the entrance, preparation of gifts, and Communion elicit strong participation from the entire assembly, support the ritual action, and draw participants into the mystery of the season or feast?
- Have we explored the use of anti-



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phons and psalms—drawn from official or unofficial sources—for the Entrance, Preparation of the Gifts, and Communion? Does the music of the liturgy incorporate both traditional and contemporary compositions, including the treasury of Gregorian chant?

■ Does the repertoire of assembly song include music that reflects the cultural diversity not only of this parish but of the larger Catholic community?

■ Are people singing at least the more important parts of the liturgy at all Sunday and holy day Masses?

## How and when are we singing?

■ When the entire assembly joins in song together, does it experience itself as one praying and singing body, manifesting the unity of Christ’s body? Do the acoustics of the church building support the vibrant sound of congregational song?

■ Is the voice of the assembly ever obscured or overpowered by the amplified voice of the cantor or other minister?

■ Is the song or hymn for the entrance procession prepared in such a way that it need not be ended arbitrarily but expresses fully the praise and prayer of the text?

■ Is the music for the preparation of the gifts planned with the ritual action in mind — long enough to support the rites of preparation but flexible enough to be concluded as needed?

■ Does the song during the Communion procession begin while the priest is receiving Communion and extend as long as possible while people are receiving Communion?

## Why are we singing?

■ Is the singing of the community perceived by all present as an integral part of the liturgy or is it regarded as a mere option or enhancement?

■ Is active participation in singing the liturgy regarded as both a right and a duty of all the baptized?

■ Do the people of our parish find in common song a language that allows them to express their faith, praise, prayer, longing and hope?

■ Does active participation in sung worship provide an impetus to active participation in the mission of Christ in families, communities and the world?

Set aside some time as the “new year” begins to engage in some serious reflection, then take a few steps during the coming year to strengthen the singing of the assembly in your parish.

J. Michael McMahon is music editor of *Celebration* and president of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians. Contact him at [npmres@npm.org](mailto:npmres@npm.org).