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Articles for faith and mission



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Living Word to a Troubled World

The preacher holds the Bible in one hand, the newspaper in the other

PATRICIA DATCHUCK SÁNCHEZ
and RAFAEL SÁNCHEZ ALONSO

The following is a condensed version of a talk written by Patricia Datchuck Sánchez and delivered by Rafael Sánchez Alonso at the Celebration Conference on Effective Liturgy in Cincinnati, July 30, 2009.

Whenever I begin to write or speak or teach about scripture, I am reminded of something that Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard once said that keeps me humble and on my toes. Kierkegaard was sure that biblical interpreters, authors of commentary and so on do more damage than good in helping our understanding of the Bible. His suggestion: “Kill all the commentators! Then, take the scriptures in hand and let them speak” (*Provocations*, The Plough Publishing House, Farmington, Pa.: 1999).

Perhaps the best way of taking Kierkegaard’s advice, without being too literal, is to shed light on the text and then get out of the way, so as not to cast our own shadow too heavily upon it.

With that in mind, we begin.

At the beginning of the third Christian century, at a time when relations between the church and the empire were uneasy, a North African Christian named Tertullian asked, “What has Jerusalem to say to Athens?”

Jerusalem, of course, represented the rich heritage of biblical faith, the center of Jewish tradition, the center of Christian tradition. Athens, as a cosmopolitan Greek city, represented the epitome of the “secular” world, center of great learning and the arts, home to exciting systems of philosophy, home to great thinkers, teachers, poets and philosophers such as Homer, Sophocles, Plato, Aristotle.



Illustration by Julie Lonneman

In essence, Tertullian was asking, “How does faith speak to contemporary culture?” “How does my discipleship impact my citizenship in this world?”

These are the questions that homilists and preachers must keep in mind if they want that homily to have an impact on those who listen.

Through the centuries, a variety of responses have addressed the question “What has Jerusalem to say to Athens?” Some are of the mind that Jerusalem should remain apart from Athens. Others think Jerusalem should engage Athens and should become purposefully invested in society despite its flaws so as to transform it, just as leaven raises the dough. In *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI encouraged believers to enter into every stratum of society to bring about the growth, change and development that preserves the dignity of all persons.

Keeping Tertullian’s question in mind, we might also dare to ask, “What has *Athens* to say to Jerusalem?”

To put it another way: What has

the world to say to the church? What have Washington D.C., Madison Avenue, Wall Street ... what have the developed rich nations, the Third World, the millions of victims of injustice, famine, disease and war ... what have these to say to the church?

As preachers of the word and stewards of its power to speak to every human experience and every eventuality, it is both your privilege and your responsibility to bring answers to these questions.

Karl Barth said that we should preach with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. This means we have to keep our fingers on two pulses: that of the living word of God, which never ceases to speak a living truth; and that of the human experience, with all its sorrows and joys, hope and despair. Bringing these two pulses together is the proper role of the preacher and the homilist.

But how does such a dialogue between Jerusalem and Athens, between Sacred Heart Catholic Church and the city of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, get underway? How can it be sustained?

Before any dialogue can begin, preachers and homilists, mediators and interpreters must allow themselves to become part of the hermeneutic. Their own experience of the word will be the filter through which others will be able to interpret the message God’s word holds for their lives. Preachers need to surrender; they need to let themselves be seized by God’s word, which is a living extension of God.

For examples of this experience, we look to Jacob (Gen 28, 32). Jacob was not perfect. He was a deceiver who had conned his brother out of his birthright and his father’s blessing. Yet God spoke to him! Jacob experienced God in a set of dreams marked by a struggle that left Jacob wounded. So often, our encounters with God can leave us similarly



wounded. So often, the word we are compelled to speak to Athens and to Jerusalem leaves the bruises of its harsh truth. People are inclined to shoot the messenger.

We look to Hosea, whose personal experiences enabled him to hear and speak the tender words of a hurt love to a faithless people.

We look to Jeremiah, who knew himself to be seduced by a word that he could not help but speak.

You, the homilist, are you Jacob? Are you Hosea? Are you Jeremiah?

Raymond Brown often spoke of his love affair with the word of God. At first, I thought these were strange words from a celibate priest. But this love affair reflects a complete investment in the word, born of love. The word becomes not merely a subject to be studied or a text to be manipulated into a preconceived message, or even an intellectual exercise that shows off one's cleverness and insight. No, this love affair means that the word has become a partner in life, a friend in whom to confide, someone to learn from.

Agreeing with Brown, Walter Burghardt once said: "The word I study has to be the word I pray; and the word I pray must be the word I live" (*Long Have I Loved Thee*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y.: 2000). Once the preacher has been drawn into love, has been seized, has wrestled with the word, he or she must bring that experience to the process of unwrapping the word for others. This does not necessarily mean that the most personal of one's experiences are shared blow by blow, but that these experiences of the word cultivate warmth, empathy and sensitivity to those who are listening to the word from the preacher's mouth. The homily is not merely an intellectual or theological exercise. The homily personalizes God's word.

Yves Congar wrote, "The specific function of the homily is not only to explain the liturgical mystery, but to bring the faithful into the mystery by throwing light on their life so that they can unite it to this mystery" ("Sacred Worship and Preaching," *Concilium* 33, Paulist Press, N.Y.: 1968).

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These words from Congar affirm Barth's insight that effective homilists keep one hand on the Bible, one hand on the human experience. Dorothy Day wrote that she could not go to Communion and be insensitive to the reality that someone was hungry; she could not enjoy the warmth of eucharistic consolation and know that she had a blanket while others did not; she could not go the altar of God and not become aware that someone was sleeping over a grate on the sidewalk.

In place of Day, remember your own experiences. Here are some of mine:

How can I be happy when I see immigrants being surrounded with helicopters and weapons, herded together like animals, threatened, separated from fellow workers (as you separate sheep from goats), interrogated, herded into waiting buses that will take them away at night to a prison, to an unknown place away from their families?

How can I keep from crying with rage when undocumented workers have to shop during the night hours for food, afraid that they will be taken away by law officers if they are seen?

How can I turn away from those same people who fixed my roof and the roofs of thousands of us after Hurricane Katrina destroyed them, and who are now on the run, with no roof over their heads but the hot sun, the rain and God's sky?

How can I, the homilist, talk to them about God's merciful love? And how can I tell them that we all are brothers and sisters in Christ, our Savior and Deliverer, that we are

all children of the same heavenly Father?

How can I walk as a free child of God when others at my side are shackled by a GPS monitor on their ankles so their every move can be tracked?

If we want to preach the word of God, we need to remember who we are now — as citizens of both Jerusalem and Athens. We need to remember how we got here. Good homilies can help us remember. Good homilies are prayer. Good homilies are didactic. Good homilies are also provocative, challenging, unsettling, even bruising, so as to prompt conversion, action, justice.

But before any of these wondrous signs of growth can be evinced in others, growth must begin with me, the homilist. Martin Marty of the University of Chicago was fond of passing on to his students the comment of another professor who had heard the homilies given by some of her students: "How can your Gospel be so interesting and you who speak it be so G— d— dull?" Frederick Buechner implored preachers to stretch the imaginations of their listeners and strain their incredulity and even make their jaws drop. "If the preacher doesn't do it," asks Buechner, "who will?" (*Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy and Fairy Tale*, Harper and Row, San Francisco, Calif.: 1977).

The preacher is the steward of the wildest mystery of all: the paschal mystery. Therefore, the preacher cannot hold back, cannot be overly prudent or politically correct.

The preacher is the carrier of the most fascinating, most amazing, most significant message there was, is or can ever be. This description by Richard Bach describes well what is entailed in the dangerous process of growing a homily: "Once in a while, there is a great dynamite-burst of flying glass and bricks and splinters through the front wall ... and somebody stalks over the rubble, seizes me by the throat and gently says, 'I will not let you go until you set me in words, on paper' " (in *Illusions: The Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah*,



Dell Pub. Co., New York: 1977).

Through the homily, the people in the pew are drawn into the sacred rite just as surely — though not in the same way — as they are drawn to Christ in Communion. Through the homily, the people in the pew are propelled into the needy world armed with a message and a method for whatever awaits them.

Obviously, every good homily requires good preparation. Much of the time, the process of preparing a homily may be tedious, hard and unsatisfying. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, had that experience, as he explains in his *First Catechetical Instruction*: “For my part, I am nearly always dissatisfied with my discourse, for I am always desirous of something better. ... But when I find that my power of expression comes short of my knowledge of the subject, I am sorely disappointed that my tongue has not been able to answer the demands of my mind.”

Augustine’s experience prompts us to realize our shortcomings and our need for grace and inspiration. Augustine’s words also affirm the fact that dissatisfaction with ourselves can be the impetus for a deeper entrance into God’s word. Our inspiration comes also from the needs of those around us, whose pain, suffering and want should plunge us deeper into the paschal mystery, where we can find the words of hope, courage and compassion that they need.

Walter Burghardt was fond of saying that lack of preparation is the kind of devil that cannot be overcome by prayer and fasting (*Long Have I Loved Thee*). Preparation includes prayerful reading of the sacred texts and the holy authors; acknowledging the layers of development in any text; acute sensitivity to the world around us, our friends, acquaintances, strangers, events in the news, Web sites, TV, movies, popular songs and so on. “Homily Hints” are all around us, illuminating the human experience and calling upon us to draw the lessons out so that the word may truly touch every aspect of the human experience.

Scripture tells us repeatedly, though not in so many words, that

Walter Burghardt was fond of saying that lack of preparation is the kind of devil that cannot be overcome by prayer and fasting.

the demands of biblical justice require our attentiveness as well as our action. Biblical justice is fidelity to the demands of a relationship. This definition was first offered by John R. Donahue, who said that we live within this great web or network of relationships, each one necessarily impinging on the other, bound to the same God, regardless of how this God is named; we are, as a consequence, bound to one another (“Biblical Perspectives in Justice,” in *The Faith That Does Justice*, edited by John Haughey, Paulist Press, New York: 1977).

The Israelites called it covenant. Christians call it *ekklesia* — a community of persons called out of the morass of contemporary culture to live a life in accord with their relation to God, with their relation to Jesus as enunciated in the Gospels, so as to make a difference for good, for peace, for justice, in the great and wonderful morass that is our world.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel’s advice for keeping the word of God pertinent to people’s lives is to remember that the preacher is a prophet — not a foreteller of the future, but someone who looks at the present and tries to bring the truth of God’s word to illumine and redeem, to bless and to chastise, to comfort and to challenge (*The Prophets*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Mass.: 2001).

The preacher-prophet must first be extraordinarily sensitive to evil and injustice. To us, said Heschel, a simple act of injustice is deplorable and we are upset by it ... but it passes. For the preacher-prophet, it is a disaster that commands attention.

Second, the preacher-prophet must be stunned by human greed so much that her words are strong, even shocking, to rouse the well-to-do to

share. The same strong words assure the needy that God hears, that God cares, and that caring is the special responsibility of their brothers and sisters.

Third, the preacher-prophet is an iconoclast who challenges institutions and beliefs without fear. Fourth, he has words to speak that are charged with power and purpose. Fifth, the preacher-prophet is admittedly lonely, often frustrated; his sanity is often questioned; her loyalty is doubted by the powers-that-be. The preacher-prophet must have a combination of guts and grace.

At times, the word of God and its hearers have been abused. This happens when it is used as a bludgeon, a weapon to frighten the faithful into compliance or repentance; sometimes it is used as a stone hurled with great force and even anger at the guilty. But we are all guilty, and we all need the repentance and reconciliation that comes with hearing God’s good words. Perhaps there is a gentler stone image we can use.

William Bausch offers the image of a stone tossed into the middle of a pond (*Ministry Traditions, Tensions, Transitions*, Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic, Conn.: 1982). It produces a ripple effect all along the shoreline, and the ripples configure themselves to the shape of the shoreline. Some places are even, others covered with reeds. Some places are curved, others rocky. Some are shallow, some deep. The Christ-event is like that stone tossed into the world to embrace and to match it, curve for curve, reed for reed, depth for depth.

As stewards of this event and of the word that proclaims it, preachers help to toss the pebble and to make sure the message reaches every nook and cranny, every shallow and every depth of the shoreline. The word of God, the word of justice is for each and every human being, for rich and poor, for educated and uneducated, for sinners and saints ... for you and me.

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

Un tiempo para recoger piedras

El culto y la vida para el mes de marzo 2010

PATRICIA DATCHUCK SÁNCHEZ
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Un esposo, cuyo trabajo le hace viajar mucho, nunca sale de casa sin preguntarle con cariño a su esposa: “¿Qué quieres que te traiga?” La esposa siempre le dice: “Por favor, tráeme una piedrecita de por donde vayas.” Después de cada viaje el marido le presenta a su esposa una o más piedrecitas y le cuenta sus historias: cómo, cuándo, dónde las encontró y por qué escogió y trajo tal piedra y no otra. Cada piedrecita es una memoria para compartir. Una vino de Machu Picchu; es antigua y misteriosa y contiene los secretos de una civilización perdida. Otra la trajo de cerca del ecuador en Ecuador, mientras que otra la sacó de un volcán en Costa Rica. Una piedrecita vino de al lado de la gruta de Lourdes. Otras han llegado de Bolivia, de Argentina, de Guatemala. Una la halló en Teotihuacán, en lo alto de la pirámide del sol, mientras que otra llegó de las murallas de Ávila en donde Teresa rezaba con Juan. Una piedra vino de Tierra Santa de donde la trajeron unos cuñados que conocían esa tradición familiar. Otra vino de un campo de olivos de España; otra del desierto marroquí en donde los vientos y arenas del siroco labraron y cristalizaron durante siglos unos minerales que ahora parecen flores a las que los beduinos llaman rosas del desierto.

Durante más de treinta años e incontables millas, la esposa ha acumulado una bonita colección de piedras. Cada una le hace posible conocer esos lugares que nunca ha podido ver, oler o conocer, si no fuera por el cariño de su esposo y de piedrecitas llegadas desde lejos con sus inolvidables mensajes.

Los hijos también aumentaron la colección con las piedras recogidas durante sus vacaciones. Ahora, le nuevo yerno originario de Brasil también le trae piedrecitas de su

tierra natal. Otras piedras vinieron de al lado de la tumba de un familiar querido o de un campo en donde la familia acostumbraba ir de picnic. Para quien no es de la familia, esta colección parece un montón de guijarros o piedras desiguales e inútiles; sin embargo, para quienes estas piedras constituyen un ritual, son un tesoro más valioso que las joyas y piedras preciosas.

Cada creyente tiene una colección de piedras, y cada una contiene una historia; a lo largo del tiempo, sus experiencias las han ido moldeando hasta llegar a ser como son ahora—a veces lisas y suaves, otras ásperas y rugosas; algunas con agujeros; todas marcadas por el tiempo, los cambios de estaciones y las mareas.

Cada cuaresma es una oportunidad de llevar a Dios nuestras piedras, de evaluarlas y ofrecérselas a Dios, el gran Arquitecto de la humanidad. Para quienes están preocupados de la acogida que recibirán nuestras piedras, los textos sagrados ofrecen palabras tranquilizadoras. La experiencia de Moisés y de los Israelitas (el 7 y el 14 de marzo) nos recuerda que Dios, aunque infinitamente maravilloso, también es accesible y misericordioso, conoce nuestras luchas y cuida a cada uno de nosotros. A pesar del “paquete” que cada uno somos y cargamos, Dios nos acoge como al hijo perdido a quien ahora ha encontrado (14 de marzo). El 21 de marzo vemos a los escribas y Fariseos que traen ante Jesús a una mujer adúltera y que, según la ley, podría ser apedreada por sus acciones. Junto a ellos estamos nosotros,

armados con nuestras piedras. ¿Tendremos el valor de tirárselas a ella o a otros pecadores? ¿O nos guardaremos de juzgar a los demás hasta que llegue el día de presentarnos humildemente ante Dios con nuestras piedras, ante el Único que puede juzgar a los pecadores?

Mientras escuchamos la narración del Domingo de Pasión o de Ramos (el 28 de marzo), caminamos por las calles de adoquines de Jerusalén con Jesús, acarreamos nuestras piedras. Con Pedro vemos que nosotros también negamos que pertenecemos a Jesús. En Judas vemos nuestra propia debilidad que “se vende” en vez de defender nuestra fe. Con la muchedumbre, oímos el aguijoneo de los sumos sacerdotes y escribas y recordamos lo fácil que es no hablar, quedarse mudos o simplemente seguir a la mayoría equivocada. En Pilatos reconocemos nuestra propia indecisión. Escuchamos las burlas contra el justo Jesús y nos avergonzamos al permitir que injusticias semejantes continúen rampantes a nuestro lado.

Como las mujeres de Jerusalén que lloraban por Jesús, ¿no lloraremos también por los oprimidos de este mundo y haremos algo positivo y práctico para aliviar sus sufrimientos? ¿Cómo hizo Simón, no ayudaremos a Jesús a llevar su cruz ayudando a otros y así aliviando sus cargas en la vida? Finalmente, al final de la proclamación de la Pasión, nos encontraremos ante la tumba cavada en la roca en donde pusieron el cuerpo de Jesús; ahí, con todas nuestras piedras, daremos gracias a Dios porque sabemos cuál es el resto de la historia; una historia que debemos anunciar, y que celebraremos con alegría el día de Pascua.

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

A Time to Gather Stones Together

Lectionary themes for March 2010

PATRICIA DATCHUCK SÁNCHEZ
and RAFAEL SÁNCHEZ ALONSO



A loving husband whose work required extensive traveling never left home without asking his wife, “What would you like me to bring back for you?” Her answer to him was always the same: “Please, bring me a stone from wherever you go.”

This is precisely what the husband did. On every trip he found a stone, sometimes more than one. At each homecoming, he would present the stone and tell the story of how he found it. Each stone had its story, and each made a memory to share. There was the stone from Machu Picchu; it was ancient and mysterious, for it held the secrets of a lost civilization. There was the stone from near the equator in Ecuador and another retrieved from deep within a Costa Rican volcano. There was the stone from the grotto at Lourdes and the ones from Bolivia, Argentina and Guatemala. One stone was found atop the Pyramid of the Sun in Teotihuacán, and another was picked up near the ancient walls of Avila where Teresa prayed with John. One stone traveled all the way from the Holy Land, sent by a brother and sister-in-law. Another stone came from the farm in Spain where past generations had harvested olives. Yet another was retrieved from Morocco, where the wind carves sand into crystalline flowers that the Bedouins have named “roses of the desert.”

Through more than 30 years and countless miles, the couple amassed a great collection of little stones. Each had the potential to carry the wife to all those places she had not seen or heard, smelled or known except through the love of a husband and the little stones that brought home their unique messages.

As their family grew, the children too began to add to the collection.

Stones from vacations were marked with the place and the year. A son-in-law brought stones from his native Brazil, and the memory stones became more numerous, more varied, more precious. Some stones in the collection were gathered from gravesites where a loved one was buried or from a garden or field where the family enjoyed a picnic. For the objective onlooker, the collection might have seemed like a worthless pile of mismatched pebbles, yet to the ones who recognized these stones as part of a precious ritual, they were more treasured than the finest jewels.

In a sense, all believers have in their possession a collection of stones, each unique in its own right, with its own place of origin and experiences that have made it what it is — smooth here, rough there, riddled with holes, lined with cracks, marked by the changing tides and seasons of life. Every Lent offers an opportunity for us to bring these stones home to God, where each can be newly evaluated and offered to the great Architect of humankind.

For those who worry about the welcome that awaits them and their stones, the sacred texts offer reassurance. Through the experience of Moses and the Israelites (March 7, 14), we will be reminded that ours is an awesome but approachable God who knows our struggles and attends mercifully to each of us. Despite the baggage that burdens our lives, God welcomes us like a child who was lost but is now found again (March 14). On March 21, we will watch while the scribes and Pharisees bring

forward an adulteress to test Jesus. Legally, she can be stoned for her actions, and we stand there with the others, armed with our collection of stones. Will we dare to hurl them at her or at others who sin? Or will we withhold judgment and keep them in our pockets until we present ourselves before God, who alone judges sinners?

As the Lucan narrative is read on Palm/Passion Sunday (March 28), we and our stones will walk the cobbled streets of Jerusalem with Jesus. We will look at Peter and see ourselves denying that we belong to Jesus. We will see in Judas the same weakness that sells out rather than stands up for the faith. Standing amid the crowds and listening to the goading of the chief priests and scribes, we will remember how easy it is to remain silent in the face of evil or simply to go along with the misguided majority. In Pilate we will see reflected our own indecisiveness; we will listen to the mocking and jeering leveled at the just Jesus and be ashamed that we allow similar injustices to go unchecked in our world.

Will we, like the women of Jerusalem who wept for Jesus, also weep for the downtrodden of this world and do something to alleviate their suffering? Will we, like Simon, who helped Jesus to carry his cross, help others carry their burdens through life? Finally, as the Passion proclamation comes to an end, we will stand at the rock-hewn tomb where they laid Jesus’ body, and with all our stones gathered around us, we will be grateful that we know the rest of the story, yet to be told and celebrated on Easter.

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The Words We Need to Hear

Spotlight on bishops, then and now

By GABE HUCK

As introduced in the February *Celebration*, I will be using this space for a while to meander through *A Liturgy Sourcebook*, a collection of texts about ritual that I edited in 1994.

I am writing this in the third week of November 2009, living here in Syria, where news reaches us quickly but “church news” can easily be avoided. Yet when friends take the time to send special e-mails, how do you not open them?

These e-mails were about the Baltimore gathering of U.S. Roman Catholic bishops in mid-November 2009. One concerned a speech by conference president Francis Cardinal George. To paraphrase: “Just who do they think they are, these pesky universities, these media outlets and these other organizations who are trying to pass as Catholic institutions? We’re forming committees! And when we’re through, it will be clear who the real Catholics are!” George is very high on the episcopal right and duty to define who’s in and who’s not (the leaner, meaner church).

The same meeting in Baltimore, however, showed that George and his supporters are doing their own bit to disparage whatever might be left of episcopal authority. In the continuing and apparently uniquely American effort to rid themselves of the responsibility given them by the “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” they handed back to the Vatican the very authority they so crave when they “investigate” our universities, media and organizations. They bowed to the Vatican on the matter of translations of the liturgy and of the *ordo* itself. The embarrassing evidence of the disappearing intellectual abilities, not to mention courage, of our bishops advances yet again.

So I wonder: Instead of trying to control liturgy with power, why not



make some personal effort to ponder, to envision what was moving in the churches 45 years ago when the Second Vatican Council met in Rome? What took hold of a couple thousand bishops when they threw out the draft of the liturgy constitution prepared by the curia and seized the moment to do something radically different? Did they glimpse that the days were numbered for liturgy as magic or liturgy as control or liturgy as splendor? Did they perhaps understand, for some frightening but important moments, that catechesis and conduct, church polity and episcopal authority were not so many free-floating elements in the church’s life, but were to be understood only in the ecclesia well-disciplined in its eucharistic liturgy and other rituals? Was such behavior by the previous generation of bishops something that this present American episcopal generation cannot imagine and so is desperate to undo?

What do I see as I open *A Liturgy Sourcebook* now? It happens that a number of bishops do appear on these pages. What might they be telling their successors and all of us?

Augustine, never at a loss for words, did some mystagogy on the “Alleluia.” Would today’s bishops be satisfied to sign off on Bishop Augustine’s resolution?

Now we urge you to praise God. That is what we are all telling each other when we say “Alleluia!” You say to your neighbor, “Praise the Lord!” and your neighbor says the same to you. ... But see that your praise comes from your whole being; in other words, see that you praise God not with your lips and voices alone, but with your minds, your

lives and all your actions.

We are praising God now, assembled as we are here in church; but when we go our various ways again, it seems as if we cease to praise God. But provided we do not cease to live a good life, we shall always be praising God. You cease to praise God only when you swerve from justice and from what is pleasing to God. If you never turn aside from the good life, your tongue may be silent but your actions will cry aloud.

Something interesting here. Augustine doesn’t fall into the trap of saying, “When we sing ‘Alleluia,’ it means ‘Praise the Lord.’” No. He gets it. He needs only to say, “See that it comes from your whole being!” And for him there’s no need to explain: “You cease to do this praising when you swerve from justice.” He has no doubt and no problem. But us? Well, the liturgy committee meets on Mondays and the peace and justice committee every other Tuesday. And the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops? Check the Web site for their structure.

On the page facing Augustine, the *Sourcebook* has a text from another bishop, one who was there at Vatican II. He’s somebody remembered more for the way he buried John Kennedy or went to Red Sox games with large groups of nuns than anything he said about liturgy. But Richard Cushing wrote to the church of Boston when silence would have been betrayal:

How, then, can we continually receive the eucharistic Christ and leave untouched or unchanged any bitter or hardened prejudice against any member of any race of people? We tell ourselves that we mean no harm to anyone. Yet at the same time, we repeat the cheap racial joke, we make the ill-advised remark, we indulge in self-righteous



anger in the home — all these plant the seed of a whole new generation of prejudice in our children. It seems so unimportant, so trivial. But multiply it by thousands and it becomes a cancer of sinful attitudes which sickens and weakens the body of the church. ... Liturgy understood as the worship of the church and social action understood as the work of the church are part, one of the other. Liturgy which does not move its participants to social action is mere ceremonialism; social action which does not find its source in the liturgy is mere humanitarianism.

One has to wonder: What would Richard Cardinal Cushing have had to say about replacing “of one being” with “consubstantial”? Would it have been printable in the diocesan paper?

After Vatican II, lots of little churches started to make connections from liturgy to justice and back again. We started to talk about our rites in the same breath as our lives. We started to explore in run-of-the-mill parishes (where else?) what on earth #14 of the “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy” meant about full, conscious and active participation as a right and a duty of the baptized, such participation being not a nicety but a necessity if we were to live in the “authentic Christian spirit.”

We have to make this a reality in all elements of the ritual. So enter Bishop Ambrose. Hear him preaching about one such element, the psalm, and perhaps be puzzled because — well, have we heard any preacher echo Ambrose’s intensity when homilizing about the psalm in the liturgy? Here is what might be called the litany of Ambrose:

A psalm is the blessing of the people, the praise of God, the commendation of the multitude, the applause of all, the speech of every person, the voice of the church, the sonorous profession of faith, devotion full of authority, the joy of liberty, the noise of good cheer and the echo of gladness. It softens anger, it gives

release from anxiety, it alleviates sorrow. It is protection at night, instruction by day, a shield in time of fear, a feast of holiness, the image of tranquility, a pledge of peace and harmony which produces one song from various and sundry voices. ... The day’s dawning resounds with a psalm, with a psalm its passing echoes.

This is marvelous poetry, a world removed from dry explanation (and there is, of course, for Ambrose no “explaining” ritual and the part of it we call liturgy — it is mystagogy, not explanation). Notice that Ambrose, not surprisingly like Augustine, is more concerned about the kind of thing we are doing than in explaining the text. Augustine: What kind of thing are we doing when we sing an Alleluia? Ambrose: What kind of thing are we doing when we sing the psalm? Somebody has to get excited about this. Somebody has to have at least a clue that in this direction we’ll find the relation of liturgy and life. Somebody has to bring both experience and wisdom. Look at that litany again, item by item. My guess is that Ambrose learned this from the church and the church from Ambrose. What if he had said: “The psalm is a piece of scripture that is sung by a cantor or recited by a lector after the first reading”?

When Ambrose was preaching and writing hymns in Milan, Bishop John Chrysostom (we haven’t had many who would get that last name in recent years) in Constantinople had something else to say about the singing of the assembly:

Even if you do not understand the meaning of the words, for the time being teach your mouth to say them, for the tongue is sanctified by the words alone whenever it says them with goodwill. ... Nor will any complaint concerning this singing arise, even if one has grown old, is still a child, has a rough voice or is altogether ignorant of rhythm. This is because what is sought here is a sober soul, an alert mind, a contrite heart, sound reason and a clear conscience.

If having these, you enter into the holy choir of God, you will be able to stand beside David yourself.

Chrysostom isn’t on a campaign for the musically disabled, he’s just saying that the advice many of us received to “just mouth the words but don’t sing” really doesn’t hold when the church sings its liturgy. In fact, the sound itself will be our liturgy, will embody and possibly create that contrite heart and that clear conscience, even in its roughness. “Lift every voice” was the advice to the church of Constantinople.

But a century or more before Chrysostom, and more in the Syrian homeland of the church, there was a document that was in part at least addressed to the bishop, and with that, this month’s bishop-inspired exploration of *A Liturgy Sourcebook* can end:

If a poor man or a poor woman comes, whether they are from your own parish or from another, above all if they are advanced in years, and if there is no room for them, make a place for them, O bishop, with all your heart, even if you yourself have to sit on the ground. You must not make any distinction between persons, if you wish your ministry to be pleasing before God. When you are teaching, command and exhort the people to be faithful to the assembly of the church. Let them not fail to attend, but let them gather faithfully together. Let no one deprive the church by staying away; if they do, they deprive the body of Christ of one of its members.

What a refreshing way to understand the Sunday assembly: “Let no one deprive the church by staying away.” Leaner? Meaner? Not where the bishop knows that the poor person should have the place of honor while the bishop finds a place on the ground.

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Embraces We Have Known

Some moments are well worth remembering

By CAROL LUEBERING

I have known Sally since we moved into the condo down the hall from her some 10 years ago. She is a delightful person who can outlast me in the shopping center any day of the week in spite of the fact that she is well into her 80s and depends on a walker. Recently I stopped by her place for something. As I left, I gave her a hug, and we agreed that we both think hugs are a wonderful idea. “You were, I believe, the first neighbor I hugged when we moved here,” I told her.

“Oh yes, I remember that well,” she replied. “You’ll never know how much that meant to me!”

Obviously, I remember that encounter too — but not as such an extraordinary event. She had just told me that her husband was in the hospital and near death. I didn’t know what else to do or say, so I just opened my arms. I was astonished to hear Sally tell me how important that hug had been to her.

I don’t suppose we ever know what effect such a simple gesture may have, but some embraces are simply unforgettable. I cherish memories of a few myself. I remember holding a young woman in my arms and weeping with joy at seeing the daughter I had given up for adoption years earlier. And I remember the healing I found in the hugs I got as I told my long-kept secret to the rest of the world.

A hug becomes memorable when it touches some deeply heartfelt need. It can speak of many things: of warm welcome or acceptance, of shared joy, of comfort in sorrow or healing of old rifts, of forgiveness for serious injuries. Or it can simply say that those things really do lie within the realm of possibility even when that seems least likely.

I will remember a hug that spoke of such a possibility. Way back in 1978, President Jimmy Carter



We nestled into loving arms that welcomed us into this world when we drew our first breath. In faith we hold that even more loving arms will embrace us when we draw our last breath.

somehow persuaded Israel’s prime minister, Menachim Begin, and the president of Egypt, Anwar Sadat, to meet at Camp David to discuss their differences. After two weeks in virtual isolation, they managed to reach an agreement that would establish a fragile peace between their countries. A photograph of the two locked in a warm embrace brightened the front pages and put a lump in at least one throat (mine). Their nations certainly didn’t remain always in agreement from that day forward, but the two leaders had formed a friendship that did endure. When Sadat died, Begin immediately announced that he was going to Cairo for the funeral — even as most other world leaders were weighing the risks of making the trip.

We nestled into loving arms that welcomed us into this world when we drew our first breath. In faith we hold that even more loving arms will embrace us when we draw our last breath. We might think of all those hugs that are etched in our memories

as signs along the way, little blessings that God scatters in our path like pebbles to guide us on the path toward home. We should, of course, hold them not only in our memories but also in our prayers.

So spend a little time recalling the hugs you will never forget and giving thanks for them. You will, of course, think first of being on the receiving end and what those moments meant to you. But be sure to search your memories for the embraces you offered when you opened your arms to your firstborn child, for instance, or welcomed a soldier home from the battlefield or realized that the person you held in your arms was someone you wanted to spend the rest of your life with.

Then share your stories of memorable hugs with the folks you visit and invite them to do the same. (Neither of you has to recite them all in one sitting! This is a topic you can return to again and again to nourish your sense of gratitude.)

Try relating your stories to events in the scriptures. Read and reflect, for example, on Jesus’ story about the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) or of his holding a child in his arms before using him to make a point (Mark 9:33-37); Joseph’s reunion with the brothers who had sold him into slavery (Genesis 45:4-15); or the prophet’s description of God’s parental love for Israel (Hosea 11:3-4).

Then lean into God’s loving arms and express your gratitude for all the warmth with which your life has been blessed. Close your prayer with the words Jesus himself taught us, the Our Father. At its end, exchange a sign of peace with each other — a warm hug.

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Questions for Liturgical Ministers

Each one has a role to play in the drama of the Mass

By DENISE SIMEONE

Have you seen a play or an opera lately? Or have you been an actor or stagehand in a theater production? Most of us have participated in or witnessed such productions. They take much more than haphazard and unplanned movement, gestures or speech; we know there are cues and steps that participants must follow so it all flows smoothly. We might not imagine it this way, but liturgy needs the same care and attentiveness from the whole assembly of the people.

We all have stories of things we've seen at eucharistic liturgies in our own church or when we were visiting another. I have seen liturgical ministers walk, bow or make other gestures that distracted me from the focus and dignity of the liturgy. I have watched lectors tiptoe cautiously to the ambo rather than walk with the confidence that they are bringing Christ into our midst by their proclamation of the word. I have seen cantors who fail to connect with us because they never look up from their music.

But I have also participated in liturgies where the liturgical ministers fulfilled their roles with such purpose and reverence that they could not help but draw me, along with the entire assembly, into being a more prayerful participant.

Every minister fulfills a public role that is intended to call each of us to fuller participation in the liturgy. Here are some questions for these particular liturgical ministries that might be useful for personal or group reflection.

■ Greeters:

Do you recognize new people who may not be parish members or who don't regularly attend a particular liturgy? Can you introduce and connect new people with other parishioners? Do you talk with children, and have you ever stooped down to look them directly in their eyes? Are

I have seen liturgical ministers fulfill their roles with such purpose and reverence that they could not help but draw me, along with the entire assembly, into being a more prayerful participant.

you aware of people with special needs such as hearing difficulties or wheelchair access? Does your church make a concerted effort to assist these people? If not, will you be a voice for them? Do you have a space for families with babies or restless children? Can you put together some materials to help children? (Some churches have small book bags filled with things for children to read or do in church that the kids return after use.) Do you have a welcome packet of information for visitors and new parishioners? Are you involved in your parish's welcoming efforts, or if you don't have such a program, can you start one?

■ Lectors and cantors:

When you approach the ambo to do a reading, are you alert to the appropriate ritual gestures to make, such as bowing? Do you dress in a way that makes you visible to the assembly without attracting unnecessary attention? Do you walk to the ambo with confidence, aware of your role of proclaiming to the church? Do you look at the assembly especially when you announce or conclude the reading or sing and lead the responses? Do you read and sing carefully and create good pacing? Are you aware of church acoustics and of how to use your microphone so that all may hear? Do you read, pray and reflect on the Sunday readings throughout the week even if you are not the lector or cantor? If you lead the responsorial, do you reflect upon

the entire psalm? Do you study to increase your knowledge of the Bible? Can you participate in retreats or programs about scripture to deepen your understanding? Can you support the development of scripture study groups in your parish?

■ Eucharistic ministers:

Do you carry yourself with reverence for not only the body and blood but also for the assembly of the people, where Christ is present? Do you dress appropriately for the ministry in your community? Do you look into people's eyes when you offer them Christ's body or blood? Do you reflect on your ministerial call to feed and nourish? Do you participate in eucharistic adoration? Do you participate in parish or neighborhood programs such as a food pantry? Can you volunteer in a soup kitchen or meal program for the homebound to feed those who are hungry, lonely or in need? Can you bake bread for your parish liturgies or special events? Can you provide food for bereaved families or funeral meals or begin such a program if your parish does not have one?

It is not the same as a theatrical play — but liturgy is a drama that unfolds before our eyes. Liturgical ministers play an important role in calling each of us in the assembly to reflect on our own parts and responses. When ministers are prepared, the rest of us feel more confident. We enter into the liturgy more fully, pray and reflect with passion. When we see liturgical ministers work and minister in the community outside of liturgy, their witness calls us to delve more deeply into how we too are called to discover God within liturgy and within our world. We are sent forth to love and serve the Lord!

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Facing the Same Direction

We are on a pilgrimage together

By MELISSA MUSICK NUSSBAUM

Late last October, just before the sun went down and the snow blew in, our granddaughter, Lucy Cecilia, was born. Her birth was hard and wondrous. I stood with her mother and father for the last 12 hours of the labor and delivery. Sometimes I stood at my daughter's head, and sometimes at her side. I helped her stand and walk and lie down. I held her hand and stroked her hair and rubbed her feet. I prayed to God in silence and spoke aloud to my daughter when words could help or heal.

Through that long night and day my daughter clung to her husband, searching in his eyes for the strength to continue, the strength to endure. The three of us were on a journey. Lucy was on her own hidden journey. We were traveling toward one another, pilgrims on the way into life, new life, unknown life.

We were never alone. Family and friends waited just outside the door and far away, all of them praying for the child whose gender and name were, as yet, unknown to us. The beloved dead surrounded us. My daughter brought a picture of her husband's late mother, Cecilia, and placed it on the window ledge, a visible sign of the invisible cloud of witnesses who have gone before us in hope and in faith.

Curious thoughts come to people waiting in hospital rooms. At some point in the day, I thought of Oklahoma Bishop Edward Slattery's decision to return to the *ad orientem* ("toward the east") posture when he presides at Mass in the Tulsa cathedral. I thought of this because Bishop Slattery has written of the *versus populum* posture — in which the priest and the people stand and kneel and sit eye to eye during the liturgy — that it has caused us to "become accustomed to facing in opposite directions."

I watched my son-in-law lean over



What pilgrimage has Bishop Slattery undertaken in which the pilgrims and their guide walk in parade formation — neck to eyes, eyes to neck? A pilgrimage is not an errand, a trip with a single goal.

his wife, their foreheads touching, as he murmured to her. I could not hear his words, but I caught their melody and rhythm. They were the sounds of comfort and devotion, the sound of one who abides. I could not hear his words, but I could see his body bent over hers. It was a posture of protection and care. His breath upon her cheek, her eyes fixed upon him, they were turned as resolutely in the same direction as any two people can or ever will be.

Bishop Slattery writes that when we gather at Mass, "we journey together to God." He says, "Priest and people are on a pilgrimage together." Yes. Yes. Again, and always, yes.

But what pilgrimage has the bishop undertaken in which the pilgrims and their guide walk in parade formation — neck to eyes, eyes to neck — unwavering, down the line? A pilgrimage is not an errand, a trip with a single goal and a set amount of time in which to reach it. A pilgrimage is a journey in which one leaves everything behind to go searching for God. How long will it take? By what ways — switchbacks and storms, dangers and snares, wrong turns and re-turns — will we be asked to walk? No one, setting out, can say. God alone knows.

Sometimes a leader stumbles, and another must help him stand or take her place. I go to comfort a dying member of my parish and find that I am the comforted, she the comforter. My elderly mother lives now in my home as I did in hers, our places in the pilgrimage kept, but rearranged.

Sometimes the pilgrims gather in circles to share food and stories. Sometimes the pilgrims walk abreast, their words of encouragement and consolation alone keeping them upright and moving. Sometimes one pilgrim carries another. And sometimes, as in a dimly lit hospital room on an autumn evening, pilgrims stand, their foreheads touching, leaning into one another as the separate bricks of an arch lean into a single strength.

They are on a journey together. They are all facing the same direction.

Lucy's journey has just begun. She spends most of her days searching for her mama and her papa. She turns her head toward the sounds of their voices. She prefers nothing to the sight of their faces. All that she knows of beauty and goodness she finds at her mother's breast, just as Jesus the Lord once found such joy at Mary's breast.

My daughter and her husband might be daunted by the trust Lucy has placed in such unpracticed and untested hands. But they know themselves for what they are: pilgrims on a journey. They journey with Lucy. They journey together to God. They hold her as they walk. They cradle her cheeks against their own. They are, the three of them and those who journey with them, facing in the same direction. We are *versus lucy* and *versus one another* and *versus Christ*, and for every moment of the way together, we are grateful.

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Essence of a Life in God

Meister Eckhart directs us to what lies beyond image

By RICH HEFFERN

Meister Eckhart is one of the great Christian mystics. He was born near Erfurt in Thuringia, central Germany, in 1260, and in his distinguished career he became a professor of theology and took a leading pastoral and organizational role in the Dominican order. He died in 1328.

Eckhart expounded Christian doctrine and spirituality in a style that was original in the best sense. Through the vividness of his use of imagery (alluding to the mysteries of the spark of the soul, the desert, the birth of the Word in the heart), Eckhart paradoxically directs us to what lies beyond image.

Eckhart did not preach exclusively to the clerical elite but to ordinary men and women, in the vernacular of his day. There was an effort in the 14th century to express in the German of the common people the deepest mysteries of faith in concrete, meaningful language in order to implant these mysteries in the mind and heart.

Dominican scholar Gundolf Gieraths said of their vernacular effort, “For this reason the whole manner of presentation could be and had to be particularly vital and personal. This manner was more expressive, and consequently it evoked a greater response in the hearts of the listeners.”

Realizing one’s identity with God for Eckhart was not reserved for people in religious orders, nor did it require renunciation of the world. God can be encountered as much, Eckhart says, “at the fireplace or in the stable” as it can through “inwardness, prayer, sweet ravishments and in the special graces [sacraments].”

His preaching style was made up of vivid images and phrases, stories that capture the essence of a life in God:

All day long a little burro labors, sometimes with heavy loads on

There was an effort in the 14th century to express the deepest mysteries of faith in concrete, meaningful language in order to implant these mysteries in the mind and heart.

her back and sometimes just with worries about things that bother only burros. And worries, as we know, can be more exhausting than physical labor. Once in a while a kind monk comes to her stable and brings a pear, but more than that, he looks into the burro’s eyes and touches her ears and for a few seconds the burro is free and even seems to laugh, because love does that: Love offers freedom.

Eckhart pointed out that many people, apparently virtuous, flee the world and hide in monasteries and cells, hoping to be rid of worldly temptations. “If their aim was to seek out God, well and good, but it is feared that they think more of themselves than of him.”

He recognized that often in the spiritual life we merely need to get out of God’s way:

◆ “Since it is God’s nature not to be like anyone, then we have to come to the state of being nothing in order to enter into the same nature as he is.”

◆ “All that God asks you most pressingly is to go out of yourself, and let God be God in you.”

More than any other Christian mystic, Meister Eckhart’s theology and spirituality are similar to Eastern spiritual approaches. His insistence that we “think principally” *in divinis* — that is, from within the mind or orientation of the Godhead or “divine knowledge” itself — is close to Buddhist thought.

“In God is neither sorrow, nor grief, nor trouble. If you would be free from all grief and trouble, abide and walk in God and to God alone. As long as love of the creature is in us, pain cannot cease.”

All things, all acts, all places can be avenues to God or block our way to God, depending on our attitude and disposition. It is detachment that makes the crucial difference, the art of “separation” as well as “unseparation” from all things.

There is a deep love for creation in Eckhart’s views. Detachment does not mean for Eckhart abandoning works and activities in favor of quietism. On the contrary, it can lead to the most active life precisely because it makes our acts pure and unselfish, flowing from the roots of our being.

Zen Buddhism emphasizes a dynamic life of spontaneous acts based upon no-mind and no-thought. One should act and live like a clean, bright mirror reflecting various objects with which it comes into contact.

Eckhart states this clearly: “Live as if you did not exist. Expect and ask nothing in return. Then the merchant inside you will be driven out of the temple God has made. Then God alone dwells there. See! This is how the temple is cleared: when a person thinks only of God and honors him alone. Only such a person is free and genuine.”

Some of his declarations are startling. His most famous single quote — “The eye with which I see God is the same with which God sees me” — is a good example.

These declarations were no doubt partly the reason he was accused of heresy in his day. But above all, his was a fresh and lively approach to unpacking the deep mysteries of Christianity.

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Meditations for Holy Week 2010

PASSION SUNDAY

When this enigmatic man marched on the capital, the adults did what they always do when they don't know how to handle their religious ambiguities. They sent their children, who waved palm branches and cheered.

The grown-ups knew that their lives were leaden, and they needed a parade. They knew that their lives were without direction, and they needed a leader. They knew that their sins were beyond self-help, and they needed a savior. But real adults do not parade or let themselves be led or admit to being less than self-sufficient. So, they sent their children to see if this man could be trusted with the little things in life. Then maybe the adults could entrust their larger problems to him. But because children's crusades have never been effective against serious violence, the man was executed.

And the same pattern persists to this day. Because we are afraid to laugh, clowns cry. Because we forget how to celebrate, life is tedious. Because we are indifferent, good people die. Because we do not want to face the demands of Christianity, we pretend that religion is good for children but a bit naive for mature tastes.

And if Jesus marched on our town today, would we send our children to check him out?

HOLY THURSDAY

The Last Supper was the most intimate moment in the life of Jesus; it is the most intimate moment in the life of his church. This is the night when people who are personally close to Jesus intuitively know that he does not want to eat alone. Tonight of all nights, he wants someone to talk with, someone to be with.

When he had gathered his friends into a safe circle of concern, he washed their feet. As a kindness, because they were tired; as a courtesy, because he was their host; as a sign that in the long run, service to them is more to the point than teaching or leading or saving them.

Then he gave them his peace. As a kindness, because they were afraid of the future; as a courtesy, because they were ill at ease; as a sign that physical chaos, psychological insecurity or spiritual turmoil need not override the balm of his presence.

Then he gave them bread and wine. As a kindness, because they were hungry; as a courtesy, because it brought them together; as a sign of his body and blood, and a promise that whoever lived in his memory would never die.

On this Holy Thursday, Jesus invites us to his supper. He will serve us, extend his peace to us and give us his body and blood. As a kindness, because we desperately need peace; as a courtesy, because we are awkward servants; as a sign, because we are awash in a sea of irrelevant facts and need a code to interpret our days.

GOOD FRIDAY

Jesus knows that he must die. We know it, too. And so we cry: "If the foul deed must be done, then do it quickly!" But between the intention and the execution of some monstrous crime, there is an empty space while the forces of hell barrage the soul with confusion. A time for the powers of darkness to overshadow the conscience with a small, still voice: "It is expedient."

We know how that is, don't we? We know how it will be. We will shout "Hosanna to the Son of David!" We will stare in amazement while mortal enemies join hands for an instant, just long enough to destroy a more despised enemy. We will feel the bitter Judas-kiss on our cheeks.

We will recoil in horror when they take him from the garden. We will hide in the shadows and plead, "I tell you, I do not know that man!" We will mingle our voices with the crowd screaming, "Crucify him!"

Then, finally, when we can do no more, we will follow him for the last time. Back through the city, back through those winding, torturous streets plunging toward that overwhelming question. We will climb the hill, nail him to the wood and raise the crossed question in the face of heaven: *Why?*

Why do people kill life itself?

Why do people despise love himself? Why must God die?

And if the Father demands the life of his Son for sin, what must he demand for the death of his Son?

Will the questions never end? Is death the final, silent answer? It cannot be. Death answers nothing. And we know that somehow, death is swallowed up in life. We know that some time, the mystery of death is fulfilled in the larger mystery of life.

Somehow ... some time ... But today is the dying of Jesus. Tomorrow, perhaps, it may be light. But today, the shadow of the cross begins to creep over the face of the earth. Tomorrow, perhaps, it may be warm. But today, it is cold as death.

And so we huddle together in the darkness, shivering against the chill, straining with naked eye into the vast desert of death. Waiting ... praying ... hoping against hope for the burst of the Rising Son.

HOLY SATURDAY

It is quiet as a tomb. Almost as if nothing dares to move. For if the Son of God dies, then what has a right to live?

Yet it is not a deadening silence. It is fulsome, expectant, like the rest in a musical score. The Word will not be silenced forever. It will gather its strength, find a voice, shatter the tomb and explode into the cosmos shouting, "*Jesus Christ is Lord!*"

‘Why Have You Abandoned Me?’

A psalm of lament during Holy Week

By J. MICHAEL McMAHON

The psalms are biblical songs that have formed a major element of Jewish prayer for many centuries and were an integral part of the spiritual heritage of Jesus and his followers. They continue to provide Jews and Christians alike with a repertoire of sung prayer that reflects the deep human emotions and expresses faith and trust in the God who is both near and far, a God with whom believers have an intimate relationship and yet who reigns in majesty.

Drawn from the Jewish scriptures that Christians call the Old Testament, the psalms have meanings that are rooted in the community that produced them — experiences of God’s goodness and majesty as well as experiences of illness and other kinds of suffering. The sacred songs that we call the psalms most often express praise, lament or both.

From the very earliest times, Christians have heard and sung the psalms in light of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Peter, inspired and emboldened by the gift of the Holy Spirit, quotes extensively from Psalm 16 in his first sermon on Pentecost. He identifies in this psalm a reference to the resurrection of Jesus: “because you will not abandon my soul to the nether world, nor will you suffer your holy one to see corruption” (Acts 3:27; Ps 16:10).

The Gospels place verses of the psalms on the lips of Jesus himself. Even from the cross Jesus cries out to God with the words of the psalms: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Ps 22:1; Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34) and “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Ps 31:6; Luke 24:46).

Psalm 22 is designated as the responsorial psalm for the Liturgy of the Word on Palm Sunday of the Lord’s Passion and is also the common psalm for Holy Week. The worshiping community is invited to make its own the words that Je-



Psalm 22 is designated as the responsorial psalm for the Liturgy of the Word on Palm Sunday of the Lord’s Passion and is also the common psalm for Holy Week. The worshiping community is invited to make its own the words that Jesus prayed, perhaps sang, in his dying moments.

sus prayed, perhaps sang, in his dying moments: “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” The liturgy calls the singing, praying community to reflect on Jesus’ experience of desolation and abandonment — suffering that was not only intense but also lonely, isolated and alienated. As we join our voices to the voice of Christ, we not only identify with his suffering, but we recognize his solidarity with the suffering and alienation of the human family.

The verses of Psalm 22 chosen for the Lectionary include three very important elements found in nearly every psalm of lament. The first three stanzas lay out the *complaint* — the scoffing of passersby, the piercing of hands and feet, the

dividing of garments. At the end of the third stanza the psalm moves to a *prayer for deliverance*: “Hasten to aid me.” Finally, the fourth stanza, drawn from the concluding verses of Psalm 22, is a *proclamation of praise* for the God who will deliver us from suffering and death: “In the midst of the assembly I will praise you.” With Christ, a suffering humanity expresses its anguish, turns to God for assistance and proclaims its praise and trust to the One who raised Jesus from the dead.

Music planners, psalmists and instrumentalists should pay careful attention to the nature of Psalm 22 as a psalm of lament and the movement of its text from complaint to prayer to praise. The musical setting of the refrain should be simple enough for the assembly to sing while evoking in prayer to God the experience of human suffering. A composed setting of the verses will allow the psalmist and instrumentalists to express the movement of the psalm from lament to prayer to praise more effectively. If the verses are chanted on a tone, however, psalmists can convey the different elements of the psalm by varying the volume and intensity of their voices. Organists can choose different registrations for different stanzas. The last stanza, with its proclamation of praise, especially needs to be proclaimed in a stronger manner that contrasts with the others.

To foster the full, conscious and active participation of the assembly in the responsorial psalm, music ministers need to study and pray the texts themselves and then proclaim them in a way that will draw people into meditation on God’s word. In coming months, this space will devote some more attention to preparing the responsorial psalm for other seasons and feasts.

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