

# Liturgy Office Newsletter - Summer 2021



This time last year we felt that we were, at last, gradually emerging into the light from a dark cocoon of Covid and that we would soon be able to get back to our 'normal' celebrations of Mass and other liturgies. Well, we were wrong about emerging from Covid as it now seems that the virus will be with us for some time and we will have to find ways of managing it effectively. Perhaps too our thinking, of getting 'back to' something, was also wrong and we should instead be thinking more about moving

'forward to' a new, and hopefully better, normal.

Stripped back-liturgies, be it First Communion, Marriage, Baptism, funerals, even Mass itself, have helped to remind us of what is essential and to concentrate on those aspects of our celebrations. The lessons we have learned can inform our thinking as we move forward.

In his Chrism Mass homily, Bishop Declan talked of three things that he wanted us to keep in mind – to have a care for the Liturgy, for the way we worship and celebrate what we believe; to have a care for the poor and to have a care for our common home. He reminded us that liturgy needs to be prepared, and prepared well, and that we should be able to connect our worship, and its message, with our everyday lives; it should impel us out to mission and so facilitate that care for the poor and for our common world. To do that we will, perhaps, have to re-think some of our practices and priorities in order to ensure that Christ is, in truth, at the heart of all that we do.

Throughout lockdown and the Covid restrictions we have had the opportunity to recapture something of a stillness and (re)discover that, in the midst of our anxiety and uncertainty, Christ has been our anchor; we have, too, realised how much we need community. As we think about returning to Liturgy, to being with our prayer-communities once again, the Bishops' Conference has issued a document *The Day of the Lord* which we include with this newsletter. It recognises that there are a number of challenges to be faced but that the greatest treasure we have is the sacramental life of the Church and, most especially, the Eucharist. How we move forward, and at what pace, will be different for each parish and if there is any way that you feel that the Liturgy Office can be of help, please do let us know.

As a Diocesan Liturgy Office, we try to ensure that there are plenty of resources available online. Now that we can include the Prayer of the Faithful during Mass once again, do remember that there are sample intercessions for each week under the 'Prayer of the Faithful' tab. You will also find our new resource 'Celebrating the Mass' which, whilst created primarily for teachers, chaplains and all others involved in the preparation of school Masses, may also be of help to others who wish to know more about the Mass and its different elements. Meanwhile Louise White, who is the Schools' RE and Catholicity Adviser and a member of the Diocesan Liturgy Office, is more than willing to help with Children's Liturgy of the Word or First Reconciliation and Eucharist for parishes. Just contact her on [Louise.White@cliftdiocese.com](mailto:Louise.White@cliftdiocese.com)

WE include Pope Francis' beautiful catechesis on Praying in the Liturgy and, as well as *The Day of the Lord*, we include an article that invites us to consider how we welcome people back to our liturgies, an article on singing together again, and a piece entitled 'Going Green'. No, this is not about recycling, but something that invites us to think about Ordinary Time and what we can learn from Jesus' ministry during the time between Pentecost and Advent.

## **Pope Francis: *praying in the liturgy***

There is no Christian spirituality that is not grounded in the celebration of the sacred mysteries. The *Catechism* writes: "In the sacramental liturgy of the Church, the mission of Christ and of the Holy Spirit proclaims, makes present, and communicates the mystery of salvation, which is continued in the heart that prays" (n. 2655). The liturgy, in itself, is not just spontaneous prayer, but something more, and more original: it is an act that founds the whole Christian experience and, therefore, prayer, too, is an event, it is a happening, it is presence, it is encounter. It is an encounter with Christ. Christ makes himself present in the Holy Spirit through the sacramental signs: hence the need for us Christians to participate in the divine mysteries. A Christianity without a liturgy, I dare say, is perhaps a Christianity without Christ. Without the Total Christ. Even in the barest of rites, such as the one some Christians have celebrated and continue to celebrate in places of incarceration, or in the hiddenness of a house in times of persecution, Christ is truly present and gives himself to his faithful.

Precisely because of its objective dimension, the liturgy asks to be celebrated with fervour, so that the grace poured out in the rite is not dispersed, but rather reaches the experience of each one. The *Catechism* explains it very well and says this: "Prayer internalizes and assimilates the liturgy during and after its celebration" (ibid.). Many Christian prayers do not originate from the liturgy, but all of them, if they are Christian, presuppose the liturgy, that is, the sacramental mediation of Jesus Christ. Every time we celebrate a Baptism, or consecrate the bread and wine in the Eucharist, or anoint the body of a sick person with Holy Oil, Christ is here! It is he who acts and is present just as he was when he healed the weak limbs of a sick person, or when he delivered his testament for the salvation of the world at the Last Supper.

The prayer of the Christian makes the sacramental presence of Jesus his or her own. What is external to us becomes part of us: the liturgy expresses this even in the very natural gesture of eating. Mass cannot simply be "listened to": it is also an incorrect expression, "I am going to listen to Mass". Mass cannot merely be listened to, as if we were just spectators of something that slips away without our involvement. Mass is always *celebrated*, and not only by the priest who presides it, but by all Christians who experience it. And the centre is Christ! All of us, in the diversity of gifts and ministries, join in his action, because he, Christ, is the Protagonist of the liturgy.

When the first Christians began to worship, they did so by actualizing Jesus' deeds and words, with the light and power of the Holy Spirit, so that their lives, reached by that grace, would become a spiritual sacrifice offered to God. This approach was a true "revolution". Saint Paul writes in the Letter to the Romans: "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (12:1). Life is called to become worship to God, but this cannot happen without prayer, especially liturgical prayer. May this thought help us all when we go to Mass: I go to pray in the community, I go to pray with Christ who is present. When we go to the celebration of a Baptism, for example, it is Christ present there, who baptizes. "But Father, this is an idea, a figure of speech": no, it is not a figure of speech. Christ is present, and in the liturgy you pray with Christ who is beside you.

**(General audience *Catechesis on prayer* – 3.2.21)**

## **Going Green**

Pentecost brought our Easter season to a rather energetic close and this beautiful solemnity always finds us returning to the Upper Room with the women and the disciples watching, waiting and praying for that promised gift of the Spirit who would anoint them and send them out as witnesses of Gospel joy. The strength, the power, and the very breath of God would fill them and energise them to being the voice of Good News not just to a city but to the ends of the Earth. Whilst Pentecost marks an end in one sense it also marks a beginning. It is the beginning of Jesus's ministry, now extended in the life and in the example of the disciples.

But as we move the Paschal candle from its place near the lectern back to the baptistry we fall into Ordinary Time. Ordinary comes from the word 'ordinal,' which means 'numbered', hence Week 8, 9,10 etc. It's not so much a time where we just do ordinary things but rather it is a time where we narrate the ordinary ministry, life, teaching of Jesus and we find ourselves immersed in a Gospel that simply draws us into a deeper, richer understanding of the outreach of the kingdom of God through the day to day walking, talking, reaching out, praying and eating side of Jesus' life. It is ordinary in that we are able to gaze into the extraordinary breaking in of God's kingdom through the simple life of Jesus of Nazareth which, of itself, is anything **but** ordinary. But I suppose we also find Jesus breaking into the ordinariness of our lives, too.

Into the simple and into the uncomplicated Jesus seeks to touch our lives. Through his simple word and simple touch Jesus seeks to make holy the ordinariness of our lives for, it is in the ordinariness that we can encounter the life of God. We 'go green' in that we put aside the white of the Easter season and adorn our churches in the green of Ordinary Time.

Green speaks to us of life, of growth, of abundance and of verdant pastures where we find a richness and a fullness of nourishment. Rather than just seeing ordinary time as an ordinary, day-to-day season, we can journey through it inviting the tender, compassionate, healing, forgiving Lord to draw us, through ordinary things, into the extraordinary life of God's kingdom. But, also, maybe this ordinary season allows us to embrace something of the mission of Jesus in our own lives and to be reminded that it is precisely in the ordinariness and every-day-ness that we are called to be proclaimers of God's goodness, of God's justice, of God's beauty, of God's joy and of God's peace.

### **All Are Welcome?**

As we move through the pandemic, the time is coming when, hopefully, our Churches will be able to open fully, without the current restrictions. As we approach this time, we have an opportunity to say to ourselves – what do we need to do to ensure that all we offer is truly welcoming and deeply attractive to everyone who crosses our threshold?

*Imagine this scenario: we arrive for Mass and are greeted at the door by another parishioner who usually smiles, perhaps says hello, and hands us a newsletter or hymn book. We go into the church and find a seat – the place we sit in every week. Sometimes we see someone we know and make conversation, but more times than not we kneel, start our prayers with no more than a cursory glance to the person on one side or the other. A young mother with small children struggles to find a place where hopefully the children will not be a nuisance, anxious to keep them quiet. As the pews fill a young man in a wheelchair is pushed towards the front of the church. There is some consternation – there isn't enough room for the procession to get past and the wheelchair will be in the way when it comes to communion. The young man is wheeled to a corner at the back of the church out of harm's way. People breathe once more. There is a chord on the organ and the choir begin to sing. It is not possible to join in because it is a new hymn that no one knows and there has been no introduction to it prior to Mass beginning.*

Imagine you are a visitor to this church for the first time. What would be your first impression? Would you feel welcome? This may seem to be something of a caricature but at various times all these scenarios have been experienced and observed in parishes and, if just one or two of these elements are present in our Church we might want to stop and think.

When we come to Mass on Sunday, we do so because we have been called to gather as community where, together, we recognise one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. Because we are baptised in Christ, we have equality with one another and are equal in the eyes of God. This equality allows us to welcome one another, to honour one another and to reach out to one another. Where in the above description then is the equality, we share being lived out? Why does the young mother feel anxious about keeping her children quiet? Why should the young man in a wheelchair feel that he must hide away at the back?

If we are to be a true community of justice and integrity where all are welcomed, our gathering must emphasise our desire to be one together, embracing one another without judgement. How we gather on Sunday and welcome one another will reflect how we welcome others in our community away from our Sunday liturgy. Our capacity for hospitality will reflect our desire and willingness to welcome the stranger and care for the marginalised. Our hospitality is our witness to God's kingdom where all divisions are overcome, and no one is excluded from the banquet.

Some questions we might like to reflect upon:

- What were we doing before the pandemic that might not help the stranger in our midst to feel that they could find a home with us?
- How can we ensure that the experience of our liturgy nourishes and enables us to go out confidently and announce the Gospel?
- Does the music of our parish draw people into prayer and enable the community to sing with one voice and one heart?
- Do our readers proclaim the Word so that those who are listening can take it into their hearts and live it in their lives?

We have a wonderful Gospel to proclaim. Let us try to ensure that our parishes are a true reflection of what it means to follow the Lord, not one day a week but every day of the week.

### **Singing together again**

Do you remember the days when we used to sing in church? When the voices of the congregation raised the rafters in response to the cantor's invitation? When hymns and Glorias were part of every week's worship? Once upon a time you may have even complained about having to sing a particular setting of the 'Holy Holy' – now, perhaps, you would be grateful to be able to sing any setting!

Over the next few months we will, hopefully, start to sing again in church. And when we do, how are we going to outdo our pre-Lockdown best?

First things first - get back into singing yourself. As you read this you may well not yet be able to sing in church again, but you can sing at home, in your car and outside. Find a space and time, when you can be on your own if you prefer.

Start slowly, with a few gentle warming up exercises, some deep breathing (really deep – so that your lower body expands and your shoulders don't go up!) and a bit of silent chewing motion to release tension in the jaw. Sing some of your favourite songs - it's so much easier and more relaxing to sing songs you know well. We've all become used to using Zoom and its friends over Lockdown for work and family chats, but don't forget that it can also make recordings. Yes - record yourself singing! At first it can be hard to listen to yourself, but stick with it and you'll begin to recognise what is good and what needs to be worked on. Of course, you may have been singing a lot over Lockdown, in which case you're good to go already.

Now remind yourself of a few of the basic principles of singing the psalms in Mass, the Office or other situations. Always read the text through. Underline - either mentally or with a pencil - where the important words are. If you're singing the Responsorial Psalm at Mass, look at the first reading, too - is there something in it which the psalm picks up on? If so, can you gently emphasise this for your congregation? Why is this particular psalm selected for this Mass? And if you are thinking of substituting the psalm for another Common one (this is allowed - there are a set of Common Psalms for this purpose - see

<https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Calendar/Info/CommonPsalms.shtml>) then consider carefully which one to choose, to match the mood and content of the other readings.

This raises another issue - one of the reasons for having the Common Psalms is for "communities that wish to begin singing the psalm". It's been over a year since the people have sung the response to any psalm, so your parish might well fall into that category now and that, in itself, may prove to be a problem. Congregations which were once used to singing together have now fallen out of the practice. They may need encouragement to make music together again. How will you manage that? Practise a gently persuasive "Sing now, with me" look for when you want them to join in the response; if you've got a choir, get them to sing the response - at least for the first few weeks - more strongly. Instrumental and singing teachers are often encouraged to teach as much as possible through the music, and not through words.

If you have a choice of settings, try using short, easy ones to start with. There will be the temptation to think "We're allowed to sing and we've got a year's worth of singing to catch up on!" but simpler will probably be better as people get used to the new/old situation.

A lot of what is said above is about the Responsorial Psalm in Mass, but much of it goes for psalms chanted in the Offices, or at other points in Mass (such as the Offertory or at Communion). Start simply, remember that your parish will not have sung together for a long time, and allow them to get used to the idea. Enjoy singing together again - and remember, 'those who sing, pray twice' (St Augustine).

## CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

Reflection by the Bishops of England and Wales

### *The Day of the Lord*

Gathering as Bishops in Conference this week, we wish to pay tribute to all in the Catholic community who have shown such courage, generosity and understanding in the face of adversity this past year. Across England and Wales, families and parish communities have risen to the challenge of sustaining one another through times of great isolation, loneliness and grief in an impressive variety of ways, spiritual, emotional and practical. We thank all who have worked tirelessly in prisons, in hospitals, care-homes and across the medical profession for giving of themselves so generously. We thank all who have worked valiantly in our schools, facing unforeseen demands and meeting them with characteristic professionalism and dedication.

We wish also to pay tribute to those who have given of their time and energy to keep open our churches as havens of peace and prayer. Churches up and down the land have realised the vision of Pope Francis that they be like village-wells where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey; and centres of "constant missionary outreach." We thank all who have developed diverse new patterns of outreach - of prayer, catechesis, study and spiritual solidarity; all who have made participation in the Mass possible through the internet.

Also prominent in this tribute should be thanks to all who have contributed to the immense effort of providing food for those most in need. The generosity shown in the distribution of so very many meals has given eloquent expression to the mercy, love and compassion which are at the very heart of God. Many have been touched by the joy of meeting Christ in the poor; and many of the poor by the joy of meeting Christ in selfless parishioners. The provision of food is often the first step into a deeper relationship of help and accompaniment, including the sharing of the gift of faith in our Blessed Lord.

'Vibrant' is a word which seems to have characterised so many of our parishes throughout the pandemic. We wish to salute our priests in particular for the leadership they have shown in this time of crisis. We thank them for their deep devotion to both the liturgy and to their parishioners. We commend every priest who made of his parish "a 'sanctuary' open to all" and with a particular care for the poor; and the many Deacons who have exercised with such generosity their mission of charity.

What will be the pace of our emerging from this pandemic remains as yet unclear. What is clear is the challenge we face of bringing our communities and the practice of the faith to a still greater expression and strength. As your bishops, we are aware of a threefold pattern to this challenge.

- a) There are the fearful and weary, anxious about coming into the enclosed spaces of our churches; those who have simply lost the habit of coming to church. Personal contact, clear reassurance, and sensitive invitations will all be needed.
- b) There are those who will have reassessed their pattern of life and priorities. The practice of faith within the community of the Catholic Church may not be among those priorities. A gap may have opened up, or widened, between the spiritual dimension of their lives and any communal expression of that spiritual quest. They represent a particular focus and concern for our outreach.
- c) There are those whom we might describe as the 'Covid curious', those who have come into contact with the Catholic Church through our presence on the internet – a contact we may be able to develop through our continuing presence across diverse media platforms.

In facing these challenges, we are endowed with veritable treasures which serve to resource and enrich us. Among them are our schools, in which so many are regaining confidence to come together with others. We believe our schools can indeed be bridges back to church. There is also the remarkable work of social outreach which has grown exponentially during these long months of pandemic. On this, too, we must build. But the greatest treasure is, of course, the sacramental life of the Church, and, pre-eminently, the Eucharist.

It is the Eucharist, the celebration of the Mass, that makes the Church; and it is the Church, in the gift of the Holy Spirit, which makes the Eucharist. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the lifeblood of the Church. It requires our active participation and, to be fully celebrated, our physical presence.

At this moment, then, we need to have in our sights the need to restore to its rightful centrality in our lives the Sunday Mass, encouraging each to take his or her place once again in the assembly of our brothers and sisters. We face the task of seeking to nurture the sense of Sunday as “a weekly gift from God to his people”, and something we cannot do without; to see Sunday as the soul of the week, as giving light and meaning to all the responsibilities we live out each day; to see the Sunday Eucharist as food for the unique mission with which we have been endowed.

In the time to come we can do no better than to rekindle in our hearts, foster and encourage, a yearning for the Real Presence of the Lord and the practice of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, a gift so deeply appreciated in these times of lockdown. We need to begin by fostering this in ourselves. For the Eucharist should be the cause of our deepest joy, our highest manner of offering thanks to God and for seeking his mercy and love. We need to make it the foundation stone of our lives.

The invitation to Sunday Mass resonates all the more deeply when we consider, as Pope St John Paul II reminds us in the Encyclical Letter *Dies Domini*, that the Sabbath rest is nothing if not a call to remember the gift of God's Creation. The Eucharist is indeed a celebration of the created world, called into life by the Eternal Word, for the bread and wine of the earth becomes the Body and Blood of Christ who is that same Lord of all life. The Christ to whom we come so close in the Eucharist must be the foundation of our strivings, not least in the urgent task we face of caring for creation and our environment.

Pope St John Paul II spoke of our amazement at the gift of the Mass and the abiding Presence of our Blessed Lord in the Sacrament of the Altar. Herein lies our treasure, enriching our relationship with Jesus and bringing together every aspect of our life and mission. This is such an important focus for our task in the coming months.

22<sup>nd</sup> April 2021

## **Art & Architecture – don't leave it too late!**

The Liturgy Office is also responsible for advising the bishop and our parishes on matters of liturgical Art and Architecture – building, re-ordering, alterations, additions and artistic commissions - for the churches of the diocese. The department seeks to serve and help parishes and other communities to explore how they can make better use of their church buildings and chapels for the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy. Any proposed changes which affect the liturgical and devotional life of the parish or community will need to be referred to the Liturgy Office for advice and permission where necessary. This may also approval from the Historic Churches Committee (in the case of a listed building). Do make sure that you contact us with details of your proposals in plenty of time as it may be necessary for a site visit to take place before approval can be given. Further information and dates of the Art & Architecture meetings are given in the Liturgical Diary on pages 159-160 or you can contact us at the Liturgy Office by email to [liturgy@cliftondiocese.com](mailto:liturgy@cliftondiocese.com) or by telephoning 0117 902 5595.

**Finally, have a safe and enjoyable Summer!**