

## Manna 3 – Eleventh Session

### Place, Gesture, Song & More: Eucharist & the Elements of Celebration

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*I took the resolution to read the word of God  
with a very deep respect and to pronounce with affection  
the liturgical prayers of Holy Church, inspired as they are by the Holy Spirit.  
It is the prayer of the Holy Spirit offered by his spouse.”*

- February 21, 1865

*Great Retreat of Rome, Saint Peter Julian Eymard*

#### ***Preface***

For Saint Peter Julian Eymard there was nothing more important to his faith than celebrating the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the Mass. For him, it was the supreme sign of the depth of Christ’s love for us. The Mass is the liturgical representation of the suffering and death of Christ on the cross.

This love of the Mass inspired Father Eymard to study the Scriptures continuously. He also loved to read the eucharistic teachings of the “Fathers of the Church” [sic] to deepen his appreciation of the Mass. Thus, he could write in the above meditation that he resolved “to read the word of God with a very deep *respect*.” (He had learned Latin so well that when he read the scriptures it was as if in his own French language.) And he resolved “to pronounce with *affection* the liturgical prayers.”

Father Eymard so loved the Mass that he celebrated the sacrament daily – not a common practice among most priests and religious at the time. Students of this “Apostle of the Eucharist” knew how much he stressed the importance of receiving Holy Communion, even counseling frequent Communion; this, at a time when most Catholics received Holy Communion once a year.

How happy Saint Eymard would be to see how much attention and care is now given to the many elements of the celebration (the altar, the gestures, the songs, and more) as highlighted in the teaching for this Manna session. And how he would appreciate the teaching of the Second Vatican Council that “all the faithful be led to full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of the liturgy” (*Constitution on the Liturgy* 14).

## ***Introduction to the Theme***

We often hear when we come to church, “Welcome to this celebration of the Eucharist. Please join in singing . . .” Celebration is a word commonly used to describe the ritual in which we participate. Every liturgy, (i.e., Morning Prayer, Benediction, et. al) can be labeled a “celebration.” Usually when we think of a celebration, we think of a birthday or anniversary party, Thanksgiving dinner at grandma’s house, our favorite baseball team winning the World Series, or an athlete winning the Olympic gold.

Why have we also chosen to use this word to describe our ritual acts? This session will concentrate on some basic elements contained in our liturgies, specifically the Eucharist (Mass): participation, gesture, song, touch, word, place, object/icons to the sacred, use of water, food, and more. Let us first reflect on why we have gathered as a faith group to meditate and grow closer to our God and to each other and to celebrate our common life in Christ.

## ***Opening Prayer***

Source of eternal joy!

You call us to glorify, adore, and give thanks for your presence in our lives.  
With great love we praise and lift our hearts to you  
to make our lives a celebration of this gift.  
May our reflection guide us to a deeper appreciation and renewal  
to that which calls us to celebrate: your Son’s Paschal Mystery.

May we continue to be born anew;  
May we continue to proclaim liberty to those held captive;  
May we walk the journey of faith with those who hope for you;  
May we die to the sin and blindness that keeps us from truly  
recognizing your risen presence and action in the world.

May your reign come to this earth so that we may celebrate with you in the eternal kingdom  
where you are LORD, forever and ever.

Amen

*Song:*

- “What is This Place” by Huub Oosterhuis - or
- “All the Earth” by Lucien Deiss, CSSp.

### ***Work Exercise***

1. Name the elements that make for a really good party. Name those elements that make the Mass seem like a celebration.
2. What does it mean to “attend” and consciously “participate” at Mass.
3. What is the difference between watching an event on television and being “live” or present at an event? How does this relate to our experience at a eucharistic celebration?

***The work exercise is followed by a small group sharing and a large group sharing.***

## **Teaching**

### **1. Participation**

As mentioned earlier, we watch sports celebrations on television and marvel at the winning team's party in front of a national audience. Do you ever feel that you are there celebrating? Or, are you just an observer at someone else's party? Certainly, we were present; we just watched a team win. We are present in mind, but not in body. This exercise is meant to help us focus on the importance of our presence at the celebration of the Eucharist, the Mass, and why our presence is so necessary. Let us begin by looking at what the church said in its Second Vatican Council document, *Constitution on the Liturgy* 14 (hereafter CSL – with the Latin name being *Sacrosanctum Concilium*):

The Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Peter 2:9; see 2:4-5) is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.

In reviewing this portion of CSL, we see that there were high goals and expectations set for all church members. Liturgy, speaking here of all liturgies, demands that we show up – that we are awake, alive with desire to praise our God. It is our "duty" because we are a holy people, made holy by our baptism into this special relationship.

Participation means that we are engaged and actively doing something to show we are engaged. We share ourselves not only with our God, but also with the others gathered. Our church documents repeatedly call for us, and forcefully challenge us, to bring our whole body into worship. Our minds and hearts have to be engaged and alive with the Spirit of God to fully participate and be present. God initiates this process in us. Our challenge is to answer the call and allow this Spirit to take root so that we may enthusiastically join the group. This means that we take time to root ourselves in this Spirit: to acknowledge its presence in our lives and then to recognize it by our active voice and movement to it.

### **2. Place**

We bring ourselves to a place, a building that has been set aside as a place for the baptized, a place dedicated to the holy for God's holy people. Earlier, we may have sung the song, "What is This Place?" (found in *Ritual Song* (first edition) 892). Let us review some of the ideas in the song:

- The place where we gather is significant. It has been dedicated by us to God. It has been blessed and sprinkled and hallowed. We each come to this place because the Spirit leads us to become one body in Christ. Most of the people we do not know in the place, but this is not important. What is important is that God has formed us to be together in one spot that unites us and is a symbol for each of us. It is a symbol of our heritage and who we are.

The church, when dedicated, has its walls anointed to remind us that we are anointed in the building of faith.

- We go beyond ourselves, our place, our world to this temple of worship. We share the temple of the Holy Spirit within us, with those gathered – living stones brought together by the keystone, Jesus Christ. If one stone is not present, the foundation is weakened. This is why it is a necessity and our obligation to be present. We cannot miss the family gathering at Thanksgiving without a serious reason. The same is true of our participation in Eucharist.
- Lastly, we gather in this place as a foretaste of the final gathering of all Christ's followers. We gather in this city, town, or village as a remembrance of the everlasting Jerusalem, a holy city formed by a holy people. The Psalms and Book of Revelation echo the importance of our gathering.
- Within this place there are other significant places: the ambo or pulpit for the proclamation of God's word, the baptistery, the ambry (place for the oils), the altar or table, the assembly (in chairs, benches, or pews), the sacristy, the organ and music area, the bell tower, the church doors, alcoves for statues of saints, and the stations of the cross. The church building is a skin sheltering all these sacred places for God's holy people. [See *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship* or *Built of Living Stones*, for further explanation.]

### **3. Gestures**

We greet one another as we come into the building recognizing the presence of Christ. We enter this place and we bow or genuflect on one knee – a significant gesture of reverence and acknowledgement. We bow (or genuflect) to the symbol of “The Anointed One” – the altar, the capstone of Christ. Jesus Christ was anointed for mission to bring about God's work. We gather around this altar, this sacred table to initiate the action of God's work: liturgy.

In reality Christ gathers us together around himself. We revere this sacred gathering by our bow. A symbol of humble reverence and dedication, a bow has been a gesture of respect since the early church. It involves our whole body: we must stop and plant our feet; we must look and acknowledge with our eyes that which is being revered; we must use our brain and our muscles to bend at the waist or get down on one knee. This takes time and is not a hurried occasion. Rather, it is a time for renewing and welcoming. We have been welcomed into this holy place; we stop, acknowledge the presence of all this is holy, and then with our body give reverence.

When passing in the presence of the tabernacle in a Blessed Sacrament chapel, we revere with a genuflection or bow to the real presence of the risen Christ contained in the eucharistic bread, Christ's body (and if reserved for a special reason, the eucharistic wine, Christ's blood). Many churches today that space and the economic means have returned to the practice of having a separate space for the Blessed Sacrament so that it may properly be revered. During our eucharistic liturgy we do not ignore the Blessed Sacrament. Rather, it is the fruits of the Mass by which we can both adore and glorify God's blessing in the eucharistic species. Contemplation of this saving mystery helps us to recall that we have reserved hosts for those who are unable to attend the Eucharist. This was not the primary reason for reservation of the Blessed Sacrament. Originally the Sacrament was reserved to bring Holy Communion to the sick. Later in the history of the Western Rite, it became a routine of extending prayer and waiting to be touched by communion. We in our prayer keep vigil in adoration, glorification, forgiveness, petition, thanksgiving, and supplication.

We begin our prayer, both individually and collectively, with the sign of the cross. With this gesture we embrace ourselves with the sign of our God's love. We unite our heads and hearts with our whole being. Touching each point of ourselves slowly and reverently with the words of the Trinity, remind ourselves of our baptism. We unite ourselves in the words first used to make us Christian:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

These words have been used since the second century Africa to claim our faith in one God in three persons: a God who is the essence of our being.

#### **4. Procession**

At one time, all processed together into the church. Today we keep this tradition regularly on Passion (Psalm) Sunday. When we dedicate a new or renovated church, we also gather outside. When we process and move forward into the sacred building, we are reminded of the journey of faith on which we all travel. Today the ministers for Eucharist keep this tradition. The cross or crucifix leads those who process, reminding us that Christ leads us.

Additionally, we have all accepted a cross to follow the LORD. When we were "signed" with the cross at our baptism, we were claimed to begin this life journey of the paschal mystery — the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Every liturgy, each Eucharist, begins with this solemn reminder. Usually, others walk for us in this sacred procession. In reality our movement from home to church reminds us of this "faith walk." When we leave this celebration, we process back out into the world, renewed to continue the journey.

During the Eucharist we have three other processions, moments of reminding ourselves of the “faith walk”: gospel, preparation of the gifts, and communion. From the presider’s chair to altar to ambo, we raise the gospel and proclaim Christ’s presence in this sacred word. The gifts are brought from the assembly to the altar as a symbol of our giving back to God these holy gifts. At communion we are invited to come forward to physically say with our bodies, “Yes, LORD, I believe, ‘Amen.’” We say, “Yes, I am on this journey with you and I always wish to be in communion with you on this journey.”

## **5. Song**

Most of the Eucharist is filled with music to accompany the actions of Eucharist. The entrance procession has music to help us gather as a people. Singing the words is quite important; in fact, since Saint Augustine, the proverb, “one who sings well prays twice” has been a guiding principle. It is an oral way for us to demonstrate our participation. Moved by the Holy Spirit and the life that is ours in God our Father and Christ Jesus, as the song goes, “How can we keep from singing?”

Music heightens what is occurring in the action of the Mass. Let us think of how we begin sporting events and how we are unified by singing the national anthem. In our Catholic tradition we use music to remind us of our call to gather and become the church.

## **6. Posture**

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* 2002 (hereafter GIRM) states in paragraph 42 and 43:

A common posture, to be observed by all participants, is a sign of the unity of the members of the Christian community gathered for the sacred Liturgy: it both expresses and fosters the intention and spiritual attitude of the participants.

With a view to a uniformity in gestures and postures during one and the same celebration, the faithful should follow the directions which the deacon, lay minister, or priest gives according to whatever is indicated in the Missal (43).

Key to this statement is the “unity” or attitude by which we do things together and the body movement that shows that we are “together.” Our body movements (our posture) also show that we are united together in forming a symbol of Christ’s body by our gathering together. Posture refers to the oneness of the body and is very much determined by our various world cultures. It is no different when we celebrate Mass throughout the country and around the

world. At key moments we stand, sit, kneel, and move forward based on a “Roman” model. Throughout church history we have followed the example of the presider’s posture, so that when he stood, the assembly (congregation) also stood, etc. This practice has been carried out through the ages and continues in our present-day liturgies. It’s like this in our societies, when we stand to greet judges or other public officials out of a sign of respect and honor. We do this same honor to the Body of Christ and Christ as our head.

Sitting tends to lend itself to a posture of listening and being attentive to God’s word. Standing has been the posture of prayers of petition, supplication, thanksgiving, glory, and expectation for the LORD’s return. Kneeling has been seen as a posture of reparation, mourning, adoration, humility, and supplication. Kneeling entered the liturgy when the western world started to have rules for worshiping its kings, queens, princes, and other leaders requesting respect and reverence. Similar traits for reverence reached the worship of our God.

## **7. Silence**

Silence is a key device observed in our celebrations too. It is a form of participation (CSL 45). It functions at many moments of the Eucharist to allow us to meditate on what we have heard, experienced, said, or sung, to praise God in silent prayer. In our noise-intoxicated world, silence in the liturgy gives us an opportunity together to listen and respond to God’s presence, especially in the Mass. Too often we rush and hurry our lives along. This can happen at Mass also.

The eucharistic celebration is designed to have many pauses for individual and group silence. Each time the presider says, “Let us pray,” we are invited for a moment, a long moment, to pray in silence, as the presider does. Between the readings, the proclamation of the sacred Scriptures, we are asked to meditate on God’s word and allow it to take root in us and awaken its echo within our hearts. After the homily we also are invited to continue to reflect on the action of God’s word in the world, so that together we may acclaim and proclaim a profession of faith, and pray for the needs of the world. During the eucharistic prayer there are pauses for silence and contemplation on the action being performed by the community. Finally, after reception of Holy Communion and the completion of the Communion Rite we may “all praise God in silent prayer” (See GIRM 43 and 45).

## **8. Time**

We are quite conscious of the “time we spend” doing things. It is a very functional and production-oriented world in which we live. Eucharistic celebrations ask us to forget



certain elements of time and focus on God. We are mindful of the season of the year (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, or Ordinary Time) and the moment(s) of Christ's life or other Christ-centered persons (Mary, Joseph, martyrs, and other saints) we commemorate in our Mass. We focus on particular elements of the Paschal Mystery to heighten our personal sense of participation in Christ's life. When we celebrate Christ's birth, we celebrate our birth and how we incarnate the word made flesh. With each moment of the paschal mystery we celebrate throughout the year, we celebrate Christ's life in ours.

Our celebrations are not meant to last a specific amount of time. In fact, good celebrations seem to not make the minutes or hours count or be counted. We should be conscious, however, that the day, season, and year are hallowed. Sunday is a unique day for the Christian community and a priority celebrated since the LORD arose from the dead and first appeared to the disciples. This time, as the *General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar* reminds us in paragraph 1: "unfolds the entire mystery of Christ."

## 9. Conclusion

Anyone who puts a party together knows that there are many elements, people, ideas, and activities that go on behind the scenes to make a wonderful celebration. I have highlighted some key aspects in this lesson to demonstrate the need for us to be attentive to that which goes into our holiday celebrations, especially the Eucharist. These are but some of the elements of our eucharistic celebrations. There are others, and even these could be discussed at greater length. May these items assist us in our celebration and help us grow in our understanding of the many components in the Eucharist which help us give praise, honor, and glory to God through our worship experience.

*Resource helps for this teaching:*

- *Book of Blessings*. The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN 1989
- *Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture and Worship*. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC, 2000.
- *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship*. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC, 1978.
- *General Instruction on the Roman Missal*. Access through the Vatican website.
- *Holy People, Holy Place: Rites for the Church's House*, by Thomas G. Simons. Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, IL. 1998
- *Ritual Song – first edition*. GIA Publications, Chicago, IL. 1996
- *The Order of the Dedication of a Church and an Altar*. Catholic Book Publishing, Totowa, NJ, 2020.

## ***Closing Prayer***

*It is recommended to have this prayer service in the church and go to the different places (i.e., stand around the altar, ambo, font, etc.) for moments of personal prayer, thinking of the different places, moments and aspects the liturgical symbols have for us in our liturgical life. This prayer service may forgo the possibility of exposition of the Blessed Sacrament that has been part of other sessions. If the planning group deems otherwise, the rubrics followed in other sessions are used at this time.*

### ***Opening Song:***

- “As a Fire Is Meant for Burning,” Ruth Duck and Marty Haugen or
- “O Christ the Great Foundation,” Timothy T’ingfang Lew and Samuel Wesley

### ***Opening Prayer:***

Adapted from the “Blessing of the Altar” from *Holy People, Holy Place*.

Blessed are you, LORD our God,  
who accepted the sacrifice of Christ,  
offered on the altar of the cross for the salvation of the world.

Now with a Mother’s love,  
you call your people to celebrate his memory  
by coming together at his table.  
May this altar,  
which we have built for your holy mysteries,  
be the center of our praise and thanksgiving.  
May it be the table,  
at which we break the bread which gives us life  
and drink the cup which makes us one.  
May it be the fountain of the unfailing waters of salvation.

May the table of your word  
at which we hear the Good News of salvation,  
enliven our hearts with healing and strength.

Here may we draw close to Christ, the living stone,  
and in Christ, grow into a holy temple.  
Here may our lives of holiness become  
a pleasing sacrifice to your glory.

Blessed be God forever. *(Repeat)*

*Reading:* 1 Corinthians 3:9c-11, 16-17

*Closing Prayer:*

Adapted from the *Roman Missal* for the Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica in Rome

O God from your holy people you have chosen us living stones,  
prepare an eternal dwelling place for us  
and increase in your Church the grace  
to build the Body of Christ  
up to the heavenly new and eternal Jerusalem.

Through Christ our LORD.

*Closing Song:*

“The Church’s One Foundation,” Samuel Stone and Samuel Wesley or  
“How Great Thou Art,” by Stuart Hine.

*Dismissal with some sign of peace:*

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