

Implications for a Liturgical Spirituality

By Alexander Peck

This article is a response to the statement below and includes implications for a liturgical spirituality:

Being one with God is the primary goal of all spirituality. Sacramental Eucharist is part of spirituality; but spirituality reaches deep into the Eucharist of the world and the Eucharist of our heart and conscience.

...the book of Creation is not a priestly book; the book of the gospels is not a priestly book; the book of one's experience is not a priestly book. We are first and foremost human beings, and these are all human books. We are also Christians, and from our Christian standpoint we can be nourished by these three books. We are sacramental and Eucharistic, but we are also part of the book of Creation itself, living day by day as we listen to the word of God, and spending moments of aloneness in our heart. In and through all of this, God can be united to us and we to God: this unitive way is the goal of all spirituality.¹

Christ Is the Eucharist of the World, Heart, and Conscience – And We are Eucharistic

To begin with, this response draws on Schmemmann's understanding of the expression,

“Eucharist of the world”, as being the Christ. He states:

In Him alone all that God has given man was fulfilled and brought back to heaven. He alone is the perfect Eucharist Being. *He is the Eucharist of the world.* In and through this Eucharist the whole creation becomes what it always was to be and yet failed to be [emphasis mine].²

From Schmemmann's statement that Christ is the Eucharist of the world, one can conclude that the *Eucharist of the heart and conscience* is also Christ, since each human being exists in the world.

¹ Broken Bay Institute, *LS511 Liturgical Spirituality: Study Guide* (Pennant Hills, NSW, Australia: The Broken Bay Institute, 2009) 13.

² Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), 38.

Furthermore, Eucharist (thanksgiving) can be the only response of humans to God's creation, redemption, and gift of heaven.³ In other words, thanksgiving (and praise) is the nature of the new life that God granted humans when in Christ He reconciled humankind with Himself.⁴ The new state of being, and new style of life, of humans is Eucharist.⁵ Consequently, *we are Eucharistic*.

Human Beings Are Sacramental – As Is the World

The understanding of sacrament begins with the concept of making the invisible visible.⁶ The prime example is evidenced through the invisible God, whom no one has seen,⁷ being seen in the humanity of Jesus. One can conclude, then, that *Jesus himself is our sacrament* – the visible sign of the invisible God.⁸ Moreover, those who are baptized into the risen Christ become sacrament – and the Church, Christ's body, is “the universal sacrament of salvation”.⁹ In that *we are sacrament*, we are instruments of grace – and become the way God graces today's world.¹⁰

Further, Richstatter writes that “sacraments [of the Church] proclaim the mysterious, hidden plan of God to bring all things together in Christ . . . [they] are the celebration of the presence of Christ in our midst.”¹¹ From this, one can argue that material things (including our bodies)

³ Ibid., 34-39.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Thomas Richstatter, “Sacraments: It All Starts with Jesus”, accessed 3 April 2010. Available from <http://www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/CU/ac0893.asp>; Internet. He states further that “God, whose wonder and love are beyond our imagination, wished to become visible and close to us.” Moreover, Augustine (who died in 430 A.D.) called sacraments “visible signs of invisible grace.”

⁷ Richstatter, “Sacraments: It All Starts With Jesus”. Note: Scripture states that “God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen” (1 Tim 6:15-16 NIV).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid. Note: The Church, as the universal sacrament of salvation, is stated in *The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, #48.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

are good, and that the sacraments celebrate the goodness of all creation.¹² In fact, the creation draws one into the life of the Creator.¹³ Finally, as the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (#61) states,

“for well-disposed members of the faithful, the effect of the liturgy of the sacraments and sacramentals is that almost every event in their lives is made holy by divine grace that flows from the paschal mystery of Christ's passion, death and resurrection, the font from which all sacraments and sacramentals draw their power. The liturgy means also that there is hardly any proper use of material things that cannot thus be directed toward human sanctification and the praise of God.”¹⁴

In other words, *the world itself could be considered a sacrament* and God is received through every material reality.¹⁵ As Mitchell expresses it, “the world itself is always and everywhere permeated, possessed at its roots, by God’s redeeming grace (that is, by God’s presence).”¹⁶ Also, the Spirit of God is present at the heart of all reality, including material reality.¹⁷

Implications for Liturgical Spirituality

If Christ is the Eucharist of the world, heart, and conscience (and we are Eucharistic), and if as human beings, we are sacramental (as is the world), then one can draw four implications for liturgical spirituality. The overarching theme of these implications is that liturgical spirituality involves far more than the confines of liturgical celebration in an official Church setting. It involves *all of life in the world*, including being nourished by the books of creation, the

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium) Accessed 9 April 2010. Available from http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html; Internet. (#61)

¹⁵ Peter Kreeft, “The Sacraments,” in *Fundamentals of the Faith* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 282-286.

¹⁶ N. Mitchell, “The Worship that Prepares Us for Worship”, *Praying* (January-February 1995): 7. Mitchell writes further that “God’s grace – so theologian Karl Rahner once wrote – creates salvation at the very roots of human existence: The world is constantly possessed by grace . . . by God’s self-bestowal . . . Grace proceeds from the innermost heart of the world and of humankind . . . [this grace] is quite simply the ultimate depths and the radical dimension of everything that we spiritual creatures experience, achieve and suffer . . . in our laughter and tears, our taking responsibility, our loving, living and dying – whenever we keep faith with the truth, break through egoism in our relationships . . .”

¹⁷ Ibid., 8.

gospels, and one's personal experiences. The premise for this is that God is always present as Holy Mystery¹⁸ – whereby the holy can be seen in the daily, “the rare in the routine”.¹⁹ Or, as Mitchell elaborates, “. . . the miracle unfolding always and everywhere in us, among us, around us . . . [perceiving] the remarkable in unremarkable events”.²⁰

One implication for liturgical spirituality is, as Ostdiek states, to create within the daily, often tawdry world in which we live, “an *awareness of the world as a spiritual place* in which the human spirit can find the fulfillment of its ultimate purpose [emphasis mine].”²¹ Such awareness, adds Gaillardetz, includes knowing that “God is the absolute depth and infinite horizon of any truly human experience.”²² Recognizing the graced character of every aspect of human existence, and appreciating the presence of mystery in daily living, is an awareness that needs to be cultivated.²³ In sum, liturgical spirituality should foster a deep recognition of the presence of God as Holy Mystery within the “warp and woof of our daily lives”.²⁴ It is a spirituality, as Dallen summarizes, “that helps us discover God manifesting and disclosing self in all of life.”²⁵

A second implication for liturgical spirituality is that it includes, in addition to the official liturgies of the Church, the *liturgy of life*, especially in view of spirituality being understood as a way of life.²⁶ When the bread and wine, for example, are presented in the liturgical celebration, it can also be understood as being symbolic of daily struggles and the joys of

¹⁸ R. R. Gaillardetz, “The Life of Grace”, in *Transforming Our Days: Spirituality, Community and Liturgy in a Technological Culture* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000), 63.

¹⁹ Mitchell, “The Worship that Prepares Us for Worship”, 5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 6. Later Mitchell adds that “the mystical is thoroughly worldly”.

²¹ G. Ostdiek, “Liturgical Spirituality: Deriving the True Christian Spirit”, *Liturgical Ministry* 14 (Fall 2005): 205

²² Gaillardetz, “The Life of Grace”, 63.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁵ J. Dallen, “Liturgical Spirituality: Living What We Sing About”, *Liturgical Ministry* 4 (Spring 1995): 54.

²⁶ Ostdiek, “Liturgical Spirituality”, 206.

living.²⁷ This liturgy of life, then, is also “placed on the altar with the bread and wine, to be identified with these gifts.”²⁸ In other words, in liturgical spirituality, there is a connection between life and liturgy.²⁹ What is celebrated in the liturgy is intended to be lived out in the rest of life.³⁰ Expressed in another way,

Liturgical spirituality, as derived from the experience of liturgy, offers a way of looking at all of creation, at all the events of our lives, and at all of humanity through the perspective of the paschal mystery of Jesus – which is the center of Christian worship (“Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again”). The fundamentally incarnational view of life that is so evident in liturgy is extended beyond the cult to how one prays, reflects, and acts outside the experience of liturgy.³¹

Third, as part of the Church’s liturgical celebrations, the intent for the faithful is *hearing God’s call in life*.³² Listening for God’s voice – as well as enlivening and deepening one’s response to God’s call³³ – is a part of liturgical spirituality. It involves listening for the different kinds of things God could be saying and “to receive different kinds of gifts from God: comfort, challenge, nourishment, and calling.”³⁴ However, while the liturgical celebration involves being “schooled in the art of listening”, as Bernardin writes, the challenge is to “be good listeners to one another, to the Lord, to the world with all its needs”.³⁵ In other words, liturgical spirituality – or, the life of communion – requires an attitude of attentiveness, as well as active engagement with the world and its people.³⁶ Its foundation is faith – whereby God’s call to us is heard and responded to with the same resoluteness as Abraham’s response.³⁷

²⁷ Ibid., 213.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 213-214.

³⁰ K. Irwin, *Liturgy, Prayer and Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 16.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ostdiek, “Liturgical Spirituality”, 213.

³³ Irwin, *Liturgy, Prayer and Spirituality*, 14.

³⁴ J. D. Witvliet, “Liturgy as God’s Language School”, *Pastoral Music* (April-May, 2007): 20.

³⁵ Ostdiek, “Liturgical Spirituality”, 213.

³⁶ Gaillardetz, “The Life of Grace”, 60.

³⁷ Irwin, *Liturgy, Prayer and Spirituality*, 21.

Finally, a liturgical spirituality involves parishioners themselves *becoming the “bread of life” and “cup of blessing” for the world* – or, as Bernardin expresses, “we are scattered, broken, poured out for the life of the world”.³⁸ The purpose of liturgical spirituality, then, is to be able to express a fully lived liturgy – where the liturgy becomes the basic stance of every moment of our lives.³⁹ Fink states it simply: “We become what we do.”⁴⁰ There is an emptying of the self for the sake of others that occurs in the loving service of God’s reign⁴¹ – that is, a life of self-giving, lived patterned after Christ.⁴² The gracious presence of God blesses others through us.⁴³ In sum, the sacraments are signs or landmarks that point, according to Mitchell, “to the limitlessness of God’s grace and compassion at work in the world . . . happening now within us, among us, around us.”⁴⁴ In other words, liturgical spirituality “stretches us to be for others”.⁴⁵

In understanding that all humans are Eucharistic and that all of life is sacramental, then indeed in and through all of life (by implication including the books of creation, the gospels, and one’s experiences) God can be united to us and we to God. Such union with God is the essence of all spirituality. Four implications for liturgical spirituality are (1) having an awareness of the world as a spiritual place, (2) appreciating the liturgy of life, (3) hearing and responding to God’s call in life, and (4) becoming the “bread of life” and the “cup of blessing” for the life of the world.

³⁸ Ostdiek, “Liturgical Spirituality”, 214.

³⁹ D. W. Fagerberg, “A Theology of Liturgy”, *Liturgical Ministry* 14 (Fall 2005): 179.

⁴⁰ P. Fink, “Liturgical Prayer and Spiritual Growth”, *Worship* 22 (1981): 388 and Dallen, “Liturgical Spirituality”, 53.

⁴¹ Ostdiek, “Liturgical Spirituality”, 214.

⁴² Fagerberg, “A Theology of Liturgy”, 179.

⁴³ Witvliet, “Liturgy as God’s Language School”, 21.

⁴⁴ Mitchell, “The Worship that Prepares Us for Worship”, 9.

⁴⁵ Dallen, “Liturgical Spirituality”, 54. Dallen is quoting Peter E. Fink from his article entitled “Liturgy and Spirituality: A Timely Intersection”.

Bibliography

- Broken Bay Institute. *LS511 Liturgical Spirituality: Study Guide*. Pennant Hills, NSW, Australia: The Broken Bay Institute, 2009.
- Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium) Accessed 9 April 2010. Available from http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html; Internet.
- Dallen, J. "Liturgical Spirituality: Living What We Sing About". *Liturgical Ministry* 4 (Spring 1995): 49-59.
- Fagerberg, D. W. "A Theology of Liturgy". *Liturgical Ministry* 14 (Fall 2005): 169-179.
- Fink, P. "Liturgical Prayer and Spiritual Growth". *Worship* 22 (1981): 386-398.
- Gaillardetz, R. R. "The Life of Grace". In *Transforming Our Days: Spirituality, Community and Liturgy in a Technological Culture*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000.
- Irwin, K. *Liturgy, Prayer and Spirituality*. New York: Paulist Press, 1984.
- Kreeft, Peter. "The Sacraments." In *Fundamentals of the Faith*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988.
- Mitchell, N. "The Worship that Prepares Us for Worship". *Praying* (January-February 1995): 4-8; 37-39.
- Ostdiek, G. "Liturgical Spirituality: Deriving the True Christian Spirit". *Liturgical Ministry* 14 (Fall 2005): 205-215.
- Richstatter, Thomas. "Sacraments: It All Starts With Jesus". Accessed 3 April 2010. Available from <http://www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/CU/ac0893.asp>; Internet.
- Schmemmann, Alexander. *For the Life of the World*. New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973.
- The NIV Study Bible: New International Version*. Grand Rapids, MI: The Zondervan Corporation, 1985.
- Witvliet, J. D. "Liturgy as God's Language School". *Pastoral Music* (April-May, 2007): 19-23.