T H I S I S T H E F E A S T

A GUIDEBOOK TO THE

VITALITIES OF THE

CHRISTIAN LITURGY

H. Paul Santmire

"This is the feast of victory for our God. Alleluia.
Sing with all the people of God and join in the
hymn of all creation:
Blessing and honor and glory and might be to God
and the Lamb forever. Amen."

--"The Hymn of Praise"
Lutheran Book of Worship (1978)

To Henry E. Horn

Pastor, Mentor, Friend

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Preface

Liturgical worship is regarded as a strange phenomenon in the worlds that I have known. For more than 15 years I served the Church's mission in the academic world, first at Harvard University, then at Wellesley College. Subsequently, for more than /O years, I served the Church's mission in the urban world, in an innercity parish in the nation's fourth poorest city, Hartford, Connecticut.

In the academic world, religious ritual is often considered to be primitive, an irrational kind of behavior predicated on the needs or drives of people who don't know any better, or who refuse to know any better. In the academic world, moreover, people tend to assume that ultimate meanings, if there are such things, must be private and subjective. Witness the memorable statement by the great twentieth century philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead, that religion is what one does with one's subjectivity. For such reasons, the classical public liturgy of the Church has been regularly consigned by numerous academic critics to the metaphysical limbo of superstition or magic.

In the urban world, religious ritual is sometimes considered to be irrelevant or even dangerous. The masses of the poor and the alienated who live in our great cities are concerned with issues of survival and hope, more than any other concerns. How can I get through the day? Am I ever going to live in a world where the hungry are fed, where women and children aren't abused or abandoned, where everybody can be free from the powers of prejudice and violence? Is a time ever going to come when everybody can be free for a life of harmony and wellbeing in the midst of some kind of supportive community?

In this beleaguered urban world, the classical public liturgy of the Church sometimes appears to be an esthetic escape from the brutalities of daily reality, "life in a stained glass foxhole," as one wag once quipped. What difference does public ritual really make, people wonder, in a world where there is no hope? If anything, some conclude, religious ritual is a negative

force, since it may sap energies that could be better devoted to struggling with the issues of survival and justice.

In this book, I am not going to try to justify the Church's classic liturgy to anybody, whether academician, city dweller, or anyone else, although, as I have written each chapter, I have remained very much aware of the worlds in which I have lived and the pathos of their citizens. Rather, I want to take the reader by the hand, so to speak, and lead him or her into the experience of the Church's classical liturgy.

I know that there are many sensitive souls in many worlds, academia, the city, and elsewhere, whose lives have already been touched, even captivated, by some encounter with liturgical worship, if not by a lifetime's exposure to it. This book is addressed to such persons, whether they be sophisticated intellectuals, street-smart urbanities, or questioning and questing suburbanites — a world with which I am also thoroughly f amiliar.

I want to show the reader, in terms of personal experience, that the Church's public liturgy need not remain a strange phenomenon} once someone has entered into the experience with some understanding. On the contrary, no matter where you're coming from, you can get carried away. Your life can be transformed. You can find meaning and hope, and a new sense of direction, in the company of other like-minded souls. That's the kind of experience to which I would like to lead the reader;

I would hope, therefore, that this book might find some use not only in the pastor's study, but also in new member classes and in "refresher courses" on the meaning of worship, in congregations of every size and location. I would also hope, more particularly, that the book could be helpful in campus ministry settings, perhaps even in some introductory college courses on "the phenomenology of ritual." Should this book, in addition, somehow find its way to the religion shelf of the local supermarket, along side of the "New Age" paperbacks and the spiritual self-help manuals, I would be overjoyed, since I believe that the historic liturgy of the Church has a great deal

to offer to a world where many people are looking for "the latest thing."

This book is dedicated to the Rev. Dr. Henry E. Horn, Pastor Emeritus, University Lutheran Church, Cambridge, Massachusetts. He was my pastor during the years when I was an undergraduate and when I was a graduate student in theology. Subsequently, he was my senior colleague at that same congregation for three years. And he has been a good friend and mentor for many years since. I owe more than I can say to this distinguished liturgical statesman of American Lutheranism. We have differed, of course, and still do, about some interpretive and practical matters. But those differences in no way diminish my debt to h im.

I also want to thank the students, faculty, and staff at Wellesley College, where I found myself faced every Sunday with the challenge of leading a highly critical but eager academic congregation in worship, for thirteen years. Those fellow citizens of academia were patient with me, and made every effort to be supportive. I especially wish to thank three students, who have subsequently gone on to be pastors themselves, Susan Andrews, Janet Nelson, and Elizabeth Hendrickson, each of whom was an energetic, innovative, and inspiring partner with me in liturgical leadership.

Most immediately, I am grateful for the dedication and the support of the whole congregation of Grace Lutheran Church, Hartord, Connecticut, a multi-ethnic, innercity church, which I often call Amazing Grace, and for good reason. Here the experience of worship is at its liturgical best, I believe. The service and witness of that congregation in its own world is in many ways remarkable, too. This is the fertile field of liturgical experience from which this book's immediate spirit of excitement grows.

H.P.S.

I. INTRODUCTION: AN INVITATION TO EXPERIENCE THE ACTION

Immediately after he had been called by Jesus, the Gospel of John tells us, the apostle Philip went to Nathanael and said: "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

Nathanael responded, memorably: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Undaunted, Philip replied, "Come and see." (John 1:45-46)

People sometimes approach liturgical worship with assumptions like Nathanael's. This kind of worship, they assume, is "too traditional" or "too formal" or "too complicated" or "just going through the motions" or "just irrelevant." What good could come out of the Church's historic liturgy?

1. The Problems and the Invitation

As newcomers fumble to find the right pages in their hymnals, only to find that by the time they have done so the liturgy has apparently moved on to yet another place, they sometimes feel emb a ras sed or frustrated or even angry.

How could an order for worship that requires what seems to be endless page-turn!ngs, and so many different actions -- standing, kneeling, greeting your neighbor, making the sign of the cross, approaching the altar, eating and drinking, maybe clapping your hands, as well as just plain sitting in your pew, touch you deeply and intimately?

How could an order of worship that surrounds you with so many different stimuli, coming at you from every direction -- colors that vary from season to season for no obvious reason,

clergy heavily garbed in unique garments, arcane Greek symbols, maybe hand-made banners, perhaps elaborate chants, even incense, and more -- be able to offer you comfort and hope? What good indeed could ever come from such an experience?

The unfolding descriptions and accounts of this book are intended to answer those kinds of questions. But first I want to say what Philip said to Nathanael: "Come and see."

The best introduction to the liturgical worship of the Church is to go to worship — and to see for yourself. The experience of liturgical worship, as it leads you to encounter the Holy God and the amazing grace of this Holy God, can never be fully explained, nor even fully described. No one can tell you satisfactorily what it means to join with the People of God and sing a hymn such as this one, from the ancient Liturgy of St. J ame s :

Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
And with fear and trembling stand;
Ponder nothing earthly minded,
For with blessing in his hand
Christ our God to earth descending
Comes our homage to demand. CD

You will have to be there, to share in the experience, in order to begin to grasp its meaning and its power.

Hence my invitation to the reader to experience the vitalities of the Christian Liturgy is, as a matter of course, first an invitation to "get where the action is." Go and participate in the public ritual of the Church, where you can encounter the Holy God and come to know His amazing grace. Participate as much as you can, even if, as a newcomer, it feels awkward, even if, as an o Id timer , it feels as if you have walked this way a thousand times before. And then a book like this one will hopefully be able to help you to venture more deeply into the vitalities of the experience.

It’s not unlike learning a foreign language. Any

experienced language student will tell you that the best way to learn the language is to go to the land where that language is spoken, and to struggle to speak it. I did that once, and I found that I had no trouble talking with professors about theology. But I had a lot of trouble talking to the butcher. After awhile, however, and not without numerous frustrations, I found it possible to speak with the butcher, and the baker, and the candlestick maker. It was, for me, a little miracle all of its own. At first I thought that I would never be able to speak the language fluently enough "to get around." But I resolved to try (with some encouragement from my friends). I kept at it. And I did it.

In this spirit I am encouraging the reader: go to the land where this liturgical language is spoken, or, if you have already been there, return. That is the best way to begin to discover or to rediscover the vitalities of the Church's liturgy. Go through the motions. Speak the words. Fumble with the hymnal, perhaps, as I used to fumble with my guidebook to find the "commonly used phrases" section. But go. Get where the liturgical action is.

It will be evident that I am writing with the newcomer in mind. Liturgy can seem like a strange world to you, indeed. I hope that this guidebook will help you to get more fully acquainted with the life of this new land.

As I have also indicated, I am writing for the old timer, too. Sometimes a simple and direct, step-by-step refresher course can be of considerable help to those who are already thoroughly familiar with the liturgy, but who may have been "going through the motions" so long that they have forgotten what some of those motions mean. Or perchance they never learned what some of them mean in the first place.

I invite both newcomers and old timers to get where the liturgical action is, seeking new understandings. And I hope that this guidebook will help you to deepen that experience along the way.

(4)

This ij^ a guidebook, not a textbook. For extensive study of the Christian liturgy, for an extended discussion of current theological issues and urgent historical questions, the reader will have to look elsewhere. Some suggestions for where to turn in this respect, as well as other related information about the liturgical seasons and the symbols of the liturgy, can be found in the appendices.

On the other hand, this is not a manual either. Although it has many implications for liturgical practice, some of which I will explicitly underline, this is not a "how-to" book that discusses the the rubrics for worship. I want to introduce the reader to the experience, not to the logistics, of liturgical wo rship.

Like most guidebooks, moreover, this book is at once a personal statement and a volume that attempts to show you how to get around in order to see "the essential features" of the place you are exploring. Every guidebook is written from the author's own vantage-point (what _I would advise you to see in New York City would differ from the advice another author would offer you). But what follows, however personal and parochial it might be in perspective, is intended to cover the territory sufficiently enough so that once you have followed this guidebook you will have a good idea of what the place is like (I would be remiss, I suppose, whatever I felt about the matter, if I did not advise you to see the Statue of Liberty or the Metropolitan Museum of Art during your visit to New York City).

I write about the Christian liturgy from my own particular vantage point, then, which happens to be North American, 1ate-twentieth century Lutheran, and which happens to be informed and inspired by my own enthusiastic involvement in the liturgical worship of this particular Christian family. But at the same time, I want to show the reader the essential features of the Christian liturgy, as they might readily be recognized also by Anglicans or Roman Catholics or others, although their guidebooks

would probably offer different itineraries.

To use the appropriate terminology here, charged as it is for some: my goal is to lead the reader into a deeper experience of "the catholic liturgy." The word catholic is often taken to mean "universal." More specifically, I take it to mean at least this much: ecumencial (widely shared, not just Lutheran), historic (ancient and traditional, not invented yesterday), and global (international, not just North American or European). In this sense, this volume is intended to be a catholic guidebook for many places, not just a parochial directory for my own particular place.

Instructed by the great Anglican liturical scholar, Gregory Dix, although not following the detailed argument of his classic study, The Shape of the Liturgy,CT) I believe that the Christian liturgy has a fundamental shape, which the tutored eye can see, no matter how widely different denominational or ethnic traditions might diverge from one another (just the way New York City is New York City, even though you might hear quite different descriptions of it from residents of downtown Manhattan and residents of Harlem).

3. A Guidebook for a Public Ritual

Perhaps the chief assumption of this kind of catholic approach to liturgical worship should be underlined without delay, so that the reader can orient himself or herself at the outset. It will quickly become apparent if it is not already clear, as the itinerary of this book unfolds, that from this catholic perspective worship is first and foremost a public ritual of the gathered congregation, not first and foremost a private activity of the individual. The Church's liturgy is a public feast, essentially, rather than a solitary mountain-top experience. (T)

"These things I remember," the Psalmist says, "as I pour out

my soul: how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival." (Ps . 42:4) This book is wirtten with that kind of memory vividly in mind.

"Be filled with the Spirit," says the writer of the Letter to the Ephesians, in words reminiscent of the Psalmist's, "addressing one another in psalms and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father." (Eph. 5:18b-20) I am taking it for granted that the Church's liturgy is this kind of communal festivity, shaped by our confession of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as God discloses Himself to us in His Word.^T)

In my own denominational tradition, such convictions come to expression especially in the great Hymn of Praise, which gives me my title for this guidebook:

> This is the feast of victory for our God. Alleluia.
> Sing with all the people of God and join in the hymn
> of all creation.
> Blessing and honor and glory and might be to God and-
> the Lamb forever. Amen. (D

Getting where the action is therefore means, for this guidebook, first and foremost going through the motions of worship wi th the gathered People of God, not first and foremost opening up your own heart to God, wherever you might happen to be. The aura of holiness of a great cathredral can be so awe-inspiring when you stand there in solitude that you can be driven to your knees, likewise for the vistas you see from the pinacle of some beautiful mountain. But this is not yet worship, as I am describing it in this narrative.

Worship, as I understand it here, is more like playing your violin in a great symphony orchestra concert than playing your violin at home, however beautifully you might play it at home — or at the seashore or on a mountain top, for that matter, or anywhere. In this concert, to be sure, individuals have

different parts, and that is important. It makes for a more beautiful concert for the listeners (God and us). But there ij5_ a prescribed order for this concert — the score — that everyone follows. And it is vigorously presided over, we would hope, by a conductor (the pastor) who knows the score very well, from schooling and experience, and sensitively facilitated by "section leaders" (deacons), who help the many instruments to blend together harmoniously.

This is not to suggest — far from it — that you are not to open your heart to God as you worship or that you will never find yourself "carried away," profoundly moved in your own heart, by the beauty of the experience. My whole purpose in writing is that you might have a meaningful part to play in the Church's liturgy and, with it, a compelling worship experience of your own. Here the point is simply this: first things first.

The way to the experience of your own that you desire leads you to do the public thing first, not your own thing. The orchestra and the score have the priority. That being the case, you can then experience the beautiful music in your own heart, as you make your own contribution to the concert. In liturgical worship, in this catholic sense, we focus first of all on the‘ public rite, rather than the private meaning, so that all of us can experience together, and thereby individually, the vitalities of this feast all the more.

I am aware, finally, that there are other "non-liturgical" forms of Christian worship — from Quaker silence and ecstatic Pentecostal praise to the "free worship" of churches in traditions of Congregationalism. I am not going to argue here that any one approach is better than any other. I believe, as a matter of fact, that most of the historic and contemporary expressions of Christian worship have a rightful, providentially ordained place in the great sacrifice of praise of the universal Church of Christ. (6~) My purpose here is not argumentative, but confessional. I want to lead that reader who is already interested in liturgical worship into a deeper experience of the vitalities of that worship, as I know those vitalities, or many of them, from my own experience.

4. To The Baptistry

Our first stop in these explorations, however, will not be the liturgy itself. We must make a necessary "detour" in this "guided tour." I trust the reader will understand.

I was on a tour myself once, visiting a great castle in Europe. I was eager to explore its ramparts, its towers, its great hall, its hidden passageways. After introducing us to the tour, however, our guide insisted that we first visit a large medieval house outside the castle. There we found maps of the region, and charts telling about the history of the castle, its people, its enemies, its renovations at various times. It was an instructive detour.

In this spirit, I want to lead the reader first to the baptistry. Historically, the baptistry was a free-standing holy place, adjacent to some church buildings, usually on the west side. Its purpose was — baptisms. It was designed as a free-standing structure because Baptism had been regarded, since the earliest Christian centuries, as the sacrament that marks leaving the world and being incorporated into the Body of Chris t.

Baptism is the passageway, in other words, between the profane world (the word "profane" means: "in front of the temple") and the sacred world of the liturgy.

In some church buildings, the passageway position of Baptism is still more apparent, architecturally. The baptismal font is placed just inside at the main entrance of the building. All the faithful are reminded, therefore, as they enter the place of worship, that "that's the way they came into the Church." Which is also to say, that is the way they left the world behind.

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1. "bet All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence," Lutheran_Book_of_Worship (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978), no. 198. Hereafter : LBW.

2. See "Directory for Helpful Reading," below.

3. The word "liturgy" itself suggests as much. In the original Greek, it is a combination of leitos (public) and ergon (work). In the society of the Greek world a lei tourgos was a public servant, and le itourgi a meant service specifically offered to the c ity state .

4. It will be evident that I take the traditional, trinitarian "Name of God," Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for granted. In my own liturgical practice, I baptize in this name, and in no other. At the same time, as I will suggest presently, I have discovered that there are many edifying, biblically rooted ways to praise God, which do not always explicitly invoke the trinitarian Name.

5. LBW.

6. See the essay by Richard A. Baer, Jr., cited in Directory for Helpful Reading, below.

II. LEAVING THE WORLD: THE EXPERIENCE OF EMIGRATION

I once shocked an entire congregation by threatening to drown a baby. Or so it seemed to them at the time. One Easter Sunday morning, we had placed a large white pottery bowl, some four feet high and three feet wide, at the head of the main aisle, at the front of the sanctuary. Then we filled that great white bowl with much water.

The congregation sat in stunned silence at the very beginning of that Easter liturgy, as the mother removed the baby's baptismal garments and revealed him in his aboriginal nakedness. Then there was a gasp, as I took the little one, and plunged him under the water three times, saying, "Matthew Paul, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

I was more stunned that most others, it turned out. It was a charged experience especially for me. That baby was my son; Conceivably, he could have drowned! In a sense he did die. I have pondered that experience ever since, whenever I have thought about the meaning of the liturgy.

To go to the land where the language of the Christian liturgy is spoken, to speak that language as your own, and to claim its promise, you have to pay a price. Not that anyone is going to be selling tickets at the door. Far more profoundly, if you are to worship God "in Spirit and in Truth" (Jn. 2:24), you must leave the world. You cannot serve two masters. And that leaving will cost you. You must die to the world. Then you can claim the promise. This has been the experience of the People of God since ancient times.

The story began more than a thousand years before the birth of Christ. A group of slaves were living in Egypt. They were among the despised of the earth, those Hebrews. The very name,

Hebrew, seems to have meant "no people," or as we might say, the scum of the earth. But, according to the ancient story, the God of their forebears raised up a great leader from their midst, by the name of Moses. And Moses proclaimed this message to the people: you shall be free! Moses told them that the Lord their God wanted to lead them to a new land, a land of liberty and abundance, a land flowing with milk and honey.

But to claim the promise, this nation of slaves had to leave Egypt behind -- which, it turned out, was not an easy decision for them to sustain. For all its pain and suffering, as they later remembered when they grumbled in their tents in the wilderness, Egypt was a land of stability and order and enough food to eat. Egypt was, afterall, "home."

As it turned out, however, the people had to go through the terrifying experience of the Red Sea waters and contend with the suffering and the apparent aimlessless of forty years of wandering in the wilderness. They had to pay a price. Then, and then only, according to the biblical story, could they lay claim to the land of promise.

The eighteenth century hymnist, Thomas Olivers, tells thie-very story, now with reference to the coming of Christ, in his great hymn, "The God of Abraham Praise." This is his picture of the Christian leaving the world:

> The God of Abr'ham praise,
> At whose supreme command
> From earth I rise and seek the joys
> At his right hand.
> I all on earth forsake --
> Its wisdom, fame, and pow'r —
> And him my only portion make,
> My shield and tow'r.
>
> Though nature's strength decay,
> And earth and hell withstand,
> To Canaan's bounds I urge my way
> At his command.

The watery deep I pass,
With Jerusalem in view.
And through the howling wilderness
My way pursue. (T)

For the Christian faith, since New Testament times, Baptism has been the way to leave the world. Baptism is the Red Sea waters. Baptism is the sacrament of initiation. Baptism is the way into the wilderness of a life lived by faith alone. Baptism is the way to begin paying the price and claiming the promise that the People of God are called to pay and to claim. In this sense, Baptism is the gateway to the liturgy.

All this is reflected, architecturally, in the structure and the imagery of the historic baptistry (as we see such a typical structure, beginning where the archeological evidence begins, in the third and fourth centuries). Baptistries were free standing buildings (at first, only one in each episcopal city) designed, in their early forms, to look like tombs — signifying entrance into death. The shape of the fonts inside the baptistries (usually recessed into the floor) sometimes took up the same theme, being hexagonal, thereby reminding converts of the sacrifice of Christ on the sixth day of the week, and of their own identification with that death. The few steps down into the font were generally severe, also to portray the descent into death. The decorative imagery on the inside walls of the baptistry often suggested similar themes, reproduced from Christian sepulchral art, such as the figure of the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep.

On the other hand, as they entered the baptistry, converts could also see signs of hope and signs of life, all around them. The baptistries themselves, and also the fonts inside, were sometimes octagonal in shape, announcing the eighth day, Easter, when Christ rose from the dead, and calling to mind the candidates' own rising with Christ in the baptismal rite. Likewise, star-studded domes represented heaven and eternal life.

The rite of Baptism gradually developed into a complex ritual , commensurate with such richly symbolic surroundings

Here again the themes of death and resurrection shaped the imagery. Death: the dis robing of the candidates, their descent C_B into the waters, and having the waters poured over them. Life: the anointing of the candidates with oil, which was meant to be a sealing with the Holy Spirit, whom the Nicene Creed calls the life-giver, then the robing of the candidates in the white robes of the saints and their being led up the steps again, on into the main building for the liturgy.

1. The Baptismal Price

The renowned Protestant theologian, Karl Barth, perhaps the singlemost important Protestant thinker of our century, would have taken issue with me, had I found opportunity to tell him about the Baptism of my son. Barth argued passionately — against the church of his time — that the practice of infant Baptism should be abolished. Barth had seen too many abuses.

Barth had witnessed pastors in Germany "making the rounds" in hospitals, close on the heels of the obstetricians it appeared, baptizing babies. He had also witnessed millions of adult Germans, who had been baptized as infants, living as if their Baptism had meant nothing at all to them, as they cheered on the Anti-Christ, in the person of Adolf Hitler.

Better then, Barth maintained, postpone Baptism until the adult years, so that in "renouncing the Devil and all his works," as the baptismal rite asks people to do, believers will be able to make their own mature decision to say No to the Devil and Yes to Christ, rather than have someone else make that decision for them, with little actual effect later on. Barth's argument against infant Baptism was, and is, a powerful one.

Consider the world in which the Church baptizes -- today. It is a world of death and violence, for many people. The vast majority of the people on this earth, including millions in the United States, live in poverty. ® Vitriolic wars of regional

scope, moreover, continue to be fought. Globally, the environment of this good earth, on which all human life depends, continues to be threatened, and the spectre of international nuclear war -- notwithstanding recent breakthroughs in the disarmament process — continues to haunt the future of our species. Closer to home, basic institutions such as the family continue to deteriorate, signaled by the constantly increasing suicide rate for both the elderly and our youth. The crime rate in our great metropolitan centers has reached appalling levels, too, predicated on the deadly powers of the drug subculture.

In the meantime, at home, the pacesetters of the society continue to whistle a happy tune in the midst of all this darkness, as if little were awry. Some seek familial solace in the distant places of nature, far away from the loud noises of world history, whether in wilderness haunts or in exurban condominiums. Others seek private solace, through a myriad of self-help therapies or cheery theologies of possibility or positive thinking. Still others charge after material success for themselves, with blindfolds on, as if there were no tomorrow. Some also attempt to drown out the noise of the darkness by imbibing what they perceive to be quick-fix trips to peace of mind, or to the final peace of death, with alcohol or other d rugs . (I)

Our North American world surely differs markedly from the world of Hitler's Germany, thankfully. But, overall, we live in a world of death and violence all the same, a world in which the powers of darkness sing their dirge from dusk to dawn every day. This is the kind of world in which the Church baptizes, as Karl Barth, in his own time, realized so profoundly.

Ours is a world, strangely enough it might seem to some, which therefore resonates deeply with the witness of the New Testament twenty centuries ago, as Barth also knew. To begin with, the New Testament sees the world, notwithstanding the fact that the world was created as a place of material, political, and spiritual blessing by God, as a place dominated by the principalities and powers of death. "For we are not contending against flesh and blood," says the letter to the Ephesians, "but

' against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places." (Eph. 6:12) Likewise, the first letter of Peter urges believers to be sober and watchful, for "your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." (I Peter 5:8)

Set in this context, for the New Testament mind, the act of Baptism must therefore be a wrenching experience, a radical deliverance out of the clutches of death and violence to a totally new world of life and peace. That is precisely the way the apostle Paul thinks of Baptism -- as the experience of dying to the old world and rising to the new, with the risen Lord:

> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Ro. 6:3-4)

According to the faith of the New Testament, then, Baptism stands for a bottomless sea between the old and the new, between the world of death and the world of life, through which every believer must be transported. Baptism stands for the crucifixion of the old and the creation of a radically new beginning.

Further, for the New Testament, Baptism also means being transported to an entirely new world, free from the clutches of the principalities and powers, to be nurtured by the life-support system of a new community, the Body of Christ. God called a people out of Egypt to be His own, not just an individual here, an individual there. So the New Testament envisions God calling together a new people, through the waters and the promise of Baptism: people who once were "no people," but who now are to be "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people." (I Peter 2:9)

As the gateway for leaving the world and its claims, then, Baptism is both a wrenching individual departure and a radically renewing communal arrival. It is easy to see, therefore, why

-Barth should have come to be so adamently opposed to infant (Baptism, since it appeared to him to have become a kind of anti-sacrament. As it was practiced in his time, Baptism seemed to offer Christian families at most a kind of warm domestic contentment -- to see darling babies "christened" -- but it did not have the radical effect of leading the baptized out of the darkness into the light. Rather, as Barth read the history of his own times, the baptized were the ones who, in scandalously large numbers, reveled in the land of darkness.

The issue to which Barth points us, however, seems to be deeper than he appears to have realized, powerful as his critique of infant Baptism was and is. The deeper issue is not whether the Church should baptize infants, but whether the Church is going to take the sacrament of Baptism with full, biblical seriousness in our time.

For, believers who have been baptized as adults can themselves, of course, forsake that Baptism, and "sell out" to the principalities and powers of darkness. There is no guarantee — even with the most concerted critical and supportive guidance and nurture on the part of the Church -- that any baptized adult will remain faithful to his or her calling to be a child of the ■ light rather than the darkness. A Church, indeed, that would resolutely guide and nurture its baptized children would in all likelihood end up being a much more faithful Church than one that would leave its baptized adults to fend for themselves.

More profoundly, I believe that the whole Church, and indeed the whole world, urgently needs the witness of infant Baptism in these times: as a testimony to the glories of God's Grace, and to His creative power, as a witness to God's unmerited deliverance of sinners from the powers of death and from the bondage of sin, as the sign that the Creator who first brought the whole world into being ex nihilo is here doing a new thing of comparable scope, establishing a new creation, now as the Redeemer of all things.

Still, the discussion of the issue of infant Baptism is by no means over, nor should it be. ® But whatever the future

course of the discussion, this must surely be the outcome: the Church must find a way to recapture the biblical understanding of Baptism, as the sacrament of dying and rising with Christ, as the sacrament of saying No as well as Yes, as the sacrament of leaving the world as well as being incorporated into the Church.^)

3 . The Baptismal Promise

But dying and rising with Christ is just the beginning. Or, better said, dying and rising with Christ is the beginning of a lifelong struggle and a lifelong adventure in newness of life, nurtured by the life of the new community. It is a struggle and an adventure that is constantly reaching out for the life of the Promised Land, so that the faithful might begin to live that future life, by anticipation, under the conditions of the wilderness of this world.

Thomas Olivers shows us the vision that informs the life of ' the People of God in this world, with these words, also from his hymn "The God of Abraham Praise":

The goodly land I see
With people and plenty blest,
A land of sacred liberty,
And endless rest.
There milk and honey flow,
And oil and wine abound,
And trees of life forever grow
With mercy crowned.

There dwells the Lord our King,
The Lord our righteousness,
Triumphant o'er the world and sin,
The Prince of Peace.
On Zion's sacred height,

His kingdom he maintains,
And glorious with his saints in light
Forever reigns. (6^

If that is the world for which we wait, and toward which we are moving, then our life here and now — in the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit — will reflect that future world.

This is expressed strikingly by the Letter to the Ephesians, which exhorts Christians to walk according to the vocation to which they have been called, "with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forebearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph. 4:1-3) That is what newness of life looks like, here and now, in part, according to the witness of the New Testament. The Church lives in two worlds, in this sense, the world of death and violence around us, and the world of life, peace, and light before us.

But the calling of this community of the baptized is not only the calling to embody that future world, as, in the Spirit, it is enabled to do in this world. The calling of the community of the baptized is also to be a wi tness -- to be a light to the world (Mt. 5:14). As "a holy nation, God's own people," the calling of the Church is "to declare the wonderful deeds of the One who brought them out of darkness into His marvelous light." (I Peter 2 :9)

As the Bible portrays that promised world, more particularly, it is to be a land for all the nations of the earth. This is how the Book of Revelation envisions that coming Kingdom:

> By its light shall the nations walk, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, and its gates shall never be shut by day -- and there shall be no light there; they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. (Rev. 21:24-26)

Baptism, in this sense, is a sacrament of universal hope as well as a sacrament of particular initiation. For, it signals the

beginning of a Divine initiative that is intended for all peoples .

This was the original intention of Baptism, as we hear Jesus saying at the end of the Gospel of Matthew:

> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obsrve all that I have commanded you. (Mt. 28:19-20)

That original intention will, furthermore, be reflected as a matter of course in the life of the baptized, who live in the light of that universal promise, as Paul emphasized to the Galatians. The Church will be o_f^ all nations, as well as for all nations:

> For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ: there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:27-28)

The same multi-national character of the Church is announced in the New Testament account of the day of Pentecost, when, filled with the Spirit, the members of the apostolic community began to speak in many tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance:

> Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians.... (Acts 2:9-11)

This means that Baptism is a sacrament of a new creation, as well as a sacrament of deliverance. Baptism means freedom in two senses, freedom from the clutches of the principalities and powers of death and darkness, but all the more so freedom for a life that seeks to embody the universal promise of God for the nations in terms of brotherhood and sisterhood within the Body of Christ, here and now, as a witness to all nations of the Kingdom

Baptism, therefore, stands for equality and for love for all peoples in a world where the spirit and the structures of hierarchical domination rule supreme. Around us in the sinful wilderness of this world we see people "lording it over" each other, at every turn: nation over nation, rich over poor, men over women, whites over blacks. This spirit and these structures of domination, in turn, foster an environment of distrust and hatred which pits people against each other at every level, no matter how much they might have been dominated themselves. Those who have themselves been dominated seek to dominate others, either within their own groups or elsewhere, "lower on the totem pole ."

In this world of dominating powers, then, this is the universal promise of Baptism, which the People of God are called by God to embody, here and now: the incorporation of people from every nation, every class, young and old, men and women, into the community of the children of light, and the life of equality and love for all within that community, as a witness to the nations. This is in keeping with the prophecy of Joel, which the apostolic Church took up in a new way, in the wake of the experience of Pentecos t :

> And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. (Acts 2:17-18)

3. The Baptismal Practice

Practice does not make perfect, in this case, or perhaps in any case. But practice can make real.

The fact that the liturgy of the Church is rooted in the waters of Baptism will have radical (which means: pertaining to the roots) implications for the worship life of the Church. Once you have entered the baptistry, in other words, once you have contemplated the meaning of Baptism, and then taken it to heart, you will henceforth have specific expectations for what you must see when you go to participate in the liturgy of the baptized.

As you leave the baptistry to join in the liturgy, you will expect to encounter an experience where the people "take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them." (Eph. 5:11) You will expect, in keeping with the command of Jesus and the Pentecost message, to encounter people from every nation, men and women, young and old, rich and poor, overcoming the spirit and the structures of domination that run rampant in the wilderness. You will expect to join with people who, as Ephesians says, speak the truth in love, who are growing up in every way unto Him who is the head, into Christ, so that the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love. (Eph. 4:15-16)

Do not be surprised, therefore, to hear references during the liturgy, particularly in the sermon and the prayers, that condemn the death-wielding powers that support racism in our society, or the deadly indifference of a nation that allows a shockingly high infant mortality rate in its major cities, or the conventional mores that prompt some juries to blink at the brutalizing experience of rape. Do not be offended when you hear utterances which condemn the war machines and the war profiteers of this world, and which remind you, sometimes to the point of spiritual fatigue, about the plight of the hungry in this world.

Do not be appalled if you hear strong language directed against those forces that destroy families, and against the practitioners of fornication and intoxication, in particular. Do not be shocked by prayers that ask God to intervene on the side of poor tenants, and to put down the uncaring and indifferent absentee landlords from their thrones, to exalt those of low degree. , in your own city.

Such utterances are not "interruptions" in an otherwise smooth and comforting flow of Christian worship. They are not alien intrusions of "politics" into some allegedly sacrosanct world of "religion." They belong to the essence of the matter. For this is the liturgy of the baptized, a people which has been called to say No to the principalities and powers of darkness, as it says Yes to Christ.

And this -- baptismal -- practice makes real. The liturgy, in this sense, is the continuous and repeated practice of the meaning of Holy Baptism. Call it the ritual formation of the baptized. Call it the constant conversion of pagan hearts. Call it going through the motions of faithfulness to God. But whatever you call it, see it for what it is: the practice of the baptized, who have left and who continue to leave the world for a new life with Christ and with one another.

Do not be surprised, likewise, to see signs during the offering, for example, that this worshipping community is resolved to go forth into the world to stand up to the powers of darkness in the name of the Prince of Peace, and to work for the healing of the nations, according to the promises of God. See the food given for the hungry, the monies given to support extension of the Gospel witness, the tools and other materials offered for the renovations of old housing stock for nearby low income people. See, and know.

Do not be surprised, either, to hear a new language and new songs in this liturgy of the baptized. Much of the old language and many of the old songs are as a matter of course tainted by the spirit and the structures of domination that flourish in the wilderness. The old language and the old music take for granted, often unconsciously, a world of "top dogs" and "underdogs," a world of dominating powers and dominated persons. The baptized are called to speak a new language and to sing a new song of sisterhood and brotherhood.

The liturgy of the Church of Christ, in whom there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, should be the first place, therefore, that you will hear people struggling

to speak a language that includes women and their experience, and rejects a language that marginalizes them. It should be the first place also where you will learn to sing the songs of other nations, especially those peoples with whom you live in closest p r oximi ty.

It so happened that I baptized my son in the sanctuary of the Chapel of a women's college, where women took a leading role in religious matters, as a matter of course, as in all aspects of the college's life. In this context it was natural for us — as early as 1970 — to address each other as "brothers and sisters," not just as "brothers," although people from other congregations at that time thought that that practice was "odd."

We also learned at the same time how natural it can feel, and how much more biblical it can be, to address God as "mother" on occasion, while we continued to pray "Our Father" and continued to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. On one occasion, for example, we readily offered this prayer, which flowed unselfconsciously as we spoke it: "0 God of our forebears, mother of us all, carry us in the arms of your tender mercy. Nurture us with your longsuffering love. Strengthen us with your lifegiving power. Inspire us with your healing wisdom, as you once carried, nurtured, strengthened, and inspired our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, at the bosom of Mary, His mother. In His Name, and in memory of her, we pray. Amen."

We experienced that kind of prayer as a biblical enrichment of the liturgy for all of us, for women because many of them felt that their experience was in this way being liturgically elicited, not sup ressed, that it was thei r liturgy, too; for men because many of us experienced a new sense for the meaning of God's promise for all of us.

That same college congregation where I baptized my son was also blessed with a certain ethnic diversity. I first learned to appreciate "liberation theology" liturgically, in that congregation, as African-American students, faculty, and staff members shared their traditions with all of us. In particular, it was during those years that I first learned to sing the

national anthem of the African-American community, the great hymn of James Weldon Johnson, "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

I was inspired, and still am, by that hymn's intense yearning for freedom, reminiscent of the children of Israel in Egypt, by its celebration of God's guidance of the people in the history of their struggles, reminiscent of the Exodus and the wandering of the People of God in the wilderness, and by its proclamation of hope, reminiscent of the ancient People of God singing confident songs of expectation on their way to the Promised Land:

> Lift ev'ry voice and sing
> Till earth and heaven ring,
> Ring with the harmonies of liberty.
> Let our rejoicing rise
> High as the list'ning skies;
> Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
> Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us;
> Sing a song full of the hope that the present has b r ought us;
> Facing the rising sun
> Of our new day begun,
> Let us march on,
> till victory is won. (?)

Without the witness of African-American Christians, which, thankfully, has now become a commonplace part of my own worship life, my liturgical experience, I now realize, would have been much poorer indeed.

Practice does not make perfect, but practice can make real.

As you set forth on this journey of exploration, therefore, seeking to touch deep wellsprings of the Church's liturgy, take this witness with you — the witness of Holy Baptism.

For, to experience worship authentically and with integrity in this liturgy, you must leave the world, and then practice that

leaving again and again. You must know personally that those who gather to worship here have been called to pay a price and to celebrate a promise: to die and rise with Christ, and to walk in newness of life toward what Thomas Olivers called the land of sacred liberty. This is the baptismal experience of emigration.

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1. Olivers, Thomas, "The God of Abraham Praise," LBW, no. 544.

2. Note these statistics from Ruth Lege r Sigard's study, Wo rid Military and Social Expenditures, 1987-88 (cited in The Acceptable Year, ed. William G. Sodt [Bellingham, Washington), II, 8 (July 14, 1988), p. 1):

100,000,000 people have no shelter whatsoever
770,000,000 do not get enough food for an active working life
500,000,000 suffer from iron-deficiency anemia
1,300,000,000 do not have safe water to drink
800,000,000 adults cannot read and write
10,000,000 babies are born malnourished every year
14,000,000 children die of hunger-related causes every year

3. For an insightful analysis of the spirit of our times in the affluent West, and a thoughtful, biblically inspired response, see the study by the Canadian theologian Douglas John Hall, Lighten Our Darkness: Toward an Indigenous Theology of the Cross (Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1976).

4. The statement of the World Council of Chruches, Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry (see "Directory for Helpful Reading" below) recommends, wisely I believe, that churches that practice either form of Baptism should continue to do so, but also learn from each other in the process.

5. The neces si ty of Baptism for salvation is another profoundly important question, which cannot concern us here. The -- legitimate — popular question is: what becomes of unbaptized babies? Whatever approach we take to this question, however, it will hopefully be an approach whose ultimate norm is, as it was

for Karl Barth, the Grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

6. Thomas Olivers, op. c it.

7. James Weldon Johnson, "Lift Every Voice and Sing," LBW, no. 562 .

III. GOING TO WORSHIP: THE EXPERIENCE OF IMMIGRATION

Where do you go to worship? To church, of course. But early Christians had no churches. The basilicas, the cathedrals, and the church buildings we know are all considerably later additions to the life of the Christian people. Originally, "church" referred exclusively to the People of God, to the Body of Christ, to the community (koi non!a) gathered for worship and then sent forth to witness and to serve in the world.

As you move now from the experience of emigration to the experience of immigration, the place for you to take up your new residence, where you can learn to speak the new language and take it to heart, is not primarily a place at all, but rather a people — for whom time has taken on a new meaning.

1. The People of God and Their Time

Early Christians understood the Church primarily as the Holy People, rather than as a Holy Place. Early Christians thus reached back into the earliest days of their Hebrew forebears for their self-understanding, to a time before the temple was built by David, to a time when the People of God worshipped in a moveable tent. The place of worship, in those days, was where the Holy People gathered.

So in the Gospel of John, Jesus identifies his Body with the temple (Jn. 2:19f.), thus radically undercutting and transforming the notion of worship as primarily an activity in some Holy Place. Elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus shifts the attention from Jerusalem and the temple to the presence of the Spirit -- "God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (Jn. 4:24)

Worship happens according to the early Church, we may conclude from pondering these teachings, where people are being united with Christ, by the Spirit. And that can be anywhere, in a catacomb, let us say, or a home, where a few believers might be gathered, or in a cathedral, where a throng might have come together.

Interestingly enough, the Gospel of John self-consciously seems to reach back to the Hebrew theme of the tent. The famous words of John 1:14 about the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us can be translated: "And the Word became flesh, and tented among us."

When we go to worship, accordingly, we go primarily to be with the Holy People, to become partakers of the blessings of the Body of Christ. The place where we worship is not unimportant, but the New Testament reminds us, again and again, to think first of the koi noni a , when we think about going to worship.

And more. This is not just one more nation, among the many nations of the world. This is a chosen race, God's own people, which has been called to declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. This is. a people of hope that lives by the vision of the new world that is to come for all nations, a new world, the people believe, that has already begun to dawn in their own midst. The life of this people, therefore, is shaped by a profoundly new sense of time.

It is worth recalling here the commonplace observation that the New Testament knows two words for time. The first is clock time, chronos . This is the time of the hourglass, that always seems to be running out. This is the time that does run out: it has its finish (finis) . This is the time that leads to death -- "when you're dead you're dead." This is the time of the principalities and powers, which, at the individual level, means "one damned thing after another" and, at the cosmic level, means "a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing." This is the time of entropy.

The other New Testament word for time is fulfilled time

kai r os. This is the time when the harvest is ready, the time of promise. This is the time for the marriage vows, the time of lasting commitments. This is the time when the mother gives birth to a new child, the time of newness of life. This the time of fulfilment (telos), not of finishing (finis) . This is the time, in the mind's eye of the New Testament, that will not run out, but that will be filled up all the more, with the dawning of the Day of the New Heavens and the New Earth, in which righteousness dwells. This is the time of everlasting energy, not entropy. This is the time of the power of the Holy Spirit, not the power of death.

Kai r os is the time that Jesus announced, when He proclaimed his own mission and calling: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the Gospel." (Mark 1:15) Kai r os is the time, as the Letter to the Ephesians affirms, that is the time of God's plan of salvation and consummation for all things, in Christ: "a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." (Eph. 1:10)

Fittingly, therefore, kai r os is also the time for the public ritual of the Church's worship. The Letter to the Ephesians calls upon Christians to "redeem the time" (Eph. 5:16, KJV) . What does that mean? Evidently it means saying No to the powers of darkness, and Yes to the work of Christ: "Walk as children of the light.... Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instad expose them." (Eph. 5:8, 11) This means, in turn, putting an end to this world's debaucheries, and becoming a part of the vibrant experience of public worship, a text to which I have already alluded:

> ...but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father. (Eph. 5:18-20)

The life of the People of God, therefore, which is announced and established in the liturgy, is life in a new time, a time of

hope, the fulfilled time. This is the time by which the people march, on their way to the Promised Land. This is the time which you can experience when you go to worship in the public ritual of the People of God. ^T)

2. The People of God and Their Place

Still, important as going to worship with the People of God in the fulfilled time is, the Church's meeting place has its own holiness, whether it be tent or catacomb or cathedral. The Spirit of God is not jealous. The Spirit of God overflows the People of God, so to speak, and dwells in their meeting place.

In some ways, then, walking into the Church's meeting place, is like walking into someone's home. It gives you that "lived in" feeling -- in this case the "dwelled in feeling" of the Holy Spirit. The Church's meeting place is, as it were, its larger body. This meeting place, in this sense, can be thought of as the temple of the Holy Spirit. The Church's meeting place has its own meanings, therefore, its own glow of sanctity.

Some Christians have on occasion resisted this thought: that the building and the things inside it can be thought of as a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Some Christians have believed, in this connection, that because God is Spirit, and because God is "above," high and lifted up, far beyond anything we can think or feel, that the believer must somehow climb above this material world in which we live, in order to commune with God. Hence it is folly or even idolatry, they have contended, to think or talk about the immediate presence of God in the worship place of the People of God.

In extreme cases, a few Christians have even believed that the biophysical world of nature around us, and the material artifacts and furnishings of human civilization, are evil, particularly the human body, which harbors "the lusts of the flesh."

This was not the teaching of the Bible, however. According (B0 to the Bible, God creates all things good, and indeed draws near to all things of this earth, in order to care for them, sustain them, and bless them. So near is God to the material order, the Bible suggests in various ways, that with the eyes of faith we can see the glory of the Lord reflected everywhere, in all things .

In the liturgy we give testimony to this mysterious Divine immediacy in all created things by enabling worshippers some tangible opportunities to sense that Divine immediacy in the world of matter in specific ways. Hence the plethora of material signs that surround worshippers in our meeting places, so many that newcomers are sometimes bewildered.

The Church's meeting place houses the Table of the Lord, where the people gather. That is its central focus. The Church's meeting place also houses the baptismal font — or that font will be found within a prominent baptistry — reminding us how we all have been delivered from death and given newness of life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.

The Church's meeting place, in addition, houses the platform or podium for the elevated reading and proclamation of the Word of God to the people. The table, the font, the pulpit, and the lectern (from the Latin lege re , "to read") — these are the most important pieces of furniture in our Holy Tent, because it is at each of these places that the central actions of God's communing with His People in the liturgy unfold.

Within the meeting place, moreover, we highlight the chief actions of the people's worship — as they enter into the presence of God, hear and celebrate His Word, offer themselves to God, commune with the Lord, and then make ready to go forth to witness and to serve in the world -- with sets of colorful "paraments" (cloth hangings) or "adornments" (the root meaning of "paraments"). These liturgical colors -- white for the joy of Easter, for example, or purple for the penitential spirit of Lent - — mark the places and ways where God enters into personal

relationship with the gathered people

You will see the same colors in the vestments of the presiding clergy, too, and therein lies a special story which needs to be told, especially for newcomers to whom the whole sight sometimes will appear strange indeed. These vestments, in their own way, witness to the presence of the God who draws near to be with His People, especially through the actions over which His specially chosen and called ministers preside.

Most of these clerical garments originated in the ordinary secular costumes of the ancient Greco-Roman world in which the Church emerged as a public institution. When secular fashions changed, however, the garments of the clergy generally did not. In a sense, those garments had taken on the aura of the holy actions over which the clergy presided. So the vestments of the clergy tended to remain the same, it would appear, as a kind of unspoken witness to the unchanging grace of God. For those who have eyes to see, then, the vestments of the clergy are a proclamation of the unchanging faithfulness of God and His grace.

In the course of church history, furthermore, those more or less unchanging vestments also took on symbolic meanings. The stole, for example, that long, thin cloth, which is afixed around the pastor's neck, originally might have been some kind of a neck scarf in the secular garb of the ancient world. Over the years it became a sign of the priestly calling. In modern times, it has been thought of widely as "the yoke of Christ," signifying that Christ does indeed work through the ministrations of the priestly figure, as he or she presides over the feast. Likewise for the chasuble, the outermost priestly garment, often worn by clergy who preside at Holy Communion: it derives from the "paenula," the outdoor cloak of the later Greco-Roman world. In practice, it has come to be thought of by many clergy as symbolizing the cloak of Divine righteousness, provided by God to cover over their fallibility and their sinfulness. (2*)

We witness a kind of theatrical masking of the presiding actors, at this point. The priestly vestments — and also the vestments that lay assistants sometimes wear and the vestments of

the choir -- announce that what is decisive here is not the imperfection of the sinful mortals who wear them, but the role within the worship life of the People of God that these several leaders have been called by God to play as ministers of God's presence in Word and Sacrament.

At the beginning of every liturgy, when I put on my vestments, I feel like the returning Prodigal Son, who was not worthy to come into his father's presence — "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him....'" (Luke 15:22) And then the feast began.

So, on any given Sunday, you will walk into the Church's meeting place, and the baptismal font, the table, the pulpit, the lectern, and the ministers will all be adorned in the same color, in order to help you discern "where the action is" and to have a new sense, thereby, of God's presence in the place where the people worship .

You may also notice some less prominent features of the worship space, all of which have to do with the nearness of God with His People, too, all of which touch us tangibly, if subtly, in one way or another, with that message. There's something for every sense, it turns out, befitting the Divine command to love God with all your heart and soul and mind, and testifying to the Divine presence in, with, and under this world, for which no creature is too lowly or too humble to be a bearer of its glory.

For the eyes: stained glass windows; paintings or murals that depict the life of Christ; candles; the paraments, the vestments, banners maybe; numerous material symbols, such as the cross? the glorious flow of light from the rising sun, at a given time and place, flooding the sanctuary; the sight of other members of the Body of Christ, each of whose body is a temple of the Holy Spirit; above all the elementally simple but spiritually elegant sight of the baptismal waters and the bread and the wine.

For the sense of touch: your hand touching your heart with the sign of the Cross; your knees feeling the press of the floor

as the touch of God's good earth; the warmth of other believers as you clasp their hands or embrace during the Peace; the shoulder-to-shoulder excitement of the throngs on great feast days; the charged feelings of the bread touching your hand or tongue; the gentle beauty of the silver cup that you guide to your lips. Your whole body, indeed, is in motion much of the time, giving you a certain constant "touch" with the tangibility of the worship space, its people, and its furnishings. You stand, you sit, you eat, you drink, you walk, you talk, you extend your hand, you may smile, you may weep. You may wipe your own tears from your eyes, and be comforted, without ever consciously thinking about the tears of Christ that flow on your behalf. But all those nuances are embedded in your experience, a t some level .

For the sense of smell: the flowers perhaps, above all the lilies on Easter Sunday; also, particularly on festival days, the incense; then, just at Easter time, the breath of spring wafting in the windows; above all, if you are fortunate, communion bread that fragrantly betrays its homemade sources and communion wine that brings with it the aroma of the rudimentary elements of God's earth, the blood of life and the hillsides of vintage growth.

For the ears: the variegated textures of the music, with the blending of human song and instruments of praise; the several resonances of human voices speaking (even the cry of a baby now and then, reminding you of your own frailty and need for the parenting of God); above all the speaking of the Word of God.

For the taste : with noble simplicity and quiet grandeur, the common delectability of the bread and the wine, especially delightful when the bread is homemade and the wine is good enough to have a name of its own.

Those are some of the subtle material signs with which the Lord is ready to bless you, when you enter the meeting place of the People of God. Undoubtedly, all of these subliminal blessings will touch you, in some respect, unconsciously, if not consciously. Let them touch you as they will.

But consciously focus on the places where the liturgical actions are about to happen, which you will see accented in the paraments and vestments of the day, and which themselves will proclaim to you directly how God wants to bless you and to change you. Consciously attend to those places where you can imagine the Lord will be standing, so to speak, during the liturgy: the places from which He now stands ready to welcome you and address you and share His life with you.

When you enter the tent of the Lord, then, as when you enter the front door of the home of friends who have invited you over for a special dinner, you will see that everything is ready -- for you. The Host has been expecting you. The bread and the wine are there, ready to be carried to the table for the holy meal. The pulpit and the lectern and the ministers will all be adorned with colors that announce that something special is about to happen, for your sake. The Communion dishes are ready. The table has been made ready withn an appropriate table cloth, the "fair linen." Externally, in the tent of the Lord, a plethora of arrangements have been made, all with you in mind.

3 . The People of God and Their Sins

Now it is your turn. Everything has been readied for you. But have you prepared yourself? Are you ready to enter into the presence of God, with the People of God? Are you ready to stand before the One who, as your Host, invites you to stand before Him?

You will surely want to prepare yourself internally. You will surely want to do all that you can, as an immigrant, to acclimate yourself to this new world of sacred time and sacred space. What can you do, then, when you enter the tent of the Lord, in order to ready yourself for the liturgy?

Since we know the glorious holiness of the One who has invited us, and we know how we sinful creatures are not worthy even to come near to His presence, we will naturally want to

confess our sins, hear the Word of God's forgiveness, which He has promised us in our Baptism, and then "be still" and know that He is our God, and that we are the sheep of his pasture. We will want to say, with the Prodigal Son when he came to his senses, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." (Luke 15:21)

The spacious silence of the sanctuary helps us to do that, as do the several traditional symbols before our eyes, especially the cross above or on the Table of the Lord. There we see the symbol of the sinless One who carries the weight of our sins.

Some will choose to make the sign of the cross over their heart at this point, as Luther recommended, as a way of personalizing this encounter with the Cross and, at the same time, as a way of recalling the waters and the promise of Baptism -- for you were baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. With this silent motion they say, "Yes, Lord, those sins are mine. Yes Lord, I can only come into your presence if you wash away my sins."

Some will choose to kneel silently in prayer (kneeling is always appropriate at this point, even where no kneeling benches have been provided). Still others will choose to sit quietly, in reflective silence, meditating on the Cross, waiting on the Lord.

The music of the prelude also helps us to ready ourselves, reminding us, as perhaps only sacred music can, of the mystery of God, of His holy otherness and His loving kindness, how He is "high and lifted up," yet "nearer to us than we are to ourselves."

In addition, during some seasons of the Church Year -- Lent, for example, but also at other appropriate times -- the Church offers us special communal responses to aid us in our preparation. The Order for Confession and Forgiveness is one such form. This form is especially valued by many, because as the pastor speaks the Word of forgiveness and assurance, following your confession, that Word comes to you from the outside (Luther called it the "verbum externum"). It is thus

free of our sometimes confused inner preparations for worship, which on occasion "do not work," either because we are slothful and non-attentive , or because we half suspect ourselves of trying to forgive ourselves, which of course no one can do.

But whatever the form of internal preparation, individual or communal, allowing yourself to be touched by the mysterious resonances of silence, the uplifting tonalities of music, the charged sight of the cross, the assuring tangibility of the "external Word," the experience of preparation is the same. "Lord," we say in various ways, "I am not worthy to come into your house, but say the word and I will be healed."

Essential as they are, however, we need not tarry too long with these moments of preparation, as we await the arrival of all the people, contemplate the worship space, and tend to the essential internal preparations. For, the invitation that we immigrants have received from our Host, thankfully, is one that will not wait. He eagerly wants us to draw near to Him, without delay. Like the father in Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son, the Lord, as it were, runs out to greet us and to welcome us, when He sees us arriving. Having embraced us with His forgiveness, again like the father in Jesus' parable, He says to all His servants -- let the feast begin.

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1. It is understandable that some should want to "look at their watches" now and again, before, during, and after the liturgy. Even clergy will do that on occasion, for various reasons. But that is a bad habit that should be avoided. North Americans, who tend to be fixated on clock-time perhaps more than any other people on the globe, especially need to learn how to break with that fixation — it is something akin to drug or alcohol addiction — and to allow themselves to relax enough to be swept up into the experience of fulfilled time.

To begin with, if there is a clock in the worship space, it should be removed (the issue here is not unlike the issue of keeping or removing a national flag in the sanctuary). Further, the scheduling of services and/or other parish programs, such as

Christian education activities, should be done with sufficient generosity to allow the liturgical spontanity of fulfilled time (to flow, and not always force it to be cramped and compacted by the oncoming brute force of the next service or the next class.

When such external adjustments have been made, then, and perhaps then only, will be possible to begin to cope -- pastorally and sensitively — with the internal demands of clock-time that some people bring with them to the liturgy: the people who have roasts in their ovens or appointments to keep or any other fixed points on their clocks that compel1 them to feel, sometimes even before it all begins, that the liturgy is going to be "too long . ”

Too long compared to what? When -- to cite an illuminating parallel -- is love-making too long? Do not happily married couples know how to find non-rushed times for love? Maybe happily committed Christians, whose lives are still in the grips of the "god" chronos, could also learn, in a similar way, how to find "psychological time" -- kai r os -- for liturgy. Not that long is necessarily beautiful; probably it is not. But, in the language of the popular chidlren's song: "Free to Be You and Me" i s beautiful. That is the freedom of kai r os .

In our society this freedom needs to be cultivated constantly by our churches, lest our liturgies be suffocated by the worldly requirements of chrono s.

2. St. Augustine wrote against "the Donatists" to establish precisely the point that the sacraments are effective in the life of the Church, notwithstanding the sinfulness of the ordained clergy. Clerical vestments are in this sense an anti-Donatist proclamation.

IV • ENTERING THE PRESENCE OF GOD WITH THE PEOPLE OF GOD:

THE EXPERIENCE OF ADORATION

When American troops came home from the arduous experiences of the Vietnam War, they came home to a profoundly ambivalent welcome. That war had been a source of bitter conflict within the country itself. Some protesters on the home front, indeed, actually looked at the returning troops as a force for evil, not for good. So, many of the troops simply slipped back into the country, inobtrusively. There were few tumultuous welcomes, few ticker-tape parades.

Contrast the experience of American troops after World War II. They also had been through a grueling experience. They also had suffered many losses, of life and limb. But their involvement in that global conflict was generally supported, sometimes enthusiastically, by the people back home. So when they returned from their long and bitter ordeal, they came home to massive crowds cheering their arrival. Troop ships pulled-into New York harbor, saluted by the high waters of the fireboats. The troops themselves then marched as one body down the great thoroughfares of American life. The bands played. The people cheered. It was a tumultous homecoming.

The Christian liturgy begins with this kind of universal human experience: the anguished ordeal and the tumultuous homecoming. But the militaristic images that sometimes have shaped that experience are here transformed into images of peace and community. The outcome, moreover, is no longer giving glory to the nation and its powers, but to God and His powers. Still, the mood is high and lifted up. The first public movement of the liturgy, after you have gone through the motions of going to worship, is a kind of tumultuous homecoming of a people which has been through the valley of the shadow of death in this world.

The traditional image that informs this public liturgical beginning is the image of the pilgrim throng arriving at the sacred shrine, amidst great excitement. For many of us, the word "pilgrim" has very specific connotations. We think of the first American colonists in New England. The word, however, is deeply rooted in the Christian tradition. It refers generally to someone who is a wanderer in a foreign land in search of some holy place. Most specifically, it can be taken to refer to the ancient People of God, wandering in the wilderness, after the Exodus from Egypt, in search of the Promised Land, finally entering that land of milk and honey.

The Christian Church, like Israel of old, is a wanderer, a pilgrim people. Like ancient Israel also, we do not wander aimlessly, without direction, however confused we might look at any given time. We are on our way to the Promised Land. Indeed, God has made that future real for us here and now, through the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. So we can march into His presence with great joy, with all the loud excitement of a tumultuous homecoming.

For this reason the liturgy begins at the heights, so to speak, not in the valleys. We lift up our eyes to the hills, from whence cometh our help. With the eyes of faith we focus- our attention on "the Lord, who made heaven and earth," who is the protector of His people, who will keep our "going out" and our "coming in," from this time and forever more. (Ps. 121:1,2,4,8)

In the language of our Baptism, in this liturgy we first lift up our hearts to the God and Father of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Subsequent movements of the liturgy, in keeping with the same baptismal language, will focus our attention on the mission of Christ in our midst and on the work of the Spirit in our hearts. Here we lift up our hearts in praise to the eternal mother and fountain of all goodness, the One from whom all blessings flow. In this sense, then, the liturgy begins with the homecoming tumult of public adoration.

1 • The Proces sion

(41)

We signal that we are God's pilgrim people who have come to lift up our hearts in adoration, at the beginning of our liturgy, with the procession. The choir, led by the crucifer carrying the cross, which is the banner of the Promised Land for us, processes in toward the sanctuary, where the lectern, pulpit, and table are located, where the presence of the living Lord is to be ministered to us, in Word and Sacrament. This procession, carried along with the Spirit of praise, as we "rejoice, give thanks, and sing," announces who we are:

Rejoice, 0 pilgrim throng!
Rejoice, give thanks, and sing;
Your festal banner wave on high,
The Cross of Christ your king.
REJOICE! REJOICE! REJOICE, GIVE THANKS, AND SING!

Still lift your standard high,
Still march in firm array,
As pilgrims through the darkness wend
Til dawns the golden day.
REJOICE! REJOICE! REJOICE, GIVE THANKS, AND SING!(T)

The truth that has just been visually and vocally enacted is then verbally proclaimed, in summary form, by the presiding minister, with the apostolic greeting: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

Which is to say: "Dear friends, the salvation of the Promised Land, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, awaits you, and the renewing power of that Holy Land that flows with milk and honey, the Holy Spirit, is ready to minister to you, so that the joy of God above, who is love, can be complete, here below." In responding "And also with you," the people makze. • the same announcement of promise to the presiding minister.

Right from the start, be it noted, the dynamics of dialogue

are established, and they will continue to be a visible, audible feature of this liturgy. This not theatre or TV, in other words, where an "audience" sits back in soft chairs and observes, perhaps waiting to be stimulated or entertained. This was already established when the people rose to their feet, as with one motion, to join in the entrance hymn (on some feast days, in some parishes, the entire congregation -- not just the choir and the liturgical ministers — appropriately processes, as one body, into the nave). That kind of eager participation now becomes explicit, in the form of dialogue, with the apostolic greeting.

This is personal engagement on the part of all, engagement first of all with the God in whose name we were baptized, who as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, lives eternally in dialogue. It is also engagement among the people, who in this way minister to each other, drawing one another into the experience of this pilgrim people.

Sj/Yen Kierkegaard tells the story of a person who is watching a marvelous theatrical production. That person is sitting comfortably, watching as the action on the stage unfolds. Suddenly, says Kierkegaard, the house lights come on. The action on stage comes to a halt. The director of the production comes to the center of the stage and points to the audience -- at you . "Come up here," the director says, "you are to have a part."

The apostolic greeting, in the moment immediately following the great pilgrim processional, is like that. It leaves no doubt that you are to have a part.

2. The Prayer

Then, still on our way into the Promised Land, where "dwells the Lord our King, the Lord our righteousness, Triumphant o'er the world and sin," as Thomas Olivers writes, we turn our attention to the God who awaits us with His mercy "on the other side of the Jordan." We sing together, still in dialogue form,

the ancient prayer of the Eastern Church, the Kyrie ("kurios" means "Lord"). It begins: "In peace let us pray to the Lord." The congregation responds: "LORD, HAVE MERCY."

(43)

Most worshippers in our day are probably not consciously aware how radical a prayer this is. (?) It has its roots in the struggles of the ancient Church to be faithful, at a time when there was one "lord" and one "lord" only in that world — Caesar.Q And that "lord," in addition to everything else he did in obedience to the "god" of war, Mars, also sometimes turned his wrath, in persecution, toward the Church. Christians in those days often risked life and limb when they refused to call Caesar lord, and instead gave their public allegiance to Jesus Christ and to Him alone.

Similar situations have arisen thoughout the history of the Church, for example, when Christians in Nazi Germany were expected to say "Heil Hitler," and some refused, only to be thrown into prison or executed. In our own time, the secret police of the apartheid regime of South Africa likewise have turned their wrath against some Christians who have taken stands against that regime. Those Christians, in turn, have had to decide whether to continue their opposition, whether to risk their lives and the lives of their loved ones, or to cease their public opposition to the government and its policies.

(4)

The Kyrie presupposes that kind of situation. It is a prayer of tenacious confidence in God, over against the principalities and powers of death that wreak such havoc in our everyday experience. For we know that the power of Jesus Christ is indeed greater than the power of any Caesar, and that the Divine ways of mercy and peace revealed in Christ will one day triumph. The Kyrie signals both to the world and to ourselves, then, not only that we are entering into the presence of,God, but <u>which</u> God awaits us: the God who will one day surely triumph over all the evils and death-dealing violence of this world.

Thus understood, the Kyrie can be a great source of comfort to individuals who have been victimized by the violence of this world. A woman who has been subjected to battering in the home,

for example, can be led into an "alternative world" as she joins in the Kyrie. The true Lord of this world, to whom she prays, is the Lord who is revealed as Jesus washes His disciples' feet,and as Jesus befriends the scorned Samaritan woman at the well. The true Lord of this world is not someone who "lords it over" anybody. For this reason, that battered woman can find a safe and healing place within the flow of the Church's liturgy, especially at this point.

Since, moreover, the Table in the midst of the sanctuary is the place that most visibly speaks of the dwelling of the Lord of mercies and peace to whom the Kyrie witnesses, some congregations have fittingly adopted the practice of enacting the Kyrie as a processional. The presiding minister addresses the people with the apostolic greeting at the front of the sanctuary. Then he or she turns and proceeds slowly to the Table, perhaps processing around it (sometimes with incense), chanting this great prayer of radical faith, "In peace let us pray to the Lord," and eliciting thereby the solemn but powerful cadence of the people's response, "LORD, HAVE MERCY." This kind of ritual enactment can make it easier for the faithful to experience the Kyrie as a drama which stands in radical contrast to the notorious processions of those who have adored the Caesars of this world. (T)

3. The Praise

Having addressed this God of peace and mercy, in a world of war and might—makes—right, the mood of the people then changes d ramat i ca1ly.

Now as the presiding minister takes his or her position at the Table of the Lord, the procession and the praying come to a resting place, to a sense of "dwelling," reminiscent of the confessions of Psalm 23: "Thou prepares t a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." This is a time of heightened adoration now, stationed spiritually "on Zion's sacred heights," where the victory of our God can be seen, with eyes of faith, in its pristine beauty.

The presiding minister chants, with great joy: "This is the feast of victory of our God. Alleluia." And the people respond, in the same Spirit, with the great Hymn of Praise, "Worthy is Christ." (D This hymn, a modern composition, is based on some of the majestic themes of the Book of Revelation. In that book, John the Seer wrote to churches in a situation of persecution, on behalf of his vision of the coming New Heavens and New Earth and the Heavenly Jerusalem, when the last vestages of death and violence will have been swept away, and the victory of the Crucified, the Lamb, will have been completed. The Book of Revelation is first and foremost a book of praise emanating from the jubilant choirs of the New Jerusalem. Such themes charge the chords of this great Hymn of Praise with a moving intensity.

In this way, the radical faith already enunciated by the Kyrie -- saying Yes to Christ and His ways and No to Ceasar and his ways — is continued, only now not with tenacious solemnity, but rather with audacious exuberance: with the claim, from the Book of Revelation, that the crucified Lamb is now Lord of all things, and that "power, riches, wisdom, and strength and honor, blessing, and glory are his."

Spiritually speaking, this moment in the liturgy signals that the people have arrived in the Promised Land of God's presence, through Christ our Lord, in the power of the Holy Spirit. The triumph of Christ is herewith announced with a tone of resolute finality. The pilgrim Church therewith emerges from the winding valley of the shadow of death, into the lush and peaceful heights of the new life, where "the Prince of Peace, On

Zion's sacred heights, His kingdom He maintains."

It is a liturgical moment akin to the seventh day of creation, a fulfilled time when the Lord rested from all His labors. The time of entering into the presence of God is over. The work of beginning this feast has come to an end. The people know now that this is indeed the "sweet sabbath," spoken of in the traditions of the African churches. The thought of our struggles in our pilgrimage can be put behind us, for now, as we celebrate the victory of the Lamb and adore Him in His glory.

At last, if but for this timeless moment, we have the sense that we can "dwell in the house of the Lord forever." With the eyes of faith, we find ourselves gazing upon a land flowing with milk and honey, the veritable dwelling place of God Himself, our Emanuel, the One who has become flesh and "tents among us," with all the mysteries of His glory. "For you alone are the Holy One," we sing to our Lord, in this time of elevated spiritual intensity, "you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of the Father. Amen."

For this beautiful moment of adoration, we are no longer strangers and pilgrims on earth, wanderers in the wilderness. With our spirits charged with the Spirit of anticipation, we have arrived. We still stand under the Cross, to be sure. But we stand, at peace. We still see through a glass darkly, to be sure. But we see, without fear. We are at rest in the Lord.

These words of Jesus might fittingly come to the minds of some of the participants, at this moment: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Mt. 11:28) Or these words of Paul: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let all know your fo rebea rance . The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:4-7)

1. Edward H. Plumptre, "Rejoice, 0 Pilgrim Throng!," LBW, no 553.

2. This situation resembles the fate of "the Magnificat" in the life of some parishes, and, beyond, in the concert hall. Sung in Latin by professional musicians in settings by composers such a J. S. Bach, the Magnificat can move people to tears. But in raw translation, read aloud, it becomes a revolutionary statement of Divine deliverance — the mighty shall be put down from their thrones, and the hungry shall be exalted. It is clearly a lot more palatable for the well-fed and the affluent to listen to the Magnificat in Bach's version, than to have to confront the actual prophetic meaning of the words directly.

3. Cf. Gail Ramshaw-Schmidt, Christ in Sacred Speech: the Meaning of Liturgical Language (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 76: "Kyrie eleison [Lord, have mercy] had a long history in the Greek world as a phrase used to welcome the sun and later to laud the emperor. We might imagine a pagan facing the sun at daybreak or townspeople hailing the monarch who processed through the countryside. Like the exclamation 'God save the Queen!' kyri e elei son was a shout of praise and first took the form of a litany of offering prayers for the whole world. Not until medieval times did it acquire the heavy penitential quality that so many of its musical settings s u gge st."

4. See further my theological narrative in South African Testament: From Personal Encounter to Theological Challenge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

5. A "freestanding altar", behind which the pastor and other liturgical ministers can stand facing the people is now common in many parishes. Even when the "altar" is against the wall, however, and the presiding officer faces that wall -- orienting himself or herself "toward God," toward the symbolic east, which is the place of the rising sun, which is identified with the risen Christ -- even then the "altar" will most appropriately be

thought of as the Table of the Lord, where the People of God gather, where God draws near to them to be in their midst, rather than as a "high place," supposedly more holy and heavenly, because it is somewhat removed from the level of the people.

6 . A similar Hymn of Praise, "Gloria in Excelsis ," may also be used at this point, appropriately, during some seasons of the Church Year or for particular festivals.

THE EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNICATION

We live in a culture that is flooded with words. So much so, especially in the case of TV commercials, that we have learned to "tune out" many of the words that fill the air around us. Who really wants to hear one more pitch for a laundry detergent?

At the same time, we live in a society where people are increasingly alienated from each other. In this generation, as in earlier decades, many of us feel as if we are living amidst a "lonely crowd." We thirst for communication. We hire experts to teach us "communication skills." Some spend large amounts of money on various forms of therapy, whose aim it is to help them communicate better with those closest to them.

Now and then we experience a breakthrough, a time when two people have truly communicated with each other. The traditional moment of commitment between a man and a woman can be such a charged occasion — "I love you." Words, spoken in the right context, with trust and commitment, still can be very powerful for us .

Indeed, as the phrase "I love you" indicates, true and deep communication, personally intimate and trustworthy speaking and hearing of words, can radically alter a person's life. A friend of mine once witnessed a high school senior, who had worked long and hard to gain admittance to a certain college, hang up the phone and then go running around the house, running out to the front porch, and then running over to a neighbor's house across the street, all the time jumping up and down, saying, "I'm accepted! I'm accepted! I'm accepted!" Words, in this case a phone call from an admissions office, can still change lives and touch souls, even though we do live in an age in which many words

are cheap .

We explore now a movement of the liturgy in which the dynamics of Divine-human communication are paramount. The charged experience of adoration now gives way to the compelling experience of communication . The focus on the God and Father of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, now gives way to the focus on that very same Jesus Chris t , the Word of the Father made flesh, in the selfsame power of the Holy Spirit.

1. Petitioning the Lord to Speak

Having now entered the presence of God together as the pilgrim people of God, having lifted up our hearts in high praise to adore the triumphant God, in that tumultuous homecoming, we ask this very God to speak with us personally, intimately, and p ower f ully .

As we are at rest in God's presence, we petition God to communicate His Word of "the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation" (Luther) to us anew, so that we, in turn, might once again know how much we have been blessed by His Grace, and then be found faithful in our life of witness and service in the world. This now is our purpose, in the words of the rock musical "Godspell" — that day by day, we might

> Love thee more dearly,
> Know thee more clearly,
> Follow thee more nearly. (1)

"Almighty God," says the Prayer of the Day for the Third Sunday in Advent, in one typical utterance, "you once called John the Baptist to give witness to the coming of your Son and to prepare his way. Grant us, your people, the wisdom to see your purpose today and the openness to hear your will, that we may witness to Christ's coming and so prepare his way...."

In the Prayer of the Day we petition the Lord, in one way or another, to do for us what He once did for ancient Israel, after the people had arrived in the Promised Land — to speak His Word.

This is the image of Ancient Israel's pilgrimage to the Promised Land we find in the Deuteronomic writings in the Old Testament. Delivered from Pharaoh's might in Egypt, the people wander for 40 years in the wilderness, and then finally enter the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey. But there they need to hear the Mosaic teaching, once again, as they heard it constantly in the wilderness, lest they forget that they were once slaves in Egypt, lest they begin to think that they gained all these blessings on their own.

Hence the people of Israel must keep telling and hearing their own story, even after they have arrived, and keep hearing and reponding to the commands that the Lord gave them in the wilderness, if they are to hold firmly to their identity in the new land. To this end, according the the Deuteronomic tradition, God communicates with them, through the words of the prophets, above all through the words of Moses, the greatest of the p r ophe ts .

Likewise, the part of the liturgy before us now, sometimes called "the Liturgy of the Word," is the time when we tell and respond to the story of our salvation. We hear the good news of God's deliverance and promise, and the commands of our God. As we gather in the Promised Land of God's presence, He speaks with us, and we respond in kind, in the power of the Spirit. The Prayer of the Day asks for all this, with varying emphases depending on the season.

2. God's Speech and Our Response

God addresses us in the lessons for the day, and we respond to each one with psalm or song. It is important that none of the lessons be omitted, that all of the lessons be read, especially

the first lesson, which is from the Old Testament. Early in its history the Church rejected a sophisticated attempt by a certain Marcion to excise the Old Testament. The Old Testament is essential because it witnesses to the whole dispensation of God, beginning with creation, and because it first establishes the witness to our salvation as a historical reality.

The Old Testament tells the story of the People of God, delivered from slavery in Egypt, wandering in the wilderness, coming to the Promised Land, then their being thrown into exile, and more. The Church needs the Old Testament to establish its own story and its own identity as the "new" People of God.

The Old Testament also reminds us, constantly, that salvation and deliverance, justification and justice, go hand in hand, as far as the Bible is concerned. It would be all too easy to misread the New Testament as a highly "spiritual" book, with no interest in this world ("My kingdom is not of this world," Jesus says in the Gospel of John [Jn. 18:36]), if it were torn away from its Old Testament roots. Including the Old Testament lesson in our liturgies on a regular basis, therefore, makes it possible for us to hear the full Word of God to His world, not a truncated, spiritualized word.

Following the communication of God's Word to us in the first two lessons (the second generally being a reading from one of the New Testament letters), God seeks to address us personally in the reading of the Gospel, from one of the first four books of the New Testament which highlight the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.

All along we have been waiting for God to address us this way, to draw near to us, and to dwell among us as the Word made flesh. So, in eager anticipation, we rise to our feet to hear the Gospel, as soon as it is announced.

The presiding minister sometimes enacts the movement of the Word to dwell anew in our midst, through the reading of the Gospel, by processing to the middle of the congregation, and inviting the people to turn from all directions to face the

reader. This is especially appropriate during the Christmas season, when we can think of the people gathering around the Gospel Word the way the shepherds gathered around the Christ child -- or during the Easter season, when we can think of Jesus, risen from the dead, drawing near to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, interpreting the Scriptures to them.

On festival days such as Christmas and Easter, the Gospel procession into the midst of the people is, in some churches, appropriately enhanced with candle-bearers leading the way and with appropriate music. Such actions further highlight the coming of the Light of the world to speak with the people, in the flesh, in their midst.

At other times, such as during the Advent or Lenten seasons, the Gospel might be read from the pulpit "on high," in order to accent the authority of the Word and its claim on our lives. In either case, the people then know that this is indeed the Incarnate Word of the Lord speaking to them. This is why they not only stand in homage of Christ for the Gospel reading, but also why they respond to both its announcement and its conclusion with high praise: "Glory to you, 0 Lord" and "Praise to you, 0 Christ."

3 . The Preached Word as Dialogue

After the Gospel, and the people's response to it, comes what may be the boldest act of trust that God has ever invested in our kind, the sermon.

God calls forth a single human voice, with all its frailties and shortcomings, from the people, in order to explicate His Word and highlight its claim, with power. God calls forth preachers to preach His Word not only in order to have His Word proclaimed, as in the Lessons and the Gospel, but also in order to have His Word interpreted, in order to communicate specifically what He wants to say to His people on that day, in that place.

The most vivid biblical models for this preaching are probably these: Moses coming down from the mountain to address the people or Jesus offering his "Sermon on the Mount" to his disciples and to others, in order to build up the life of the new People of God. Either one is an awesome model, which appropriately leads to much fear and trembling on the part of most preachers. No mortal who understands anything about this calling, surely, would accept this responsibility were it not for the Divine promise of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Pastors have to go through long years of training in order to develop the art and the discipline of this kind of communication. Something is going on here that differs radically from the exercise of "good communication skills" as those are taught in speech classes. Something more is involved here than "being dynamic" or "talking with a marvelous voice."

The goal of the sermon is not to entertain people or to make them feel good. Nor is it to give a talk that, like our favorite TV commercials, is always "short and sweet." The goal is to communicate, as truly and as powerfully as one human voice can do when inspired by the Spirit, what God wants to say to each individual hearer (including the preacher) that day, through the appointed lessons from the Bible.

Someone once observed that the goal of preaching should be "to afflict the comfortable and to comfort the afflicted." That is to say, the goal of the sermon, from God's point of view, is to communicate His Word of judgment and grace. Preaching has both a prophetic and a priestly aspect, the chastening announcement of God's Law and the healing mediation of God's Gospel. Without the former, preaching offers merely "cheap Grace," comfort without command. Without the latter, preaching offers only another imperative to burden our consciences, demand without promise, directives without the enabling power.

In keeping with its essential nature, preaching must always be an address to the people who are there. Otherwise it becomes a lecture or a diatribe or some kind of meaningless spiritual nostrum. The preacher must not address issues, first and

foremost, but people. Otherwise preaching is not personal communication. On the other hand, the preacher is called by God not only to speak t_o_ the people and with the people, but sometimes to speak out agai nst them, particularly in condemnation of their idolatry, reminiscent of Moses tearing down the golden calf, but also in condemnation of their refusal to accept the grace of God as it has been intended for them.

One preacher, for example, once took up the text "follow me," (Mt. 16:24), and addressed the issue of the American flag that that particular congregation had displayed in its sanctuary. He claimed that Christian discipleship cannot be divided: you cannot serve God and nation, too, or God and Mammon, too. You must give one or the other priority. That sermon got him into a lot of trouble with his congregation, but arguably it was trouble that was elicited by the Word of God itself, not by the preacher's own political or theological proclivities. In this sense, sometimes preaching against the congregation -- in this case against what appeared to be their idolotrous fealty to their nation -- can be precisely what the Lord has ordained for that d ay .

In another case, in explicating the text "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth,"(Mt. 5:5) one preacher took issue with what she perceived to be her congregation's refusal to believe that God's promises were intended for them. This happened to be a small and struggling inner city congregation, which believed that it was doomed to die. "God blesses you," she told her people, "and will find a way for us to thrive in our ministry." The congregation reportedly found this, at the time, too much to believe, too much to hope for. But that preacher surely had her point, rooted in the Word of God itself. Again, preaching against the congregation — in this case against their refusal to believe that God's promise was intended for them — can be precisely what the Lord has ordained.

As mention of preaching to and against the congregation suggests, moreover, the dynamics of Divine-human communication through the sermon are predicated on the assumption that the preached Word is indeed a dialogue of God with the people and

that therefore, as in the case with any real communication, the hearers must work at their listening. It is frequently pointed out that the preacher is expected to work, on his or her sermon with intense discipline, born of specialized training. What is not so frequently pointed out is that the congregation also has its responsibilities in this respect, too.

The people must be expectant, must keep asking themselves how God is addressing them, each one, through the humble words of the preacher. Just "sitting back" and waiting for the sermon to get through to you is a habit that people may be accustomed to from watching TV, where they constantly expect to be stimulated, but this is not the way to listen to sermons. The people have to sit forward, not back, and work at listening, not wait there passively to be stimulated.

Hearing a sermon aright is a struggle, just as preparing and delivering a sermon aright is a struggle — just as any serious kind of communication between two people is almost always a struggle. But, by the grace of God, the Spirit can indeed be poured out richly on the preacher and the people, and the Word of God can be both spoken and heard on that day, in that place.

The Liturgy of the Word reaches its climax in the Hymn of the Day, which is intended to pick up themes and nuances from the lessons, the Gospel, and the sermon, and to allow the people to speak their understandings and to rejoice together that God has once again so richly communicated with them.

If all is right, if the attunement between God's Word, on the one hand, and the preacher and the people, on the other, is good, if the Spirit overflows with inspirations that day in that way, especially as the people sing the Hymn of the Day, then -- in a culture with too many words yet too little genuine communication -- the people will be blessed with the sense that the communication of God Himself, His true and powerful Word, has indeed found flesh once again, in their midst. And so they will be edified — built up — as the People of God, in a way that only God has the wisdom and the power to do by His Word.

It was such a vibrant sense for "the living communication of the Gospel" (viva vox evangel!i) that prompted Luther to think of the preached Word of God in sacramental terms, a thought which surely bears underlining in our time, when words are cheap and when the very institution of preaching, for this reason and others, is suspect.

For Luther, when the Word of God is rightly proclaimed, Christ Himself touches the congregation, as the historical Jesus touched his hearers when He spoke with them. The preaching of Christ becomes the real presence of Christ. The living Christ is with us, in, with, and under the humble discourse and the often mundane-sounding dialogue of preacher and congregation. It is a charged experience indeed.

For this reason, the tendency to downplay the sermon, evident in some parishes, to turn it into something less than i.t can be, perhaps to let it become a short, didactic "homily," which is a kind of appendage to the Gospel reading at best, should be discouraged. That robs the people of what God wants to give them.

In this respect, it is well to remember that good communication always takes time. This is not a friendly truth for some North Americans — while, at the same time, they appear to have problems communicating meaningfully. They are often "too busy" to take the time to allow a conversation to run its course. Their schedule is "too tight" to allow them to explore meanings and silent nuances and mixed-messages and fresh ideas, when they speak with others. That would take too much time. This problematic is especially apparent in the dissolution of numerous marriages in our time.

We ought not to permit that cultural malaise to shape our approach to the Divine-human communication. On the contrary, it should be the other way around. If we take the time to listen to God's Word, and to communicate with Him in this way, then we will

be in the position we need to be in to communicate more authentically with each other.

So we should take time for the sermon, and not box it in with worldly concerns ("if you can't say it in twelve minutes, you can't say it"). Surely the sermon should not be allowed to degenerate into a long monologue, either. But if the sermon is truly a dialogue, then the hearers will be engaged, even captivated, and time will not be a problem. Indeed, in a certain sense, a good sermon will leave the people wanting more, since they will have been touched deeply by having heard God's own voice.

This is one of the points where predominantly European congregations can benefit from the gifts brought to them by those who know the traditions of the African-American churches. In many of these churches the sermon is profoundly dialogical. There is no rush to get it over, either. Something too important is underway for that. The living Lord is speaking. The preacher, therefore, is driven by the Spirit, and the congregation is captivated by the Spirit. Together, in the Spirit, they enter into a sometimes rhythmic dialogue, predicated on the give-and-take of highly charged, biblically based, announcements and exclamations. It can be exhausting. It can be breathtaking. This kind of experience is reminiscent of Luther's understanding that the proclaimed Word in the sermon is sacramental; that it mediates the real presence of Jesus Christ.

This is why it is so important, in predominantly European congregations, to have a well-chosen Hymn of the Day waiting in the wings, to follow the sermon. This hymn will give the people, in that kind of setting, the opportunity they need to share their sometimes pent-up "Amens," which in African-American churches would have been heard, now and again, during the sermon itself: to say Yes to the living communication of God in the sermon, with heart and soul and mind, befitting such an engaging and captivating experience.

Allowing the people to "sing their hearts out" in response to the proclamation of God's Word helps to insure the dialogical

character of ths sermon, and thsrsby hslps to nurture, profoundly, the dynamics of the Divine—human communication in that congregation. In this context, then, the sermon and the Hymn of the Day should be regarded as inseparable. This dialogical "Word-Hymn Event" makes it possible for the sermon to be fully sacramental.

The exhilarating sense of being truly and profoundly moved by God's living Word proclaimed in the sermon is strikingly expressed by the same writer who composed "Amazing Grace," with these words — which might be taken as an excellent paradigm for any Hymn of the Day:

> Glories of your name are spoken,
> Zion city of our God;
> He whose Word cannot be broken
> Formed you for his own abode.
> On the rock of ages founded,
> What can shake your sure repose?
> With salvation's walls surrounded,
> You may smile at all your foes.
>
> See the streams of living waters,
> Springing from eternal love,
> Well supply your sons and daughters,
> And all fear of want remove.
> Who can faint, while such a river
> Ever will their thirst assuage?
> Grace which, like the Lord, the giver,
> Never fails from age to age. ^2*)

With the Hymn of the Day, the second movement of our great liturgical symphony of hope comes to an end: the experience of communication. Not that God does not continue to speak, or we to respond. On the contrary, as the very language of the liturgy shows, God's Word to us, and our response, defines the entire flow of our worship. Virtually every word of the liturgy is in fact from the Scriptures, the written Word of God, either directly or in paraphrases. Further, the dynamics of the Divine-human communication reach their culminating conclusion in

Holy Communion, which has been traditionally and instructively called a "visible Word" of God to His people.

Still, this movement of the liturgy we have just reviewed is rightly called the Liturgy of the Word. For here we self-consciously lift up the Word of God as word, specifically as a word addressed audibly to us, and then we celebrate that audible address.

In response, then, our hearts will of course overflow with gratitude for all the blessings of this Divine-human communication. We will naturally want to respond by offering our lives anew to God. (3)

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1 . "Godspell."

2. John Newton, "Glories of Your Name Are Spoken," LBW, no. 358.

3. At this point in the liturgy, during some seasons of the Church Year, if not always, some parishes add moments of silence and then the recitation of one of the creeds (Apostles, Nicene, A thanas i an) . It is debatable, however, whether this practice is as edifying on a regular basis as it might at first appear to be. The use of one of the creeds in the liturgy (apart from the rite of Baptism), to begin with, is a relatively late practice, historically speaking. In this sense, the "historic liturgy" does not organically require the practice. Further, the great narration of creation, redemption, and sanctification, which the creeds encompass, is included almost immediately during the liturgy in the Eucharistic Prayer. So in this sense the recitation of a creed adds nothing to the liturgy that is not already there. In addition, short of being intoned (which has its own problems), recitation of one of the creeds as a regular or semi-regular practice would seem to introduce a certain didacticism, even abstraction (recall especially the "textbook language" of the Athanasian Creed), into the flow of the liturgy, to the point of being disruptive. On the other hand, it is also true that repetition is the mother of wisdom. Depending on the

circumstances, one of the creeds (for example, the Athanasian Creed on Trinity Sunday) may prove edifying for many.

vI. GIVING OF OURSELVES; THE EXPERIENCE OF OFFERING

A friend was telling me about his efforts to take care of his aging mother. "My friends tell me I have my own life to live," he explained to me, "that I shouldn't spend so much time with her -- but I want to be with her. She's done so much for me." He wanted to offer his life to her, in her time of need, in gratitude for what she had done for him, in so many ways, when he was growing up.

The comparison is imperfect. God is not an aging parent who needs our care. Still, in response to all the blessings God has bestowed on us, we will naturally want to offer our lives to God in our worship, and not go our own way -- "do our own thing" — especially now that the dynamics of the Divine-human communication have so richly blessed us.

This is the third movement of the liturgy. The movements of (1) entrance and (2) Divine address give way to the movement of (3) giving of ourselves. The experiences of (1) adoration and (2) communication give way to the experience of (3) offering. The focus on (1) praising the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and (2) knowing that selfsame Word made flesh anew, addressed to us in the power of the Spirit, now give way to the focus of (3) being lifted up with gratitude by that same Spirit , who together with the Father and the Son are forever to be glorified.

During the Offering — which follows the Liturgy of the Word, and prepares us for what is sometimes called the Liturgy of the Upper Room, that is, Holy Communion -- we will now have the holy leisure, so to speak, born of the Holy Spirit, to explore every avenue of grateful response to God the Father, for what He has done for us and for what He still will do for us, through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Spirit.

1. Offering Our Time

Taking time to offer ourselves to God in gratitude is already, in itself, an offering. Setting aside the time. Cherishing the time. Even lavishing the time. Not being in a rush to move on to something which may or may not be "more important."

Taking time to offer yourself helps to secure that sense of being "at home," in a world where "you can't go home," where even the Son of God had nowhere to lay His head. It helps to undergird that sense of "dwelling forever" with God, since this moment anticipates life in the eternal habitations of God, the New Jerusalem that is to come, with an overflowing spirit of contentment, as, lifted up by the Spirit, you attend to where you are and what you are doing:

> Thou prepares t a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever, (ks. 23:5,6)

The Divine hospitality of this moment is stirring and satisfying. It calls forth songs of joy, as when you enter your home after a long day, and spontaneously break forth into humming a happy tune. For this, if anywhere during the day, is where you belong. You are not in a hurry now to "get anything done." On the contrary, you may simply wander around your dwelling place, humming, and savoring the moment of finally "being at home."

The sense of belonging that the encounter with the hospitality of God elicits during the time we take for offering makes it possible for us to see this place in this moment, if not the whole world, as this most beautiful Divine dwelling place. Here and now this worship space takes on the aura of a place that beckons all creatures, like a mother hen, calling her chicks to her wings in time of trouble:

> How lovely is thy dwelling place, 0 Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yea, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. Even the sparrow finds a home and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at thy altars, 0 Lord of hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in thy house, ever singing thy praise. (Ps. 84:1-4)

But this whole experience of "being at home" in the dwelling place of the Lord, filled with gratitude, and the sense of contentment and joy that goes with it, is, without a doubt, predicated on taking the time: which, as we have already had occasion to observe, is not easy for persons who are daily imbued with the values of efficiency and "saving time." Many Americans have a horror of "wasting time." After all, "time is money" (Benjamin Franklin).

It is a phenomenological fact, however, a principle of personal interaction: that if you do not take the time to offer tangible signs of your gratitude, those tangible signs will mean very little. The phenomenological fact is clearly illustrated by the contrast between a person who picks up a Thank You Card on the way home from work and hastily mails it, and the person who goes out of his or her way to find some violets and delivers them personally to the one being thanked. The first person makes a gesture, with a token gift. The second person makes an offering, with a gift of which his or her very person is a part.

Sadly, in some North American parishes, the time of offering has been truncated. It has become a time of impoverishment -- howevermuch money might be "collected." Middle class instrumentalism and pragmatism dominate this segment of the liturgy, all too often it would appear, as the taxhouse expression "taking the collection" indicates. The time of offering appears as a time "to pay the bills" or, more personally, "to pay my dues."

Given such assumptions, the natural response to the time of offering as a liturgical moment will be to "get through it" as quickly as possible (who really likes to give away money, so why

dwell on it?), saving as much time as possible. Meanwhile, the choir is asked to provide what will hopefully be beautiful music, in order to drown out what are perceived to be the crass sounds of mundane monies clanging in the offering plates -- and hopefully to make the pain of parting with one's money more tolerable.

But it can be different, as many parishes have discovered or rediscovered in recent years. The time of offering can be a spiritually uplifting time, rather than a spiritually depressing time. And it should be -- if, to begin with, the congregation takes the time it needs in order to moved by the Spirit with genuine gratitude.

With our time thus offered to God, we then will have the space to offer costly signs and rich embodiments of our talents and treasures to God as well: signs and embodiments which are the expressions of personal engagement by all who offer them. We will also have the space to offer expressions of the less tangible aspects of ourselves, plentiful offerings of caring.

2. Offering Our Talents

To speak of our talents is to speak of the gifts with which God has endowed each one of us as His creatures, whom he calls by name. One illustration of such talents or gifts from God, our Creator, is this instance from an account of Moses' overseeing the construction of the Tabernacle:

> And Moses said to the people of Israel, "See, the Lord has called him by name Bezalel... and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carvingwood, for work in every skilled craft.... (Ex. 35:30-33)

Sometimes it is possible for such talented members of the People of God to find ways to offer signs of their talents to God during the time of offering.

I have seen two women offer lovely hand-made quilts during the offering, which were signs of dozens of quilts that a group of women had made to send abroad to hungry and homeless people. I have seen an artist bring forth an elegant hand-carved crucifix. I have heard musicians, many times of course, beautifully offering their music to the Lord, vocal or instrumental, solo or ensemble. I have seen little children confidently and touchingly offer Christmas cards that they had designed and pasted together for a congregation's shut-ins. I have seen dancers dance with grace. I have heard poets read with power. I have seen the hearing-impaired offer the charged silences of signed hymns.

3. Offering Our Treasures

If we take the time to offer signs of our talents to God in gratitude for so blessing our common life, and especially for so blessing us with the communication of His Word to us, we will as a matter of course also take the time to offer signs of our treasures to God in the same way. The craftsman Bezalel, celebrated in the account of the making of the Tablernacle in the time of Moses, worked with materials that had been donated lavishly and freely by the people, according to the scriptural ac count:

> So they came, both men and women; all who were of a willing heart brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and armlets, all sorts of gold objects, every man dedicated an offering of gold to the Lord. And every man with whom was found blue or purple or scarlet stuff or fine linen or goats' hair or tanned rams' skins or goatskins, brought them. Every one who could make an offering of silver or bronze brought it -- T~..a»$_o$ nfforln?! and every man with whom was found

> acacia wood of any use in the work, brought it. And all women who had ability spun with their hands, and bought what they had spun in blue and purple and scarlet stuff and fine twined linen... And the leaders brought onyx stones and stones to be set for the ephod and for the breastpiece and spices and oil for the light, and for the anointing oil, and for the fragrant incense. All the men and women, the people of Israel, whose heart moved them to bring anything for the work which the Lord had commanded by Moses to be done, brought it as their freewill offering to the Lord. (Ex. 35:22-28)

Our economy today, of course, is different. To provide for the construction of a new Church building the free will offerings that most of us would bring would be gifts of money -- or gifts of pledges. But it is helpful to think of that money or those pledges as a signs of more tangible treasures, such as those mentioned in the Tabernacle narrative, lest our monetary gifts come to be regarded by ourselves as something less than gifts, perhaps with counterproductive nuances — money, for example, understood as "dues" or even as "filthy lucre."

Our gifts of our treasures, it scarcely needs to be observed, will not all be for purposes such as the making of the Tabernacle. What a beautiful sight it is, for example, in the fall especially, during the season of the harvest, to offer gifts of food to be shared with the needy or financial gifts for the hungry. What a beautiful sight it is, likewise, at any time, to witness members of the congregation offering hammers and saws and other tools as signs of the congregation's commitment to renovate an abandoned building for low-income people nearby. What a beautiful sight it is also to see all the members of the household of faith offering their pledges of financial support to undergird the ministry and the mission of the Church, at home, nationally, and abroad.

The beauty of such offerings is even greater, when accompanied by hymns such as this one, which tells the meaning of offering and helps to sustain the spirit of freewill offering:

As saints of old their firstfruits brought

Of orchard, flock, and field
To God, the giver of all good,
The source of bounteous yield;
So we today firstfruits would bring,
The wealth of this good land,
Of farm and market, shop and home,
Of mind and heart and hand, (i)

4 . Offering Our Caring

We have still more to offer God, however, above all the visible signs of our invisible caring. These offerings flow from the inmost self and are in this sense immeasurable, whereas the offerings of time, talents, and treasures can to some extent be measured. This does not diminish the importance of the measurable offerings. Rather it complements their importance, affording us the opportunity to offer even the most intangible aspects of our selves to God in visible ways, along with the more tangible aspects of our selves. These are the offerings of our c a ring .

If the French philosopher RenG Descartes could say, memorably, "I think therefore I am," Christians would be much more inclined to say, "I care, therefore I am." For, as members of the People of God, who seek to minister to each other and to witness to all nations, we know that who we are, our identity, is not constituted by our thinking, but by our relationship with God and with others.

So it is fitting that we should offer Prayers for the world and for those whom we care about most dearly, during our time of offering. We pray for the peace of the whole world, and for peace for a neighbor who is distressed, and whom we name. We pray for the nations of the world to respond to desecration of God's good earth, and for the preservation of a nearby wetland which we name. We pray for all the hungry of the world, and for a neighborhood soup kitchen which we name. We pray for all the

families of the earth, and for our own families, wh om we name. In so praying, we offer our caring to God.

(8?)

It is fitting, likewise, that we should offer the Peace of God to one another during our time of offering. We reach out to others in the congregation with the right hand of friendship. In so doing, we weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice. We offer heartfelt gestures of affection to the lonely and to those wracked by guilt, to those who fear death and to those who think that they have no reason for which to live. We offer heartfelt gestures of congratulation to those who are celebrating birthdays or wedding anniversaries, to those who have finally found work or finally found a spouse. We extend the Peace of the Lord to our sisters and brothers in the Body of Christ, with a thousand nuances of caring, communicated subliminally with tone of voice and facial expression and in countless other tacit ways during "the passing of the Peace." In so extending the Peace of God to others, we are again offering our caring to God.

Above all it is fitting that we should offer the Bread and the Wine to God, for the sake of one another, during our time of offering. For the bread and the wine can be an offering not only of our caring in the sense of thinking about the needs of others, but also in the sense of being frustrated by, or even angered at, the limits that the so-called realities of this world often impose on any efforts mounted by anyone to alleviate human suffering. In this sense, with the bread and the wine, we offer our cares to God, as part of our caring.

The offering of these signs of our caring, bread and wine, readily combine, then, the counterpoint of anguish and anger with the cantus firmus of comfort and hope.

We carry the bread and the wine to the Table before us, as an offering to God, with the awareness that the seeds of the grain and the grapes of the vine had to be crushed to death. Yet we offer the bread and the wine, at the same time, with the awareness that the first is the staff of life and that the second is the libation of gladness. We offer the bread and the wine

with the moods of our cares and our caring that extend from the / Crucifixion to the Resurrection, from the first verses of Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?," to that Psalm's concluding verses, "You who fear the Lord, praise him! ...For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted." (Ps. 22:1 , 23f.)

Consider the bread . It is conceivable that you cannot bear to see one more photograph of one more malnourished child in the impoverished Transkei "Homeland" in South Africa. Yet it is also conceivable that in response to an appeal from a South African exile you have redoubled your own efforts to lobby your congressional representatives to support comprehensive political and economic pressures against the apartheid regime. This is your care, and this is your caring.

You have decided that it is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness. You have decided to let your cares give way to caring. You have been able to muster some hope after all. In this way, all the dimensions of your caring about the black majority in South Africa are offered to God, with the bread that is brought to the Table of the Lord. Your heart has been kneaded into the dough of that bread and has been lifted up with the rising of that bread: the one who carries that bread to the Table of the Lord is carrying your heart.

Consider the wine. It is conceivable that you long ago assumed that the makers of California wine had made great strides in protecting their farm workers from being ravaged by the harsh conditions of their employment. But then you have heard about the deaths of children from cancer and the delivery of stillborn infants in farmworkers' communities, with the strong implication that those losses were caused by exposure to poisonous pesticides. It is conceivable that you have no desire to return to this cause, which is like an open wound, it seems, in the body of this nation. It is also conceivable that you will sit down without delay, nevertheless, driven by some inspiration which at that moment remains unconscious: to write a letter to your local supermarket, telling the manager that you are joining the national boycott of California grapes. In this apparently

impulsive act, you have once again discovered that you are a "prisoner of hope"(Zech. 9:12) in a world of despair. This is \ your care and this is your caring.

The wine that is brought to the Table of the Lord is therefore, for you, as for many others, both an offering of bitter disappointment and sweet hopefulness. Your heart has been crushed with the grapes, but also fermented with the Spirit of life: the one who carries that wine to the Table of the Lord is carrying your heart.

A contemporary offertory hymn tells this story of offering our cares and our caring to God in the form of the bread and the wine, with simple but fitting expressions of both the sadness and the gladness:

> We place upon your table, Lord,
> The food of life, the bread and wine,
> As symbols of our daily work,
> According to your grand design.
>
> Within these simple things there lie
> The height and depth of human life:
> Our pain and tears, our thoughts and toils,
> Our hopes and fears, our joy and strife. (2)

There is so much that we can, and we will want to, offer to God in exuberant gratitude, if only we will take the time to offer our talents, our treasures, and our caring. Our offerings will, of course, vary from week to week, with regard to particulars. Given the whole course of the Church Year, indeed, it may be advisable to follow the familiar architectural maxim in this case, with regard to the multiplication of offerings on any one Sunday: less is more.

I can imagine, as a matter of fact, that the time of offering on many Sundays might be consistently simple -- the Prayers, the Peace, an Anthem perhaps, the Offertory Hymn, and the Offering of Financial Gifts and the Bread and Wine.

But over the course of a year, if we do take the time for (2A offering ourselves to God all along, and if we do afford ourselves the spiritual leisure to offer ourselves richly, as the Spirit might move us at any given time, we will find ourselves, more and more, I would imagine, wanting to express our gratitude to God by offering more and more.

For it is a beautiful thing to dwell in the tent of the Lord in the land of the living and communicate with Him, as the Psalmis t says :

> One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, and to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple. (Ps. 27:4)

At the same time, as we live in a world of violence and death, the knowledge of God's salvation, which is ours in the temple, lifts us up with gladness and overwhelms us with gratitude, which we then can express with offerings of greet joy:

> And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies round about me; and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord. (Ps. 27:6)

5. Retrospect: the First Experience of Completion

In retrospect now, we can witness at this point a kind of completion -- or coming full circle — of the first three movements of the liturgy thus far: (1) adoration, (2) communication, (3) offering.

We have glorified God, heard His Word, and been lifted up in gratitude by His Spirit. (1) This great symphony of hope began with a movement toward God: entrance into His presence and praise for His blessings. (2) It continued with a movement of God toward us: to communicate with us by His Word, calling forth

our joyful reception of His Word. (3) The third movement then completed the cycle: we offered ourselves, now touched and stirred by the Spirit, back to God with overflowing thanksgiving.

Although, however, we have indeed reached a certain completion in this great symphony of hope at this moment, with the experience of adoration, communication, and offering now behind us, this completion we now know, exhilarating as it is, will itself presently be expanded, elaborated, and elevated still more, in every respect, in, with, and through the experience of Holy Communion.

At this point, then, our experience is but the first completion of the liturgy, no matter how charged and stirring the experience has been and is thus far. The full and final completion of this uplifting experience still awaits us. The best is yet to come.

This symphony of hope now enters its climactic movement, which will recapitulate and magnify everything that has thus far happened. The magnificent meal of this great feast is about to be served.

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1. Von Christier son, Frank, "As Saints of Old," LBW, no. 404 .

2. Wilson, M. F. C., "We Flace Upon Your Table Lord," LBW, 217.

VII. COMMUNING WITH THE LORD (1): HOLY COMMUNION AS SACRAMENT k-X

The Culminating Experience of Adoration

This is the time we have all been waiting for — communing with the Lord. Thus far the movements of this great symphony of hope, each with its own integrity, each with its own meaning, have flowed with deep intensities and elevated harmonies. Now begins the final and concluding movement.

(1) We were invited. And we came into the presence of this the Host who had invi ted us, as He stood at the door waiting for u s , beckoning us on. We celeb r ated the glories of His grace .

(2) Then He spoke wi th us , and we with Him .

(3) In response to His gracious Word to us, we offered signs of our gratitude for all that He had done for us, and for all that He has promised still to do for us.

(4) Now, as He awaited us with open arms from the very beginning, He reaches out to embrace each one of us tangibly with His love. This communing with the Lord. (1)

This is the culminating experience of the liturgy. Communing with the Lord is a movement which has its own profound richness, as it recapitulates everything that has gone before, yet leads us still more deeply into intimate communion with God, in the person of His crucified and risen Son, made real for us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

As we commune with the Lord now, we experience the moment of adoration as we contemplate the great mystery of Chris t wi th us , here and now, as our Host (sacrament).

We experience the moment of offering as our fellowship with

the sufferings of Christ, here and now (sacrifice).

We experience the moment of communication as joy in the presence of the risen Lord and of one another, as His Body (supper) . (2)

The richness of this movement of our liturgy is indicated by the several names that we characteristically use to describe it: Liturgy of the Upper Room, Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, the Sacrament of the Altar, or the Eucharist. The meaning of each of these titles is more or less self-evident, except for the last. "Eucharist" is a traditional (Greek) expression that means "thanksgiving."

As we will shortly see, as this whole movement of the liturgy -- Holy Communion -- recapitulates all others, so within this movement, this eucharistic aspect, evident above all in the Eucharistic Prayer, recapitulates all other aspects of this single, concluding movement. If Holy Communion is the culminating movement of the entire liturgy, the eucharistic aspect of Holy Communion is the focal point of that culmination.

1. Sacrament as Mystery

The world around us is often a world of superficiality. Every airport looks like every other airport. Fast food establishments, like MacDonalds, can be found in every nation, in Hong Kong and Moscow, as well as in rural Maine or downtown Chicago. Superhighways are the same everywhere. The clothes people wear are increasingly the same around the globe, depending on the climate, especially those worn by the younger generation. Wherever there are cities of any size, everything looks mass-produced, and much of it probably is mass-produced.

Social and political life also seems to be mass-produced, more often than we would sometimes like to admit. People support certain candidates not so much on the basis of their candidate's

good character and sound policies as on the basis of the success the candidates have in generating "media events," which seek to communicate the image of good character and sound policies. People go on pre-packaged vacation trips to places like Disney World, too, oblivious to the fact, it seems, that they are following precisely the same kind of mass-produced agenda that millions of other people have been programmed to follow. People drive the same kind of cars, talk about the same TV shows, buy the same kind of status symbols for their homes, and even raise their children instructed by the same popular magazines or TV talk shows. As a result, many feel that they are in danger of losing their individual identities, surrounded by a sea of mass-produced superficiality.

As a part of this global world of mass-produced culture, personal relationships themselves tend to become superficial. At work, people either work alone with machines or they treat each other as "numbers," or both. Each person, indeed, tends to become a "number," a replaceable part of a huge bureacracy. Some of the more profound experiences of life, accordingly, tend to be cheapened as they, too, are "rationalized." People do not have the time, or will not take the time, to develop relationships with one another. So love becomes cheap. Even death becomes cheap,, like the poor soul lamented in the Beatles' song, "Eleanor Rigby." No one comes to her funeral. Nobody cares. Not even the priest who buries her. She is, after all, a nobody.

The world of our common experience is, of course, much richer than I have described it here. But few thoughtful souls would deny, I take it, that our world of mass-produced commodities and mass-produced experiences tends to lack depth. Few reflective souls, I imagine, would disagree, after pondering the matter at any length, with the conclusion of the philosopher Herbert Marcuse that we live in a "one dimensional society."

In this world, Holy Communion stands for something radically different — for what the theologican Paul Tillich called "the dimension of depth": the experience of wonder, the experience of awe, the experience of being driven to your knees in reverence, the experience of being touched and embraced by a love that flows

with an inexhaustible power and an incomparable intimacy. This is the mystery of Holy Communion.

It is therefore appropriate to begin considering this movement in our liturgy by highlighting its mystery. This is the moment of adoration in our liturgy par excellence, when we adore "the Mystery." Whereas the aura of holiness surrounds all the movements of our liturgy, this movement, above all others, is fittingly called holy -- our Holy Communion -- because in these moments we not only encounter here and now the God who otherwise is high and lifted up, but we commune with Him, here and now, in this place. We enjoy intimate fellowship with the God who otherwise dwells in light inapproachable, who now hosts this meal, who now graciously offers us the immediacy of His own presence, in overwhelmingly gentle yet powerful communications of intimacy. It is an experience that calls to mind some of the appearances of the risen Christ to the first generation of beli evers .

After the crucifixion, the followers of Jesus dispersed in disarray and despair. We have this account in the Gospel of Luke, however, that testifies to the kind of experience that disclosed new hope to those despondent disciples. This is the - experience of awe and wonder, the time of standing before the One who is made known in the breaking of bread.

Two disciples were talking about the crucifixion, according to the story, when Jesus Himself, risen from the dead, drew near to them and walked with them along the road to Emmaus. But they did not recognize Him. They shared their lament with this new companion, and related the account about the women of their company who had found the tomb empty. Then Jesus began to interpret the Scriptures concerning Himself for them, as they w alked.

They invite this stranger into their home. He now becomes a companion ("cum panis" means "with bread") indeed. "When he was at table with them," we are told, "he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him. Then he vanished out of their sight.

Among the many things that this story teaches us is this: the mystery of our Lord's presence in Holy Communion. They stood in awe of His manifestation to them, there and then. They said to each other: "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" (Luke 24:13-35)

The appearance of the risen Christ to Mary Magdalene, as we see that event portrayed in the Gospel of John (Jn. 20:1-18), has the same kind of mysterious power for her. The others had left her standing alone, looking tearfully into the empty tomb. Then Jesus appears behind her, and asks her why she is weeping. She takes Him to be the gardener. But He calls her by name. He touches her with deep intimacy, by this personal address. Now she hears the voice behind her as His voice. She turns and says, "Rabboni ! "

The Gospel writer (or perhaps a later editor) tells us that that word means "teacher." But it undoubtedly had much wider and deeper nuances, as it was first heard in the circles of the Fourth Gospel. "Rabboni" was rarely used as a title for teachers or rabbis at that time. It is a title that was probably used in this context, therefore, precisely so that its meaning could be filled up, so to speak, with the luminescence of this particular experience, rather than by its conventional associations. "Rabboni" was in all likelihood first understood to express something like Thomas' utterance in response to the risen Christ's appearance to him, "My Lord and my God." (Jn. 20:28)

While the appearances of the risen Lord to his immediate followers surely are meant by the New Testament to stand in a class by themselves, in the sense that they were unique and were not to be repeated for later generations, this by no means diminishes their importance for us as testimonies to the mysteries of the risen Lord's presence in Holy Communion. In this sense, Jesus' response to the questions A f "doubting Thomas" should not to be read as a concession to later generations, as it often is, but as a proclamation and a promise of the powerful experience of His presence, whenever He discloses Himself: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." (Jn

20:29) The weight of that utterance falls on the first word which summons all the powerful images that come with the scriptural understanding of blessedness.

We are indeed "blessed" in Holy Communion with the same presence of the same Lord who appeared visibly to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, to Mary Magdalene, and to Thomas. As we encounter the crucified and risen Lord drawing near to us in the actions and the elements of this sacrament we are, in faith, claimed and stricken by the compelling luminscence of this invisible presence. It is the same Christ who visits us, who stands there, who addresses each one of us by name. The only difference now is that He is indeed invisible. His visibility now is -- these actions and these elements. But He is here, all the same.

As we hear His voice, our hearts burn within us. As He stands before us invisibly, yet feeds us visibly, the joy of recognition dawns brightly in our souls, the luminesence of His presence touches us intimately. In awe, as we see the Bread and the Cup held before us, we whisper in our hearts, "My Lord and my God!" This is Holy Communion as sacrament -- the great mystery of our liturgy.

2. The Presence of the Host

Consideration of the sacrament as mystery leads as a matter of course to further consideration of the mysterious presence of the One who serves as the Host at this meal.

The word sacrament itself has many meanings, but its central idea is highlighted by the Greek word from the New Testament that it translates: mys terion or "mystery." Jesus taught His disciples, "To you has been given the mystery of the Kingdom of God...." (Mark 4:1) As this word of promise from Jesus took root in the consciousness of the early Church, it became clearer and clearer that the essential meaning of the mystery of the Kingdom

of God is God's great gift in Jesus Christ Himself.

Later, then, as the Church continued to reflect about the chief sacrament or central mystery of its liturgical life, it began to settle more and more on the confession of the real p res e nee of Jesus Christ in this sacrament as the central meaning of this mystery.

Thus the holiness of this movement in our liturgy, its profound mystery, its sacramental meaning, is first and foremost this: the dwelling of the Holy God with His People, in the flesh of the Son of God, made real for us in this moment by the indwelling Holy Spirit of God.

It is the presence of this Host at this meal, in other words, that makes it everything that it is. His invitation, His visitation, His giving of Himself to us, as He surrounds us with His Glory, disclosing Himself to us once again as our crucified and risen Lord — this presence establishes this mystery for us.

The words "Do this in memory of me," then, which have many rich nuances that have still not been exhausted by centuries of devoted study, mean at least this much. They are not best understood to describe this sacrament as a mere memorial, as, for example, we might thankfully remember the life of a Martin Luther King, Jr., and celebrate his influence in our lives. The expression "Do this in memory of me" rather has the nuance of re-presenting our salvation to us, of recalling the One who was host at the first Upper Room to host us here and now. So Jesus is saying, in effect, do this for the recalling of my presence.

This is not a magical recalling, surely, as if we — or perhaps the presiding minister — somehow had a kind of alchemic power to make Christ present in our midst. The words "Do this in memory of me" are rather to be heard as the original, and unwavering, promise of Christ to His people: do this, and I will be with you, in this way. The gates of hell shall not prevail against this promise. The steeples of the cathedrals may crumble, but Jesus Christ will be present, when the Church does this, in memory of Him, because He has promised so to be present.

To accent the graciousness of Christ's invitation to us and His visitation in our midst in this sacrament, the Church has tended throughout the ages to focus its attention on the elements of bread and wine, since they are, most tangibly, what is given to us, in contrast to anything that we might do ourselves. This is not to suggest that the real presence of Jesus Christ is somehow limited to the elements in the experience of this sacrament. On the contrary, Christ is present in the all the actions of the sacrament, as our Host. But the elements, given to us, reveal more tangibly than anything else precisely what is happening throughout, the giving by Christ of Himself to us for heavenly food.

Hence when we speak about the real presence of Jesus Christ in this sacrament, we most frequently and most appropriately focus our attention on Christ's presence with us in, with, and under the gifts of bread and wine. This bread, we confess, is_ His Body. This wine, we confess, i_s_ His blood.

In earlier centuries terms like "transubstantiation" and "con substantiation" were used in the attempt to "pin down" the meaning of Christ's real presence. The most thoughtful of theologians who now address themselves to these matters, however, shy away from that kind of terminology. They hold that while there might have been a certain theological necessity in the past for the use of such concepts, any attempt to exp lain how Christ is really present in the sacrament now is perforce misguided. At best, such terms should be understood as testimony to the mystery of Christ's presence, not at all as definitions of that presence.

Rather than seeking to explain or to define the sacramental presence of Christ, indeed, we fittingly bow down before the mystery, in adoration. It is a spirit reminiscent of the Psalmist's: "0 come let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our maker." (Ps. 95:6) This mystery is not for us to understand, but to know.

Luther once remarked that if we were to understand how a grain of wheat grew into the full plant we would die of wonder. All the more so, with the mystery of Christ's presence at this

holy meal. The impulse to fall to one's knees, therefore, and to contemplate the mystery, as one might look up at the rising sun, characteristically pervades this whole movement of the liturgy. As the voices of the faithful so appropriately sing, in many of our North American congregations:

> Let us break bread together on our knees;
> Let us break bread together on our knees.
> When I fall on my knees
> With my face to the rising sun,
> 0 Lord, have mercy on me. (3

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1. Although some parish churches do not offer Holy Communion every Sunday, a sound reading of the New Testament, as well as the urging of various national Church guidelines, mandates that this should be the goal toward which all congregations are moving.

This is a matter, too, not only of ecclesial urging, so to speak, but all the more so, practical necessity. The hungry person wants food without delay, and does not pause to consider whether it is time to eat: so in situations of great distress or persecution the people demand Holy Communion without delay. Writing from within the context of the Church struggle in South Africa, for example, the Reformed theologian, John De Gruchy, has this to say: "The time has come when we who are in traditions where the Eucharist is not celebrated week by week as an integral part of worship must not only recognize that this is a serious flaw, but remedy the situation.... It was, after all, the Protestant Reformers who insisted that Word and Sacrament belong together, and none other than Calvin who inis ted on weekly celebrations of the Lord's Supper." (Theology and Ministry in Context and Crisis: A South African Perspective [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], pp. 167f.

At the same time, liturgies which come to their conclusion with the movements of "Hearing and Celebrating the Word" and "Giving of Ourselves" (see chapters V and VI above) surely have their own integrity, and should not be looked at as liturgically truncated. For, the Divine-human communication and our response

in the form of offering, is a real, powerful, and intimate address and response. It is not a question, then, of something truncated needing what is really essential, but an essentially good rite ("the Liturgy of the Word") that can and should be enhanced and completed, for the sake of the people, and thereby made much better.

A visit with some friends and the conversation that goes with it can be a joy, for which you can be profoundly grateful. But it will be all the more joyful when you can sit at table together and break bread together — especially if you came to the gathering, in the first place, hungering.

2. The order of the experience here is not quite the same as the ordering of the earlier movements of the liturgy. We began with entrance into the Presence (adoration), Hearing the Word (communication), and Giving of Ourselves (offering). Here we contemplate the mystery of Christ's presence (adoration), are drawn into His sacrifice (offering), and commune with Him and with one another richly (communication). This shift in the order is part of the multifaceted richness of the whole liturgy. The liturgy has its own unfolding logic, like a great symphony indeed, which is all the better, so to speak, because it cannot always be predicted or anticipated.

3. "Let Us Break Us Break Bread Together," LBW, no. 212.

VIII • COMMUNING WITH THE LORD (2): HOLY COMMUNION AS SACRIFICE

The Culminating Experience of Offering

In the night in which he was betrayed, he took bread. And when he had given thanks, he broke it, and gave it to them saying, "Take, eat, this is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same manner, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying, "this cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people, for the forgiveness of sins. Do this for the remembrance of me."

As this great mystery of our faith, this visitation of Jesus Christ to us and with us, can be viewed as sacrament, so it can be seen, also, as sacrifice , as the body of Christ broken for us and all people, as the blood of Christ shed for us and for all people. We enter into this experience, accordingly, to give of ourselves likewise: to be drawn into his own unique offering on the Cross for our sake and for the sake of the whole world, and to watch with Him in his anguish. We partake, thereby, of His o f fering.

Self-sacrifice for the sake of others, including our enemies, is of course an action that cuts deeply across the grain of the world in which which live. The wilderness of sin around us -- and within us -- is precisely wilderness because the nations rage against each other in a spirit of self-aggrandizement and sometimes violent self-assertion. Within the nations, groups also contend with each other and sometimes fight with each other viciously in order to win power over each other. Within those groups, in turn, individuals themselves strive to be "number one," in order to be in positions of power over others, even to dominate others, to assert themselves, sometimes at any price.

No wonder Jesus was crucified! What place is there for a

life of self-offering in a world of nationalism and classism and narcicism? The One who is the Good Shepherd, who is willing to lay down His life for the sheep, therefore must stand totally alone, as Jesus in the end did in fact stand totally alone, when even his most trusted disciples deserted Him.

Part of the challenge of approaching the mystery of Holy Communion, indeed, is how to begin to understand what the sacrifice of Christ could possibly mean for us and for our world, so brain-washed have we become by the ways and the mores of this world's often violent forms of self-aggrandizement and self-assertion.

1. Christ's At-One-Ment With Us

Some years ago a minister of a downtown Boston church was on his way home when he encountered a young man walking aimlessly, indeed despondently, along the street. After talking with him for awhile, the minister decided to invite the young man home. Then he and his wife fed the young man, and offered him the use" of their guestroom for the night. In the middle of the night, for reasons that the police could never fully determine, the young man arose, murdered the minister, raped the minister's wife, and then departed, never to be seen again.

Many in the area were deeply moved, as well as shocked, by that story. Those of us who were clergy were particularly stunned. We thought of how this our brother had gone the final, extra mile in love, how he had laid down his life for the lost in such a terrifying but altogether Christ-like way. We also thought about the price his wife had to pay, about her brutalization and her bitter grief.

We were prompted to examine our own lives, many of us, and to contrast our brother's and our sister's sacrifices with what many of us felt was the all too often hum-drum, security-seeking character of our own lives. In these and many other ways, we

were drawn, in spirit, to our brother who had given his life, and to our sister, his wife, who had been so victimized and left so painfully bereft of her loved one. We identified with him. We identified with both of them.

Perhaps this mundane but moving story might illuminate some of the deeper meanings of our communing with the Lord, when we think of that communing as sacrifice. Perhaps it can remind us of the profound meanings of Christ's sacrifice for all of us, and the power that that sacrifice holds for all of us who identify our lives with His. That sacrifice is an example for us, surely, but all the more it is an act of self-giving which is so real and so powerful that it draws us into it, includes us in its anguish, and draws us away from the more typical self-centeredness of our lives.

A traditional image for all this is: in the death of Christ we are washed with the blood of the Lamb. As Christ dies for us, his holy and pure blood flows over us and covers us, like an invisible garment. So we are one with Christ's death.

Luther sometimes preferred a different kind of image: the Psalmist's image of a mother hen gathering her chicks under her ' wings, bringing them close to her, readying herself to protect them from danger, preparing to bear the brunt of the hawk's deadly attack herself.

These images suggest a kind of transfer, as we are drawn in this sacramental moment to the Crucified One. Christ takes on both the punishment for our sins, which has been held in store for us like storms of rain churning in the gathering thunderclouds, and he bears the pain of that punishment, as if the searing lightening of judgment that had been intended for each one of us struck Him instead.

In the traditional language of theology, this kind of transfering of what was meant for us to Him, as we stand with Him, has been called the Atonement -- more clearly stated, His at-one-ment with us.

But our being drawn into the sacrifice of the Crucified is more than that kind of transfer, profoundly moving and relieving as that is for us. Our identification with the Crucified, our being drawn into the presence of the Lamb, also involves a participation from our side — in some small measure, but a real participation nevertheless — in His bearing the sufferings of the whole world.

That bearing up, that experience of the agony of the ages, upon the part of the Crucified, of course dwarfs in intensity and in depth of pain and grief anything that any one of us could ever experience. But the at-one-ment of Christ with us can be understood to include this kind of reciprocity, infinitely limited as it is on our side, because that at-one-ment is a matter of such profound intimacy.

In extending His arms over us, in other words, as those arms are nailed to the Cross, Christ fully shares Himself with us, His agony -- His bearing up, His holding up, the weight of this world's infinite agonies -- as well as His spirit of self-offering for our sakes. He makes Himself vulnerable even to this degree. He gives of Himself to us even to this extent: that He is willing to let us share with Him, in some infinitesimal way, but still really share with Him, the experience of His own sufferings on the Cross. He invites us to reach up, as it were, and help support His resolute arms on that world-shaking Cross with the feebleness of our own impotent arms.

I once witnessed a bolt of lightning hit a nearby tree, in the midst of a colossal thunderstorm toward the top of a mountain. Drenched with the rain already, and shaken already by the loud rolls of thunder that seemed to be engulfing me like a flood, I was terrified when the lightning hit that tree so near to me. There I stood pondering the huge gash down the side of that giant oak. There I stood, unable to move.

Incomprehensible as the thought may sound, we stand by God

in his hour of grieving," as Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said. (T) For the sacrifice of the Cross, on God's part, means not only the covering over of our sins, but also God's taking on, bearing, and experiencing the enormous pain of human suffering throughout the ages, and in every corner of the earth. And we are drawn into that sacrifice in that particular respect.

Bonhoeffer must have known that personally, when, even as the terrors of World War II were coming to an end, he was called by the Gestapo — "Prisoner Bonhoeffer!" -- and then led out to be shot. As the barrels of the Gestapo pointed at him, he must have recalled what he had earlier written about standing with Christ and participating in His agony.

On two different occasions, I stood with my wife, as she experienced the sharp pains of childbirth. I could do nothing at those times, but stand there with her. I stood there -- just as I am, without one plea. It was her pain, hers to bear, mine only to touch at the edges. All the more so, in being drawn forth to participate in the great mystery of Christ's sacrifice, made real for us in Holy Communion, we touch only the edges of this Divine pain and grieving. But we do touch.

And as we do, with the ears of faith, we can hear His cries on the Cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" which are the cries of a mother who in pain delivers a stillborn infant, which are the cries of a South African child who sees his older sister being burnt alive by a mob, which are the cries of a family in Hiroshima, which has been consigned to the living hell of survival after the monster bomb had wreaked its monstrous havoc on their world.

In a sense the faithful have always experienced Holy Communion in this way, even if they have not always been ready to articulate the experience in such words. So they have approached the Table of the Lord, characteristically, with great sobriety and indeed with tears in their hearts, like lambs being led to slaughter, as they might have approached the original Cross at Calvary. In their approach of silent awe, they have known deeply if not consciously -- for still waters run deep -- that their

at-one-ment with the Crucified God in Christ is a participation in the sufferings of God for the world, as well as a deliverance from the weight of their sins. "Go to dark Gethsemane," the 19th century hymnist James Montgomery wrote --

> Go to dark Gethsemane,
> All who feel the tempter's pow'r;
> Your Redeemer's conflict see.
> Watch with him one bitter hour;
> Turn not from his griefs away;
> Learn from Jesus Christ to pray. (?)

The knowing of the Cross, in this way, is always a part of our experience of Holy Communion, whether it comes to conscious expression or not. Whatever the season, although especially during times such as Lent, we are led to experience Holy Communion as the full sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross.

In this way, communing with the Lord, who is offered to us graciously by God, especially in, with, and under the gifts of bread and wine, means being drawn into the reality of Christ's sacrificial death. The bread and the wine are truly vehicles for Christ's coming to us -- yet we should never forget that they are at the same moment broken and shed for our sakes, and therefore intended to draw us together into the holy sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. When we walk forward to the Table of the Lord, then, we are walking forward to experience the throes of death. (3*)

In a world where the nations rage and the peoples weep and gnash their teeth as they strike out against each other in fear and hatred, and where fratricide is commonplace, all for the sake of self-aggrandizement and self-assertion, we walk forward in Holy Communion to die with Christ, to be partakers of his self-offering on the Cross. We walk forward to allow our lives to be totally shaped by and filled with the self-giving life of this One, who, although he was in the form of God, emptied Himself, taking on the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even death on a Cross, and who now lives eternally as the Crucified. We walk with words like these on our lips:

Victim Divine, your Grace we claim,
As here your precious death we show,
Once offered up, a spotless lamb,
In your great temple here below.
You did for humankind atone;
And now you stand before the throne. (4~)

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1. Quoted by John W. De Gruchy, Theology and Ministry in Context and Crisis: A South African Perspective (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 124.

2. Montgomery, James, "Go to Dark Gethsemane," LBW, no. 109.

3. Cf. the words of the Swedish scholar, and Lutheran bishop, Yngve Brilioth, Eucharistic Faith and Practice Evangelical and Catholi c, tr. A. G. Hebert (London: S.P.C.K., 1953), p. 43:
"That of which memorial is made, that which is set forth, is the sacrifice of Calvary, both in the act of Jesus at the supper and in the eucharist of the church; and here we have the undeniable evangelical basis of the sacrificial aspect of the eucharist. Admitedly there is in the eucharist no sacrifice in the ordinary sense; there is no material emmolation to be accepted by God, no oblation to propitiate his wrath. We may say that it is a prayer-in-action, an enacted prayer, of immeasurable depth and intensity; a dramatic act of commemoration and thanksgiving for God's own act of sacrifice.... Finally, the act of sacrifice acquires its full meaning through the part taken by the congregation. Union with the crucified Savior, realized through Communion, gives the faithful a share in his sacrifice, and so makes the Act of Memorial an actual sacrifice -- a sacrifice which finds its fulfilment in a life lived after the pattern of the crucified Master."

And, regarding Luther, in particular, pp. 137f. : "At no point was Luther so violently opposed to the medieval system as in his repudiation of the Romish doctrine of the sacrifice of the Mass. This was the spear-point of his assault, and this was the cause of the immense emphasis which he laid on communion. Yet even so.... We have seen how the doctrine of the heavenly priesthood

of Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews finds an echo in Luther. There it is Christ who offers his sacrifice, not we; but Luther's thought goes on to find some place for an offering made by man, for since we are by the sacrament incorporated into Christ, we there 'offer ourselves up with Christ,' sharing in his sacrifice. Here he is in contact with the highest conception of the eucharistic sacrifice in the early church, the self-oblation of the church to God in union with the one sacrifice. But unfortunately he never worked out this idea fully, for the blossoming of this gracious and spiritual doctrine was cut short by the icy winds of controversy; and the failure of the Lutheran churches to recover the idea, either in liturgy or doctrine, has led to their permanent impoverishment."

4. Wesley, Charles, "Victim Divine, Your Grace We Claim," LBW, no. 202.

IX • COMMUNING WITH THE LORD (3): HOLY COMMUNION AS SUPPER

The Culminating Experience of Communication

In the course of an intimate human relationship, such as a marriage, that relationship often is tested, sometimes profoundly, as when a child dies. Then, in their anguish, husband and wife cling to each other, and experience each day as a time of suffering. At other times, their relationship might be elevated with joy, in moments of intimate sharing, as when a child is born.

The partners in such a relationship cannot usually experience "everything at once." It is almost humanly impossible — although it has happened — for husband and wife to experience the joys of a new birth fully at the same time when they are grieving over the recent death of another child.

Likewise it is almost humanly impossible for the People of God to experience "everything at once" in their liturgy. It is too much to bear, the depths of grief, the heights of joy. Nevertheless, both are there. Both are given, in any moment, in the selfsame liturgy.

It is therefore important to recall in this connection how significant the flow of the Church Year is for the Church's liturgical experience. With its varying emphases extended over time, the Church Year allows first one mood, then another, to be experienced in some satisfactory measure.

This is an especially important practical liturgical insight for us to recall as we explore the many meanings of Holy Communion, in parti cuar as we move now from consideration of Holy Communion as sacrifice to Holy Communion as supper. As we do, it will be much easier to understand how these two dimensions of the sacramental experience, sacrifice and supper, the one eliciting

deep sadness, the other eliciting ebullient joy, can coexist (within the flow of a single liturgy: if we recall that the one is thoroughly accented during the forty days of Lent, above all during Holy Week, beginning with Passion Sunday, the Sunday of Palms, continuing through Holy Thursday, the night of the Last Supper, to the sacred events of Good Friday that recall the Crucifixion. The other is thoroughly accented beginning with the great festival of Easter, and continues especially during the season of Easter.

1. The Unity of the Experience: Sacrament, Sacrifice, Supper

But it is possible, even during the course of one liturgy, to experience this sacrament of sacrifice and supper as a single event, and to think of it as a single event, even though the depths and heights of the experience will undoubtedly vary, depending on the accents of the Church Year or the accents of your own daily history.

It is possible to see the lifting up of the bread and the wine by the presiding minister for the congregation to see, during the Eucharistic Prayer, as the proclamation that this is the sacrament of the Lord. And so we may adore Him.

It is possible to understand the coming forth of the people to the Table to receive the bread and wine, broken and shed for them, as the proclamation that this is the sacrifice of the Lo rd. And so we may offer ourselves to partake of His own unique o f fering.

It is possible, likewise, to envision the wellsprings of joy in the hearts of the faithful who receive the bread and the wine, and their mutual recognition of that joy at the Table of the Lord, as the proclamation of the sup per of the Lord. And so we may be carried away with gladness, as we communi cate with Him and

with one another

Taken together, then, these three moments — standing to contemplate the bread and the cup held before us, coming forth, falling on our knees to receive the bread and the wine, broken and shed for us, standing in joy, having received the bread and wine and sharing in the exhilarating hymns of the people -- can be thought of as announcing the unity of Holy Communion, as sacrament, sacrifice, and supper, and the unity of our experience of Holy Communion as adoration, offering, and communication. That same unity, as we will see presently, is announced for all to hear in the great Eucharistic Prayer.

2. Accenting Each Moment: Sacrament, Sacrifice, Supper

Each of these moments needs to be attended to, both as we think about Holy Communion and in our liturical practice, particularly the second two.

That Holy Communion is a sacrament, that it is the chief mystery of the Church's life, is a theme which is widely affirmed in interpretation of Holy Communion, although sometimes neglected in the Church's practice: when, for example, the presiding ministers do not seek to cultivate the people's sense of awe surrounding the actions of the entire Communion rite, or when the people themselves become preoccupied with other things, such as the logistics of moving from pew to altar and back, or the time (chronos) that it takes for large numbers of communicants to be served. For the most part, however, the faithful know how to stand in awe before this sacramental mystery.

The accent on Holy Communion as sacrifice, however, has sometimes almost totally eclipsed the accent on supper. On the other hand, in recent decades especially, the accent on supper has sometimes been so pronounced that the accent on sacrifice has

virtually disappeared at times, apart from formulary expressions

Both these accents, sacrifice and supper, sadness and joy, going through the valley of the shadows and climbing the mountain of the rising sun, must be consistently nurtured, lest this concluding movement of the liturgy lose its balance, and therefore its biblical depths and its biblical heights.

The sacrifice was emphasized, to the neglect of the supper, at various points during the late Middle Ages, and again in various forms of Protestant pietism during the nineteenth century, and on in to our own time. This effectively reduced, if it did not totally eliminate, the biblical emphasis on joy, and Holy Communion tended to become a kind of penitential rite, with little or no anticipation of the Kingdom to come.

More recently, especially during the nineteen-sixties in the United States, in reponse both to the exaggerated emphasis on the dimension of sacrifice in preceding years and to new discoveries of New Testament understandings of the supper as a meal of joyful expectation, the emphasis shifted to the joys of the supper. This was undoubtedly a necessary development, for both of the aforementioned reasons, but in some instances the new emphasis, on the joy of the supper tended to become a singular emphasis. Liturgies became "celebrations of joy" or of "the goodness of creation," even "love-insj" in keeping with the optimistic proclivities of the counterculture during the nineteen-sixties. They tended to become superficial, far removed from the agonies of the hungry in a Biafra, far removed from the anguish of the cancer ward, far removed from the traumas of those who still remember the Holocaust from firsthand experiece -- far removed from the cry of our Lord on the Cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Hence we must treasure the traditions about the Cross, as, at the same time, we seek to affirm the new kind of emphasis in the Church of this century on Holy Communion as a joyful supper in the presence of the risen Lord.

3. This Joyful Communication With

Our Lord and With Each Other

But now we must hasten to explore that gladness, to describe that climactic moment, to see the unfolding of this joyful supper.

The accent on the supper, as we must describe it, and in the liturgical experience itself, comes with a sense of abruptness, necessarily, for here we signal a radical break, from death to life, and there is no continuity from the one to the other, only the silent witness of three days of sadness and grief. The Resurrection of our Lord is a kind of creatio ex nihilo, a creation out of nothing, akin to the first day of creation. It is a new creation, indeed. Hence it is celebrated on the first day of the week, not on the seventh.

The experience of the sacrifice gives way to the experience of the supper not unlike the way the experience of the pain of childbirth gives way to the joys of seeing the newborn, alive and well. During the delivery, there is the pain. Then the pain is totally forgotten, swept away by overflowing joy. "When a woman is in travail," Jesus says in the Gospel of John, "she has sorrow because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for the joy that a child is born into the world. So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you." (Jn. 16:21-22)

It is a profoundly shaking, but profoundly exhilarating shift of moods that comes into view here, the abrupt movement from sacrifice to supper, from sadness to gladness. But in the power of the Spirit, the "giver of life," this shift is possible — although it surely cannot be identified with any particular act of the liturgy itself -- as the Spirit carries us from the depths of the valley of the shadow of death, to the heights of the holy mountain of the living God.

The early Church understood Holy Communion as the supper of the Lord, with charged enthusiasm ("enthusiasm" is from "in God" [en Theos]), as we have seen. For the first generation of Christians, indeed, this sacrament was even more than a supper. It was a banquet, a feast of love and life that knew few limits. This accent, widely attested in New Testament times, has been kept alive, in various times and places, throughout the history of the Church, as this hymn by the seventeenth century writer, Johann Frank, illustrates:

> Soul, adorn yourself with gladness,
> Leave the gloomy haunts of sadness,
> Come into the daylight's splendor.
> Bless the one whose grace unbounded
> This amazing banquet founded;
> He, though heavenly, high, and holy,
> Deigns to dwell with us most lowly. O

The theme of Holy Communion as banquet has been reenforced in our own time, as I have indicated, by the fruits of New Testament studies, which have highlighted this central meal of the Church's worship as an anticipation of the great heavenly feast to come in the last days, the time of the coming of the New Heavens and the New Earth, in which righteousness dwells. Texts like the following, from the traditions of the prophet Isaiah -- now appointed as the Old Testament lesson for Easter Sunday — were read in New Testament times as portraying the meaning of the Church's holy meal of bread and wine:

> On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined. And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken. (Is. 25:6-8)

The experience of Holy Communion as supper of joyful

communicating with the risen Lord, gathers together the other accents of this meal, sacrament and sacrifice, and lifts them up in the gladness of this moment. It is the risen Lord who is sacramentally present -- we adore Him. It is the Lord who was sacrificed who has risen from the dead -- we partake of His offering. All this is announced with majestic cadences in the Eucharistic Prayer, this great Table Grace of all table graces, which is offered before the eating and the drinking begins.

After he had given thanks, Jesus said: "Do this...." So the Church, in obedience to our Lord, gives thanks, profusely, and in so doing proclaims to all who have ears to hear the themes of sacrament, sacrifice, and supper.

Although the Eucharistic Prayer has, as a matter of course, taken on many forms throughout the centuries, and indeed in our own day, its classical shape is basically trinitarian, in keeping with the baptismal roots of the whole liturgy, in keeping with the theological motifs of sacrament, sacrifice, and supper, and in keeping with the experiential moments of adoration, offering, and communication.

During the Eucharistic Prayer, we savor all the blessings of the God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in the power of the Spirit. We turn the thoughts of those blessings over and over in our minds and hearts, dwelling on each one, hearkening back with exuberant praise to the first days of creation and, above all, blessing God for the fulfiling events of our redemption, as new creation. In particular, the Eucharistic Prayer highlights the institution of the sacrament, by Jesus, the Word made flesh, as it recalls the words of the Upper Room. The Eucharistic Prayer also invokes the Spirit , and the memory of the Spirit being poured out on all flesh, consummating and lavishing all these blessings upon the faithful today. We reminisce together, in the joyful beauty of this sacred time. All the more so, we anticipate together what will be, how this holy meal, wonderful as it is, is but the foretaste of the great and consummating Banquet that will be celebrated one day in the midst of the New Heavens and the New Earth in which righteousness dwells.

All of these nuances, and more, then come together in the Lord's Prayer, which is the crown, as it were, of the Eucharistic Prayer: the exalted mystery, yet the Divine intimacy of our God ("Abba," Father); the hope for the coming Kingdom of God also on earth, according to the will of the Father; the petitions for bread for the world and for the forgiveness we need; the heartfelt request that we should be permitted not to have to face up to the powers of darkness of this world on their own terms, but be delivered from them; and finally, once again, the exaltation of praise of the God who is the alpha and omega of all things -- "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen."

As this great Table Grace, crowned with petitions from the Lord's Prayer, thus narrates the meaning of the banquet with words, first from the presiding minister, then with glad shouts from the people, those words themselves are surrounded with actions on the part of the presiding minister and the people that embody the same proclamations, petitions, and hopes:

(1) Prior to the Eucharistic Prayer, the invitation of the Host is reexperienced in the celebratory dialogue between the people and the presiding minister.

(2) The proclamation of the great victory of the One who comes in the name of the Lord from the heights of heaven to redeem the earth is reaffirmed in the Sanctus — "Holy, holy, holy."

(3) Then follows the Eucharistic Prayer itself, crowned by the Lord's Prayer, proclaiming and recapitulating and anticipating the meaning of the whole Communion rite, as sacrament, sacrifice, and supper.

(4) Next the faithful come forward and fall to their knees, with their faces "to the rising sun," in order to receive the bread and wine, broken and shed for them, which are for them in faith the Body and Blood of Christ.

(5) Finally, the faithful are lifted up with joy, having received the bread and wine now become the bread of life and

the wine of gladess, and that joy overflows in song and in prayers of gratitude.

4. The People of God as the Body of Christ

At one point in his struggle to interpret Holy Communion anew, yet within the language he had inherited from the Middle Ages, the Protestant Reformer Huldreich Zwingli -- whose sacramental views in other respects had a restricted scope — gave utterance to this insight, which has the ring of New Testament authenticity. The people gathered to receive the bread and the wine, Zwingli suggested, are transubstantiated into the Body of Christ (not the elements, Zwingli said). The faithful communing together become the Body of Christ.

The nineteenth century Danish Lutheran reformer, Nikolai F. S. Grundtvig, expressed similar sentiments in his great hymn, "Built on a Rock":

> We are God's house of living stones,
> Built for his own habitation;
> He fills our hearts, his humble thrones,
> Granting us life and salvation.
> Were two or three to seek his face,
> He in their midst would show his grace,
> Blessings upon them bestowing. (?)

With these images, Grundtvig was reaching deeply into the currents of New Testament thinking about the Church as the Body of Christ. For example, from the First Letter of Peter, referring to Christ as the stone that the builders rejected:

> Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (I Peter 1:4-5)

The eucharistic meaning of this theme of the indwelling of Christ in His people so that they become His Body is also attested variously in the theology of St. Paul. We see it, for example, when Paul pronounced judgment on the fomenters of division in the Church at Corinth, who, when they ate and drank, did so "without discerning the body." By this Paul was referring to the gathered congregation, which was for him the Body of Christ. (I Cor. 11:29)

In keeping with these images of the people becoming the Body of Christ as they participate in Holy Communion, it is possible to imagine the real presence of the living Lord in Holy Communion as a kind of energy field, with the Spirit as the gyrating power. As we receive the bread and the wine, as the experience of sacrifice gives way to the experience of supper, we might imagine the bread and the wine together as centers of expanding spiritual energy. This is the feast of life indeed: the electricity of the Spirit of Christ now begins to flow through the entire congregation, and we are charged with a new joy.

In this moment we are caught up in the uplifting, liberating field of spiraling spiritual energy which is the embracing presence of our risen Lord, in the power of His Spirit. Our hearts are transfigured with the glory of the Lord in this dark world, and so Christ is glorified, as the Apostle once suggested: "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glories of God in the face of Christ."(II Cor. 4 :6) We do in truth become the Body of Christ — again, in Paul ' s words: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of this one bread." (I Cor. 10:17)

5. The Triumph of Hope

In this time of ecstatic spiritual joy and union, moreover, we receive still more blessings: not only the gladness of life united with Christ and with one another, here and now, but also

the promise of a still more glorious participation in his Resurrection in the New Heavens and the New Earth, in which righteousness dwells, a day when the deliverance which we experience now will spread to the whole cosmos, which now groans in travail.

The church's banquet today, then, great and glorious as it is, is but the foretaste of the feast to come. So Paul depicts what is still to come:

> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the [children] of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for our ad op o t i on. . . , the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. (Ro. 8 :19-24a)

The great and glorious feast of cosmic hope, to which we look forward, and which we in some measure experience here and now, also gives us a grand perspective on the predicament of the world a round us.

This great feast here and now, in other words, is not celebrated in a vacuumb. This high mountain of festivity does not exist apart from the valleys of despair that surround it. This mana from heaven in which we here delight does not fall anywhere else but in the midst of the wilderness. So the last word of our celebration on the mountain of the Lord is — hope for the whole world.

How can you rejoice while you still must weep? Now we know. For this great banquet of joy is indeed a foretaste of the great heavenly feast for all peoples and for all things that is still to come. Hence we can look down from the mountain of the Lord into the valleys of despair and rejoice, with fervent hope! For

we know that all nations and all societies and every person, and indeed every creature, as Paul says, will one day enjoy the liberty that the children of God experience here and now.

Celebrated in the midst of this world's hunger, this supper is a sure and certain promise of abundant food for all. Celebrated in the midst of the world's thirsting for meaning and community, this supper is a sure and certain promise of deep draughts of truth and friendship for all. Celebrated in the midst of this world's wrenching poverty, this supper is a sure and certain promise of glorious riches for all, especially for the wretched of the earth. Celebrated in the midst of this world's violence and death, this supper is a sure and certain promise of a glorious peaceable Kingdom where life abounds for all, where the lamb will lie down with the lion and a little child shall lead them.

So, in the midst of their tears, the joy of those who celebrate this supper can be as complete as any joy in this world could ever be, in the knowledge of this supper's universal promise. For our communication with Christ, who one day will come again for all to see, as the universal Lord of all nations, and indeed of all things, is thus a kind of communication even with all things through Him, in hope, in keeping with the Pauline vision of the whole creation groaning in travail as it awaits the final day of redemption.

It is now time, however, to witness the ending of this great and glorious feast of cosmic hope, and to see how we are sent forth into the valleys and the shadows of this world to witness and to serve the very Lord who has so richly blessed us here. The triumph of hope now becomes, in faith, the mission and the vocation of love in this world.

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1. Franck, Johann, "Soul, Adorn Yourself with Gladness," LBW, no. 224.

2. Grundtvig, Nikolai F. S., "Built on a Rock," LBW, no.

x. GOING FORTH TO WITNESS AND TO SERVE IN THE WORLD:

THE EXPERIENCE OF EMBARKATION

One of the most difficult human challenges is the ending. Novelists and composers struggle with it. All of us experience it: the beautiful summer evening when he and she must say goodnight to each other after a lovely moonlight walk, the time when you must leave one job that was important to you and move on to another, the day when you have to move out of the house in which you grew up, knowing that you will never be able to live there again, the day of your graduation. When something or someone is important to you, yet you still must take your leave, you will naturally want to linger. You may even want to hold on, perhaps desperately, where you are.

When our liturgy is right, however, its ending will pose no such challenge. It will draw forth no such nostalgic or desperate feelings for what has been. Rather it will be a happy ending, or to use the much richer biblical word, a blessed ending. This is the moving experience of embarkation with which the liturgy ends.

That is why the presiding minister can so confidently pronounce the benediction of God at the end. That is why the assisting minister can so joyfully say "Go in peace. Serve the Lord." That is why the people can so confidently respond "Thanks be to God." That is why everyone can so freely sing a hymn of praise or a hymn of confident marching forth, as we end our liturgy with dispatch, once the supper is over.

1. This Blessed ^Ending, This Blessed Sending.

Why this blessed ending? Because the ending is not really an ending. We have this promise from our Lord: "Lo, I am with

you always, even to the end of this age." (Mt. 28:20) The One who has so graciously served as Host for our worship, who has fed us with the Cup of his sufferings and the Bread of His glorious life, also promises to accompany us and to care for us and to command us, as we go forth from this feast to continue our pilgrimage.

And more. He will be with us to the close of the age indeed. But all the more so will He be with us, and we with Him, on the day of the New Heavens and the New Earth, in the midst of which is situated the New Jerusalem, as the Book of Revelation proclaims. The same Lord will make all things new. All the nations shall come to His throne. He will wipe away every tear, and the crying of death shall be no more. Only the eternal praises of God and the Lamb, inspired by the Spirit, will be heard. This was the vision of Thomas Olivers, as he ended his hymn, "The God of Abraham Praise":

Before the Savior's face
The ransomed nations bow,
O'erwhelmed at his almighty grace
Forever new.
He shows his wounds of love;
They kindle to a flame!
And sound through all the world above
The Paschal Lamb.

The whole triumphant host
Give thanks to God on high.
"Hail, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!"
They ever cry.
Hail, Abr'ham's God and mine!
I join the heav'nly lays:
All might and majesty are thine
And endless praise!

So the ending of our liturgy, because it is blessed, is not an ending. Rather it is a beginning -- of a life in this world with our Lord, a life that will be consummated in the eternal Kingdom of God, with the same Lord.

This means that the precious gift of this blessed ending is f re edom in Christ, freedom from the burden of our sins, freedom from the pall of despair that this world's suffering can cast over us, freedom from our own self-centeredness. For, through our Baptism,and with that baptismal promise continually made real for us in the liturgy, our citizenship in the coming land of sacred liberty has been and is irrevocably established.

And because, in Christ, we are free from the fetters of this world's wilderness, the fetters of our mortal nature, of our sin, and of our despairing over the fate of this world, we can also be free for others. Indeed this is the command of our Lord, to go forth to witness and to serve in the wilderness of this world, in His Name. For this reason, this blessed ending of our liturgy is also this blessed sending.

This blessed sending is the sending of the Church out into the world to witness and to serve. It is also the sending of every indivdidual Christian to witness and to serve. This blessed sending is, further, the sending of the Church and every individual Christian to witness and serve, both in word and in d e ed.

Two familiar texts may be taken here as paradigmatic explications of the blessed sending that concludes our liturgy. First, regarding the witnessing, the great missionary command of our Lord: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...." (Mt. 28 : 19-20) And then, regarding the serving, the words of our Lord to the lawyer, who had asked what he must do to inherit eternal life and had been told the story of the Good Samaritan: "Go and do likewise." (Lk. 15:37)

2. The Context: the Mission and the

Vocation of Jesus Christ

But we have yet to identify the context of this witnessing and this serving. For that witness and that service does not stand by itself, any more than the liturgy stands by itself. This witnessing and this serving is of course a discipleship, a following of the One who, having blessed us so richly during the liturgy, then sends us forth — to take up our cross and rejoice always in His victory over death. Our mission, as the People of God, and our vocation as individual disciples, is therefore defined by His mission and His vocation, as that unfolds in the universal milieu of God's history with His creation.

Of course there are innumerable ways to define the mission and the vocation of our Lord, far too many to begin to describe here. But this is a beginning: thinking of Him in the inaugural days of his ministry, as we see that story unfolding in the Gospel of Luke, chapters three and four.

Jesus had been baptized by John. The Holy Spirit had descended upon Him. Then, "full of the Spirit," he returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit, for forty days in the wilderness, and tempted by the devil.

Next we see Him returning to Galilee "in the power of the Spirit" to begin his ministry. This is the inauguration of his mission and his vocation, according to Luke. He comes to Nazareth, enters the synagogue, and is given the book of the prophet Isaiah to read. Which he does:

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

As he closes the book, he says to his hearers: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:16-21)

We see a similar, if much more compact, portrayal of the mdss-inn and the vocation of our Lord, in the Gospel of Mark,

where the witness of the prophet Isaiah as we see it in Luke is ' packed into one pregnant expression, the good news of the Kingdom oE God: "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:14-15)

This is the content of our discipleship, then, as it is defined by the context of our Lord's mission and vocation. We seek to witness to our Lord and serve Him, following his command: to be witnesses and servants of the coming Kingdom of God, which Jesus first announced, for which he died, for which He rose from the dead and reigns eternally with the Father, together with the Holy Spirit.

"Then comes the end," as Paul portrays this eternal rule of our Lord, "when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and every power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death." (I Cor. 15:24-26)

Hence this blessed ending of our liturgy, which is also this blessed sending, has this specific meaning, as the mission of the Church and the vocation of every individual Christian is shaped by the mission and the vocation of Christ Himself: to witness to the coming Kingdom of God and to serve that Kingdom, with our Lord always with us, empowered and guided by the very Spirit that empowered and guided Him during His earthly ministry.

3. Embarking Without Delay

The liturgy has the virtue of ending quickly, once it has begun to end. It is not like a Beethoven symphony that goes on and on before it ends. This is the feast, yes. But then the feast is over. It is this blessed ending, which is at once this blessed sending. But then it ends. Then we are sent.

We should not attempt to extend our exploration of the

liturgy, therefore, lest we find ourselves continuing far beyond the liturgy itself, seeking perhaps to explore the mission of the Church at or the vocation of the disciple.

It should suffice, then, to sing a hymn and then to embark:

Sent forth by God's blessing,
Our true faith confessing,
The people of God from his dwelling take leave.
The supper is ended,
Oh, now be extended
The fruits of this service in all who believe.
The seed of his teaching,
Receptive souls reaching,
Shall blossom in action for God and for all.
His grace did invite us,
His love shall unite us,
To work for God's Kingdom and answer his call. CT*)

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1. Westendorf, Omer, "Sent Forth by God's Blessing," LBW, no. 221.

"MAP" OF A TYPICAL SUNDAY LITURGY

The Liturgical Action	What May Appear in Your Sunday Bulletin
[THINKING ABOUT GOING TO WORSHIP] (Chapter I)	
[LEAVING THE WORLD] (Chapter II)	
GOING TO WORSHIP (Chapter III)	Silent Prayer Prelude [music] Confession and Forgiveness
ENTERING THE PRESENCE OF GOD WITH THE PEOPLE OF GOD (Chapter IV)	Entrance Hymn Apostolic Greeting Kyrie ["In peace, let us pray to the Lord... Lord, have mercy...."] Hymn of Praise ["This is the feast. . . . "]
HEARING AND CELEBRATING THE WORD OF GOD (Chapter V)	Prayer of the Day First Lesson [Old Testament] Ps a Im Second Lesson [Epistle! Gospel Verse The Gospel Sermon Hymn of the Day

GIVING OF OURSELVES
(Chapter VI)

Prayers of the People
Sharing the Peace
Anthem
Offering of Gifts
Offertory Hymn

COMMUNING WITH THE LORD
(Chapters VII, VIII, IX)

Invitational Dialogue
Preface ("It is truly meet,
right, and salutary....]
Sanctus [Holy, holy, holy...]
Eucharistic Prayer
Lord's Prayer
The Communion
Communion Hymns
Post-Communion Canticle
["Thank the Lord and
sing His praise...."]
Prayer of Recollection

GOING FORTH TO WITNESS
AND TO SERVE IN THE WORLD
(Chapter X)

Benediction
Dismissal
Hymn of Blessing
Postlude [music]

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[Printed Announcements of
Congregational Concerns,
Activities, and Witness and
Service Opportunities]

DIRECTORY OF LITURGICAL SEASONS

ADVENT
(word means: "coming")

color: blue or purple
(signifying hope, and the royalty of the One who comes)

A season of sober anticipation of the One who comes to His people and to transform the world, especially in His Incaration, His Second Coming, and in His presence in the Liturgy of Word and Sacrament.

CHRIS TMAS
(word means: "Mass of Christ")

color: white
(here signifing hope, joy, and purity)

A season of rejoicing in the birth of Christ and reflection about the fateful beginnings of his life as the Messiah of Is rae1.

EPIPHANY
(word means: "manifestation")

color: white on the feast day, green for the season (signifying here univer- sality and then growth in wisdom and stature)

A season of celebrating the manifestation of Christ to the world, beginning with the story of the visit of the "wisemen" to the infant Jesus (Jan. 6).

LENT
(word means: "springtime")

color: purple
(signifying here pe ni tence)

Forty days of self-examination and preparation for the events of Holy Week and Easter, above all, Palm Sunday (Passion Sunday), Maundy or Holy Thursday, and Good Friday. Originally related to the instruction of converts, leading up to their Baptism at the Easter Vigil.

EASTER

(word derived from "Eostre," the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring)

color: white

(signifying here new life, hope , joy)

The season of great rejoicing in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, culminating with the Day of Ascension, which highlights His rule over all things.

PENTECOST

(word means: "the fiftieth day," the Greek name given to the Jewish Feast of Weeks, which fell on the 50th day after Passover; the day the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles)

color: red for the feast day, green for the season (red signifying the outpouring of tongues of fire; green for growth in grace)

Celebrates the outpouring of the Spirit, as with tongues of fire, on the feast day. Marks growth in grace, with many gifts, inspired by the same Spirit, during the season.

DIRECTORY OF FREQUENTLY SEEN LITURGICAL SYMBOLS

The central symbol of the Cross of Christ appears in many forms and shapes.

The Greek letters chi and rho, the first two letters of the Greek word for Christ.

Mr

An ad revianion for the Latin inscription on the Cross: "Jesus of Nazareth, Ki ng of the Jews."

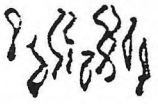
IIQ-S

An abbreviation; the first three letters of the Greek word for Jesus.

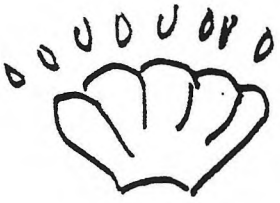
The Greek letters, alpha and omega, the first and the last letters of the alphabet, referring to Christ who is the beginning and ending of all things.

The word "fish" in Greek (ichthus) is spelled with the letters that have been taken to signify: Jesus (i), Christ (ch), God (th), Son (u) Savior (s) .

Two ways of pointing to the mystery of the Holy Trinity, God confessed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



Two ways of pointing to the Holy Spirit, as tongues of fire and as the dove.



The "shell" is a symbol for Baptism

There are many ways to depict the bread and the cup of Holy Communion.

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