

LITURGY WITH STYLE AND GRACE

Gabe Huck and Gerald T. Chinchar

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Each parish I visit and preach in reminds me how much has changed since Vatican II. What were once roles reserved to clergy are now universally shared by lay people: office and property administration; ministry to the sick, poor, hungry and homebound; presence and voice in the local ecumenical and secular communities; religious education and faith formation of children and adults; marriage and baptism preparation; liturgical planning and design of the environment for the liturgical seasons, etc.

Perhaps congregations are most frequently made aware of the changes when they attend Sunday worship and experience the very visible liturgical roles now fulfilled by lay people (e.g. eucharistic ministers, lectors and those who bring the gifts to the altar and set the table). In addition, with the return of the permanent diaconate, many liturgical functions, once thought reserved to priests, are now also performed by married or single deacons.

LITURGY WITH STYLE AND GRACE is a useful book, a manual, for parish liturgy planning teams, ministers (especially the Eucharist) and anyone who wants to learn more about why we do what we do at liturgies----and how to do it better.

It is also useful for those of us who have “been around for a while” and who need a practical updating in liturgical practice.

Our liturgical celebrations are ways we are touched by the paschal mystery of Jesus. They are forms of human activity that express, through ritual, both the individual and community’s current realities and God’s response to them. In *LITURGY WITH STYLE AND GRACE*, the authors profess “an incarnational vision of liturgy” and suggest ways in liturgical celebrations to communicate in human gestures God’s gracious outreach to us. The authors lament that we sometimes forget that liturgy is a community action. As a consequence, people tend to leave the liturgical actions to the “professionals” and assume a spectator’s role each Sunday.

But in these post-Vatican II days more and more laity are involved in our liturgies. This book is designed to help planners and presiders become better informed and reflective about our unique and diverse roles in the liturgy.

The articles in this book are grouped in six sections. The first sections discuss general liturgical basics: an overview on the nature of symbols and rituals. Following these introductory essays are discussions about the nature of words, music and silence in both secular and religious rituals. In the reflections on our stories of faith there are suggestions for sharing scriptures that small Christian

communities will find helpful. In accord with the incarnational nature of liturgy the authors dedicate several essays to gestures, processions, pace and rhythm, and singing - as well as, lights, acoustics, candles, the building (“the church house”) and other physical aspects of liturgy. The whole person is, or should be, involved in liturgy - and so the whole person and our worship surroundings are the subjects of these essays.

The Mass is our most familiar ritual and so each of its components receives attention, e.g., the Gathering Rite, Liturgy of the Word, Liturgy of the Eucharist, etc. While the entire assembly are the celebrants, each liturgy has specific liturgical roles. The next series of essays are about individual liturgical ministries: presider, deacon, homilist, minister of music, lector, servers, ministers of communion, ushers, writers of prayers, sacristans, artisans and “other ministers” - such as bread makers, planners and coordinators. If I were going to instruct or train these parish ministers I would find the succinct reflections and guidelines very helpful input for them. Finally, we receive a “bird’s eye view” of the church year, with its seasons and feasts - Advent, Lent, Christmas time, etc. There are also essays on the rest of the rites: Christian initiation, infant baptism, confirmation, weddings, funerals, etc.

The format of each discussion makes this book helpful not only for the individual reader, but for group planning and discussions. Each article includes: a one page

essay, followed by reflective questions and one or two relevant quotes by liturgists, theologians, spiritual writers, literary figures and church documents. For those who want to study more there is an extensive bibliography.

As an ordained person, I have presided at innumerable liturgies over the past forty years. It takes reflection, prayer, concentration, collaboration, information and pastoral concern to keep our liturgies fresh, reverent and helpful for the assembly. I found this book not only informative, but it also served as an examination of conscience. It asked me to reflect on how I prepare and what and why I do what I do at liturgical celebrations. LITURGY WITH STYLE AND GRACE will help both ministers and members of the assembly keep the liturgy from becoming “the same old thing,” done on automatic pilot over and over again. I highly recommend this book.

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