

# NOTRE DAME STUDY OF CATHOLIC PARISH LIFE

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## Report No. 5

### THE CELEBRATION OF LITURGY IN THE PARISHES

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The Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life has been innovative primarily in its focus on the parish as a social institution that shapes its peoples' values and practices and, in turn, is shaped by its people. Thus, "Catholics" as isolated individuals are less important to us than Catholics in the *context* of their parishes. Since parishes have many things in common with each other but also differ in important ways, we need to understand not only the current attitudes and interactions of its people — ordinary parishioners, volunteer leaders, paid staff, and pastors — but also the unique elements in the past history of each parish.

Perhaps one of the most innovative features of our study is the examination of American Catholic parishioners within the context of their parishes' *liturgies*. We are convinced that if parishioners are to be studied *as parishioners*, we must devote attention to the liturgies. It is in the celebration of the Mass that parishioners gather in a common place, at common times, in large numbers to identify themselves not only as Roman Catholics but as members of St. Mary's, Holy Family, Christ the King, or whatever

*community* of faith. Clifford Geertz, the eminent anthropologist, has highlighted the importance of ritual in shaping peoples' identity, their sense of what they share, and their cultural outlook. Like anthropologists, liturgists also look to ritual, and cite the Vatican II description of the Church's liturgical celebrations as "the source and summit of Christian life"

We know liturgies are important in parish life. Report 4 pointed out that registered parishioners most commonly use images of "the people of God" "the body of Christ" or make references to sacramental acts when they describe the purpose of their parish. Furthermore, beyond participation in the Mass and other religious rites, the types of activities to which parishioners devote most of their effort focus inward on sustaining a worshipping and social community. Little *organized* activity is devoted to moving outward from the parish in programs of mercy and justice.

### ***Methods of Study***

While liturgy is central to American parish life, it has not been the subject of much systematic empirical study. Thus, to assess the impact of parish liturgies and to see whether they meet the objectives of the Vatican II constituting documents, we designed a set of instruments that would enable trained specialists to observe Masses unobtrusively, to record faithfully what they see and hear, and to provide descriptions that are directly comparable, one to another. Given the enormous complexity of even a simple low Mass — the range of potentially significant elements such as the size and layout of the building where Mass is celebrated, the number and kinds of people involved, their religious understanding and needs, the different ministerial roles, the way the congregation is distributed, the signs and symbols sacred and secular the presider sends off to the assembly, the resources for worship, and so on, *ad infinitum* — and given the paucity of previous empirical research on the topic, we had to chart new ground.

Based on discussions with various liturgists and social scientists, we designed a series of instruments — some observational, some involving interview guides, and other questionnaires. These instruments dealt with various aspects of the conduct of the liturgy, physical plant, worship resources in terms of equipment and personnel, liturgical planning, sacramental preparation, parishioners' expectations and reactions. Though an iterative process, the instruments were formally tested in three very different parishes and redesigned. They were critiqued by consultants.

At the same time, we recruited a staff of sixteen site visitors. We put together several two-person teams of observers — one a sociologist, the other a liturgist. Using national recruitment processes among sociologists of religion, we selected the sociologists for their skills in field data-collection techniques; all were relatively young, in their twenties or thirties, having just completed the doctorate or soon to do so: none had a specialist's understanding of Catholic liturgies. The liturgists, on the other hand, were specialized in their field; all had successfully completed a master's or doctoral program in

liturgical studies; all were currently employed as diocesan or parish liturgical coordinators or as instructors in liturgy; all but one are Catholic priests or sisters. The site visitors received study materials by mail, were brought to Notre Dame for a two-day training program by our staff, and conducted trial observations in parishes outside our sample. As much as possible, we tried to nurture attentiveness to every unique detail of the unfolding liturgy, at the same time as we developed common frames of reference.

The two-person teams visited their assigned parishes from our 36-parish sample mainly during October and November, 1983. Of these parishes, 5 were rural, 14 were small towns (under 50,000 people), 10 were urban and 7 were suburban parishes. A few observations were made on the last Sunday of September and the first Sunday of December. This period was chosen to coincide with our survey data collections, but it is also an "ordinary" period of the church year when no major festivals are celebrated. Yet parish activity is also on the upswing: the doldrums of summer are over, the ravages of winter not yet affecting attendance. Only the observations on the first Sunday of December took the team into a special season, Advent. For liturgical purposes, then, it was the parish as it usually is, no special flourishes, but no "down times" either.

The observer instruments yielded 140 observations of 70 Masses. Each member of the team was to fill out an instrument for each of two Masses; they positioned themselves at different locations in the congregation in order to gain differing perspectives. We required the site visitors to determine which Mass was the principal Mass of the week-end and to observe it; then they were also to observe a secondary Mass, often on a Saturday evening. In the smallest parishes, of course, there was only one Mass; and in one parish served by a circuit-riding priest the Sunday Mass was neither on Sunday nor Saturday evening but on Thursday evening. Overall, we have 87 usable descriptions of Sunday Masses and 53 of Saturday Masses; these arrange themselves as 72 descriptions of principal Masses and 68 of secondary Masses.

The instruments and observers did rather well. We asked them to record their observations independently; on factual, not judgmental, questions we asked them to reconcile differences after the Mass, if they could conscientiously do so. Inter-observer agreement was quite high, although there are inevitable differences of judgment on such issues as the quality of singing, the extent to which a homily was based on the readings for the day or the music was appropriate for the day, etc. For the most part, we did not find differences in judgment so large that we could not draw accurate conclusions about a liturgy.

A particularly difficult challenge in observing and describing liturgical celebrations is capturing the atmosphere of an assembly and the style of a given liturgy in a way that enables reliable comparisons to be made between one celebration and another. Most of us are sensitive to such factors and easily know the difference between celebrations that are lively or dull, old-fashioned or up-to-date, but measuring such elusive intangibles is another matter. We experimented with different ways of doing this and ended up adopting a series of polarities (e.g., formal vs. informal styles of presiding), measured on a scale of

1-5. In particular, we looked at the characteristics of liturgical celebration promoted by the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, such as congregational participation, the awareness of the congregation as a community, attention to the fullness of liturgical signs like processions and communion, and the distribution of ministerial roles. The observers were thoroughly briefed and exercised in the use of these measurements, so we are confident that the judgments of various teams of observers are reasonably consistent. Having sociologists paired with liturgists was particularly helpful in this regard, since it diminished the likelihood that celebrations would be too rigorously judged against some supposed ideal and helped ensure some measure of dispassionate objectivity.

That is not to say that we were always happy with the design of our instruments and the ways observers used them. We did get the mix we sought between the perspectives of professionally-trained liturgists and perceptive but not specialized sociologists. And in only one instance was the team not well received; one pastor resented the presence of the sociologist on the site visit staff. Inconsistencies in occasional parishes remain puzzling, but we must recognize that some parishes, pastors, and parishioners do some uncustomary things in their liturgies, and that observers would react in different ways to them. Some might suggest there is a systematic bias brought on by the fact that observers ranged in age from mid-twenties to early forties, while some of the secondary Masses they observed were attended mainly by people in their fifties or over; yet there is little in our data to suggest that the observers could not establish empathic rapport and would therefore, grossly distort perceptions. Thus, while we would revise some portions of the instruments in further studies, we are confident that this first major effort has yielded reasonably reliable and systematic data.

In this, the fifth in the Report series, we will turn almost exclusively to the observers' descriptions of the Saturday and Sunday liturgies. To the degree that the parishes we have studied are representative, these descriptions offer a fairly accurate picture of ordinary liturgical celebrations in Catholic parishes in the U.S. twenty years after Vatican II. In the sixth report, we will reflect further on what we have found through observation but will introduce more of what parishioners say about their worship life and what leaders do to plan liturgies.

### ***The Progress of the Mass***

As previous reports have noted, Catholics participate in Mass for a variety of reasons. The importance of what is called "the Sunday Mass obligation" is well known, especially to older Catholics. Since the Council, the emphasis is placed on participation by the whole community, "the people of God" in a particular place. Actually both of these emphases are aspects of the same thing: the duty of Catholics, as individuals and as a people, to gather for the worship of God in fellowship with each other.

### ***The Gathering and Fellowship***

While we know that Catholics — especially the registered parishioners in this study — continue to attend Mass, the data do not clearly indicate to what extent they are gathering in fellowship. (The term "fellowship" is not a traditionally Catholic term; however, it is widely used by pastors and parishioners in our Study, perhaps reflecting the religious homogenization of American culture.) We recall from Report I that 85% of registered parishioners felt that their parish met well their spiritual needs, but barely half of them felt it met well their social needs. Report 4 also pointed out that the plurality of Catholics define their deepest religious beliefs in individualistic rather than communitarian terms. Thus, it is hardly surprising that the congregations we observed seldom appeared to act as a *gathered* assembly.

It is relatively rare for these parishioners to gather before Mass begins: planned opportunities for socializing occurred only before 15% of the principal Masses, and in only 40% more of the principal Masses did parishioners greet each other informally and chat before the Mass. At the Saturday evening Mass, gathering is even less likely; there were no formal opportunities before the Mass and at only 15% of the Masses did parishioners bother to converse informally with each other. Despite recent efforts to appoint "ministers of hospitality" deliberate attempts to greet arriving worshipers — a practice so common in Protestant churches — also remain rare. Ushers are around, especially at the principal Sunday Mass, but they do not view it as part of their duties to welcome people as they arrive. When greetings occur, they are typically among friends and acquaintances as they move from the parking area into the church. Once settled in the church, people pray privately (in 84% of the Masses), read the bulletin or service guide if there is one (in 50% of the Masses), continue to chat (in about 10% of the Masses) or, very rarely, make their private confession (a little over 3% of the Masses). So the church fills up, but not much has happened beforehand to make it a "gathering." Actually it doesn't really fill up: only seven of the thirty-six parishes had a completely full church on the "ordinary" Sundays when we visited them. Socializing and fellowship occur after Mass, if at all, and we will discuss that later.

### *Pre-Service Preparation*

Within the United States three Catholic church bodies are generally thought to have maintained both strong confessional and liturgical traditions — Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Episcopalians. In liturgical churches, the Sunday liturgy or Mass consists of a liturgy of the Word, built around Bible readings, and a liturgy of the Eucharist. Hymns and chants are integral to these two central events in the service. Although all three bodies come from common Western Catholic singing traditions, for a variety of reasons Roman Catholic Masses in this country were usually "low Masses;" at sung Masses, singing and chanting was seldom done *by the people*, but was usually reserved for choirs. Lutherans and Episcopalians, on the other hand, placed strong emphasis on full participation by the people in the sung service, and every 20 to 40 years produced hymnals and service books that tended to become normative for their parishes. Everyone was expected to sing and chant and speak; the settings were known by the people; and the

service was easy to follow from the service book or hymnal. Catholics did their singing at devotions and Benediction, but not at Mass.

Consistent with encouragement from the Vatican II period, American Catholics are seeking to recover a lost tradition, the sung liturgy. It comes slowly to a people accustomed to take part in the Mass with spoken responses, but more commonly with reverential silence. Some had become so attuned to silence and passive participation that they now complain that active participation and singing is "too Protestant" Since in the past, Catholic catechesis did not devote much effort to stimulating the people's direct participation in the Mass, other procedures must now be used to introduce singing, chants and hymnody, and to make the people comfortable with active sung participation.

One of the most important of these "remedial" procedures, according to our data, is the pre-service music rehearsal. At a little under one-third of the Sunday Masses, but almost never at Saturday evening Masses, the congregation is asked to rehearse the music to be sung at the Mass. This procedure is most likely to be used in suburban parishes and to be led by a cantor or choir. It does occur in other settings, however, and in some instances is led by the celebrant. Such rehearsals appear to be worth the effort: the use of a rehearsal in the pre-service period relates very positively in our data to the involvement of the congregation in singing and to the quality of both the music and singing. The same is true where preludial music is played to begin the liturgy. Perhaps such practices bespeak the presence of effective musical leadership in the parish, but they do clearly signal that full sung participation by the people is the normal expectation for this Mass.

Perhaps because it involves more care and preparation, such as a congregational rehearsal, the principal Sunday Mass was more likely to start late, while the secondary Masses on Saturday evening or Sunday morning usually started on time; nearly 60% of the principal Sunday Masses were late in starting. Their tardiness, however, may also have much to do with the fact that they were better attended and the people were evenly distributed through the church. Less than half the secondary Masses filled the church and people tended to cluster in the middle and back. Another reason for the tardy start is that the principal Masses are attended especially by families (anyone with a family knows the struggle to get to church on time) and people under fifty, while in the secondary Masses, older people tended to predominate. A final reason for their tardiness, particularly in the suburban parishes, is that there is often a full schedule of Sunday morning liturgies and it takes time for one Mass to empty and another to fill.

### *Ministries in the Mass*

Another reform of Vatican II was to encourage the involvement of people besides ordained priests in formal liturgical roles. In only one Mass of the seventy we observed was the Mass concelebrated with another priest, in nineteen of the Masses, more often in urban parishes, a deacon assisted. Lay readers (rectors) read at least two of the readings at virtually all of the Sunday Masses, but were less likely to be used on Saturday evening. Lay Eucharistic ministers are also used in the Masses, but not as commonly as lay readers:

lay communion ministers function at 70% of Sunday Masses and 64% of Saturday evening celebrations. Although our survey data tell us that a slightly higher percentage of laywomen than laymen serve as communion ministers, there were more men serving on these ordinary Sundays, suggesting that available women may be used as Eucharistic ministers less frequently than the men. Something similar appears with altar servers (or acolytes): on Sunday morning, altar servers are almost always used, but they are absent from nearly one-third of the Masses on Saturday evening. Boys and men clearly predominate at the altar, but some parishes are using girls and women; at about 10% of the Masses, the altar servers were female, appearing more often at secondary Masses than at the principal Masses. Patterns of use for other formal functionaries in the liturgy, such as organists, guitarist, choirs, etc. will be described in a later section on music.

### *The Beginnings of the Service*

In Lutheran and Episcopal churches and some Catholic parishes, the service begins with a prelude on one of the principal hymn tunes of the day. The prelude sets the mood for the season of the church year and helps worshipers to focus their thought on the themes found in the readings for this particular Sunday. At 55% of the Masses we observed, there was no prelude; at 25% of them an organist played, and the remainder used other musicians such as a flautist, guitarist, choir, or soloist. Some used taped music or taped bells. Even when a prelude was played, it was not necessarily on music appropriate for the Sunday; it often consisted of music known by the musician but out of season for the church year or unrelated to the hymns and lessons of the day. The evidence is clear that this aspect of the liturgical tradition is only slowly being recognized.

For more than half of the Masses, then, the service did not begin with something musical to focus thoughts but with an entry procession. In only 10% of the Masses, typically secondary Masses, was no entry procession used. In the other 90% its form varied greatly according to the layout of the church and the importance attached to it. Typically, the procession on Sundays or Saturdays of "ordinary" time was not very ceremonialized. A ceremonial cross was carried in only one-third of the processions; and lights such as candles were carried in only 4 of the 70 Masses. There is even less ceremony on Saturday evening than at principal or secondary Sunday Masses: there, the procession did not occur at all 13% of the time, was accompanied by silence 10•70 of the time, or was accompanied by a recited antiphon 16% of the time. At the Sunday morning Mass, however, the procession was almost always accompanied by an entry hymn or song, something that happened at only half of the Saturday evening Masses.

Practices also varied substantially from parish to parish and Mass to Mass on the greeting, the introduction, and the penitential rite. While the Sign of the Cross and the invocation of the Triune God were rarely omitted, they followed a greeting or opening remarks in over one-third of the masses. A greeting such as "good morning or good evening" either substituted for the formulaic invocation or was added to it in 20% of the Masses. At one-third of the Masses, the celebrant simply omitted any opening remarks that would have developed the theme for the Sunday or welcomed the faithful to

participate in the Mass, and slipped quickly into the penitential rite. The data indicate that this omission is associated with poor rapport between parishioners and presiding celebrant, diminished community awareness, and poor congregational participation.

### *Problems of Ritual Prayer*

The foregoing description of how Catholics assemble for the weekly Mass illustrates the difficulty of studying patterns of behavior when that behavior varies so much from parish to parish and Mass to Mass. It might be thought that, once we got on to the unfolding of the liturgy proper the data would be more manageable because the range of variations would be narrower. To some extent that is true, but even so our observers found that the manner of celebration in any given parish was never entirely predictable. This is obviously due in part to the discretion allowed to local communities by the rite itself in the use of options, but it may also be the result of uneasiness about ritual itself.

Christian liturgy is and has always been — in principle at least — the prayer of the community. It is also ritual prayer, characterized by repetition of the same acts, rehearsing of the same words, celebration of the same symbols and singing of the same chants. Community celebrations tend to become ritualized for without repetition and familiarity communal participation would be difficult, if not impossible, especially in pre-literate cultures. Thus the Christian liturgy developed certain recognizable features and familiar forms in different church communities and different rites of East and West evolved. Liturgy is characteristically traditional, though not necessarily uniform from one church to the next. Over the centuries, of course, these diverse traditions were developed, borrowed, pruned, reformed and grew again: for liturgy is not static. Such has been the history of the Church's common prayer and liturgical celebration.

The "fixing" of the liturgy, however, was never absolute. There was, for example, a wide range of chants for use on Sundays and holy days, there were processions and litanies appointed for specific days, there were occasional offices and festal commemorations. Thus around a fixed structure and certain unchanging nuclear elements (like the Canon of the Mass) the Church's calendar provided a rich repertoire of variable elements suited and assigned to specific days and occasions. What the keepers of the tradition always knew—even when, in modern times, more of them were legalists than liturgists—was how the structure was to be observed and how the variable elements were to be used in due order. The preconciliar Roman liturgy is not to be idealized — it was frequently sloppy and slapdash — but it was usually celebrated whole and intact.

In the postconciliar period this taken-for-grantedness of traditional ritual forms and of the fixed repertory of assigned texts and chants appears to be declining. In part, this may be the result of the very project of liturgical reform itself: if something could be changed, then anything could be questioned. Or it may be symptomatic of the American way, where consumerism puts a premium on the innovative and identifies re-runs with the off-season.



Whatever the causes (and our data do not give us any answers to that question directly), it does not appear from our observers' reports as though those responsible for liturgy in U.S. Catholic parishes think of their Sunday liturgy as the rehearsal of old, familiar rites. The legalism which used to protect the Mass to some extent from idiosyncratic alterations seems largely to have waned. In its place enthusiasm and goodwill have to substitute for a sense of the rite. As a result, important elements of the Mass structure are sometimes omitted or distorted by misunderstanding. Often the freedom given to the local community to plan and adapt the liturgy results in poor or altogether inappropriate selections of prayers, readings, and especially music. Sometimes the people responsible for planning the liturgy or leading the celebration fail to communicate adequately with each other or are simply acting without reference to each other. Such lapses would be rather more rare if those concerned had had the opportunity to reflect on liturgy under its double aspect of ritual and prayer: too often it lapses into rote performance or into gusts of enthusiasm, neither informed by a reverent respect for the tradition or by a grasp of the nature of the liturgical act. At its best, liturgy is the prayer of a living community united in one body before God, drawn into the mind and heart of Christ their Head, so that their daily lives come to reflect that new identity. When that happens, too, the faithful know themselves to stand in communion with the whole Church throughout the world and with the generations who have gone before them: they become part of something much larger than themselves.

With the predicament in mind, let us go on to look at what the parishes in our survey made of the ritual prayer of the Mass.

### *The Formal Parts of the Opening Rite*

The penitential rite was only rarely omitted. Of the three options provided in the Sacramentary, the third is clearly the favorite, especially for the Saturday evening or other secondary Masses. The first (the *Confiteor*) is more likely to be used at the principal Mass. Rite II is used hardly at all. The Kyrie and/or the Gloria were sung at only four of the seventy Masses, and in fact were omitted altogether more than they were sung; thus, the Kyrie and Gloria were typically said by the celebrant and the people. (The Gloria would not be used in those few Advent I services we observed.) The Credo, which appears later, was sung at only one Mass.

Traditionally, the Kyrie, Gloria, and Credo have been included in every musical setting of the Common (or fixed parts) of the Mass. It is clear that a major shift has evolved in Roman Catholic sung liturgies in this country, a shift not attributable to any official decision or decree but to popular practices which depart from practices encouraged in official books. Whether these deviations in favor of spoken or even omitted common parts are a beneficial evolution may be a matter for pastoral reflection.

Looking at the quality of congregational participation in the Opening Rites, we find that enthusiastic involvement, as opposed to mechanical or listless participation, was markedly higher on Sundays than on Saturdays. This was true of congregational *singing*

especially, but it was also true of the verbal responses. In only half of the Sunday Masses and a third of the Saturday Masses did participation in verbal responses involve more than 70% of the congregation. But Saturday and Sunday Masses differed not only in the volume, but also in the manner of congregational participation. While missalettes were equally available on Saturdays and Sundays (roughly three-quarters of all Masses had them) the congregation is much more likely to make full use of them on Saturday evenings than on Sunday mornings. Thus missalettes tend to be associated with lower volume and less enthusiastic participation, at least in the Opening Rites.

### *The Liturgy of the Word*

In the Liturgy of the Word, the lectionary is in universal use. The lectionary prescribes which readings will be used on a given Sunday. As mentioned earlier, lay readers are usually responsible for the first two readings: only in a couple of instances did a priest or deacon do these readings. Three-fourths of the time the Gospel was read by a priest, one-fourth of the time by a deacon; only one priest chanted the Gospel. The homily was omitted only a couple of times; 80% of the time it was based more or less on the readings of the day.

Different preaching practices are associated with different kinds of parishes. Homilies generally were marked by a strong application to daily life, except in rural parishes, and by their openness to change, rather than by their stress on traditional doctrine. Homilists in urban parishes showed a relatively strong inclination to preach on private morality, while homilists in small-town parishes were more likely to address social morality; on the whole, however, balance was maintained between the two. Rural preaching was marked by its sticking very closely to the readings of the day, being usually explanatory in tone and making more extensive use of exegesis. It was also marked by the traditional character of its content. Homilists in suburban parishes, in contrast, tended to base their homilies less on the readings and on Scriptural exegesis, spoke more openly about change, were more direct in their application to current life situations, were moving and celebratory in style, and were polished rather than simple in style. Sermons in urban churches were more often simple than polished in style and stuck closer to the readings than homilies in the suburbs. Sermons in small-town churches showed the least application to current life in favor of the after-life, but were ironically attentive to social morality and were more explanatory than hortatory. Most sermons on Sundays lasted 10-15 minutes, but on Saturday evenings the homilies tended toward the extremes, either shorter or longer than that.

By relating the kind of homily preached to the overall tone of the celebration, a number of patterns appear. Sermons based on the readings showed strong connections with the selection of music appropriate for the day, with high percentages of people joining in the common parts of the Mass, and with generally higher levels of engagement and devotion among the congregation. Sermons which were not only based on the readings, but which were also moving and celebratory rather than lamenting in tone were most often preached by celebrants who, throughout the liturgy, seemed to enjoy good

rapport with the congregation. Liturgies marked by more emphasis on the sacred than on recognition of the assembled community tended to have sermons that were judged to be dull. Strong congregational singing was found in parishes where homilists showed openness to change and made direct applications to current life situations. On the other hand, sermons characterized by their emphasis on traditional doctrine were more often accompanied by relatively low levels of popular participation in the Mass.

Incidentally, very little provision was made in the 36 parishes for the special needs of children. Their presence was acknowledged only at the principal Masses and then only 20% of the time. Occasionally the homilist would have a children's homily, and some parishes made provision for children's catechesis during the regular homily.

The Nicene Creed was recited by the people in all instances but one, when it was sung. However, in 11% of the principal Masses and 16% of the secondary Masses the Creed was omitted altogether.

All but two of the seventy Masses had a time for intercessions. The pattern of leadership differed considerably: in about half of the Masses, intercessions were led by a lay reader, cantor, or announcer; this was the case for both principal and secondary Masses. When a layperson was not leading the prayers in the principal Masses, the leader was likely to be the celebrating priest or a deacon, and in the secondary Masses, the leader was likely to be the celebrating priest. In only a third of the Masses were petitions encouraged beyond those read by the leader; usually this was done by silent prayer, but occasionally the priest would add other intentions or parishioners would speak their intentions from out in the congregation.

### *The Liturgy of the Eucharist*

The Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the bringing up of the gifts. Only one Mass in ten failed to have any kind of offertory procession, though in the other nine Masses there were great variations in the people involved, the accompaniment, and the gifts brought up. 80% of the time, gifts were brought up by ordinary members of the congregation; 50% of the time ushers were involved. At Sunday Masses, the procession was accompanied about two-thirds of the time by congregational singing or, less often, by a choir anthem, an organ offertory, or a guitar-accompanied solo. On Saturdays, congregational singing at this point occurred at 60% of the Masses, but if there was no offertory hymn, then it was done in silence or with an organ or guitar voluntary. The blessings ("Blessed are you, Lord God. . .") were recited aloud at 30% of all masses, and the priest's private prayers were also proclaimed aloud 10% of the time, although the latter is contrary to the rubrics.

The earlier observation regarding the drift away from singing those parts of the Mass which were traditionally sung at any sung Mass applies equally to the Eucharistic Prayer. Of course, it is centuries since the Eucharistic Prayer itself was sung with any regularity, so it is hardly surprising that the Eucharistic Prayer itself was sung at only two

Masses. However, the Preface, the part of the Prayer which survived the longest as a sung element, was sung at only six of the seventy Masses. It would appear that the evolving practice is to use music only as a way to get the congregation to join into the *peoples'* parts, in contrast to the classic tradition of East and West of setting the entire liturgy, whether done by priest, monks, or people, to music. Thus acclamations of the people were sung approximately 70% of the time, with the Eucharistic Acclamation being sung slightly less frequently than the *Sanctus* or the *amen*. Generally speaking, the level of participation in these acclamations was slightly higher on Saturday evenings and at secondary Masses, probably because congregational participation was stronger when they were recited than when they were sung, and they are sung more often on Sunday.

The sung-versus-spoken participation rates involve a curious interplay with hymnals and missalettes. When acclamations are sung, people participate better if they have hymnbooks than if they have missalettes. When acclamations are spoken, people participate better if they have missalettes than hymnbooks. The problem seems to reside in the way publishers have printed spoken and sung texts and scored the music for the latter. In some recent hymnbooks of liturgical churches, in addition to hymns there are several complete Mass settings in the front of the book. Both sung and spoken parts are together and the congregation follows through it sequentially; the hymns in the same book are grouped by season of the church year, and are indexed by the lectionary. Any pastor or musician can quickly find the appropriate music for the Sunday. Any worshiper can follow the entire service with one book in hand. The musician, in turn, can play the music as written and as the worshiper sees it. In most hymnbooks currently published for Catholic Masses, however, the hymns are not grouped by season or indexed to the lectionary; some hymnals omit the spoken texts altogether and all the settings for a given part of the Mass — e.g., the *Sanctus* — appear together; parishioners find it confusing to locate the place and follow the Mass. The missalettes all offer the texts for the propers, i.e., the variable parts depending on the season and the lessons, but in the opinion of many church musicians, few musicians will use the musical scoring for the sung parts; when the notes in the missalette go up and the organist goes down or plays a different rhythm from that shown in the missalette, the people are confused and drop out of the singing. Further, hymnody is usually drawn from outside the missalette. Until appropriate integration of the service occurs, the said-sung participation rates are likely to continue their erratic fluctuation, according to liturgical musicians with whom we have discussed our findings.

Other factors also affect how engaged in, or bored with, the celebration the community appeared to be. Low levels of engagement are associated with an exclusive use of hymns at Mass, with the use of guitar rather than organ, and with the amount of singing the congregation is expected to do. If the congregation is expected to sing everything, boredom levels also rise. The same happens if the congregation is largely excluded from sung participation by the dominance of cantor, choir or folk group, though the folk group in the smaller church comes off better than cantor or choir in this regard.

Parishes which seem to have made little progress in implementing the spirit of the postconciliar reforms have liturgies where the congregation often gets restless during the

Eucharistic Prayer; implementation of Vatican II, however, is not itself a guarantee against boredom. Nevertheless, congregational attentiveness is greater where the Mass is characterized by a strong sense of awareness of the gathered community. Where the celebration is also marked by some awareness of the sacred, the congregation is more likely to be fully engaged than if the sacred is either stressed exclusively or neglected. We could find little clearly to link the kind of homily preached and the level of participation in the Eucharistic Prayer, though homilies based on the readings do seem to be followed by slightly higher levels of participation.

As for the role of the celebrant in all this, we find that a celebrant does not prevent the congregation from being bored by ad-libbing during the liturgy nor, at the other extreme, by being extremely reverent. Curiously, it seems better for the celebrant either to be acting clearly with the people, or to be acting clearly on behalf of the people, than for him to be trying to occupy some middle ground between those two styles. Needless to say, in making all these correlations we are simply reporting patterns that emerged in the seventy Masses we studied. Given the enormous number of potential factors involved in distinguishing congregations that are highly engaged in the Mass from those which are relatively apathetic, it would be misleading to look for any simple formula which can produce "full, conscious and active participation" in any congregation.

Turning to the Communion rite, it is apparent that the long campaign in favor of more frequent Communion has paid off handsomely in American parishes. In 90% of the Masses observed, more than three-quarters of the congregation received Communion, with no significant differences from one Mass to another. Where Communion from the cup is concerned, however, the picture is not so uniform. It was available at only 47% of the Masses: at 44% of secondary Masses and 51% of principal Masses. Even when the cup was available, a majority of the congregation drank from it only in one-third of the cases. Lay people assisted in the distribution of Communion at less than three-quarters of all Masses, men dominating among them. At main Masses on Sundays, lay Communion ministers were involved 78% of the time with men assisting at 65% of the Masses and women at 54%. Another aspect which is of some theological significance and which has been a matter of papal advocacy since the eighteenth century, is that of the people receiving hosts consecrated at the Mass in which they are participating. This still has not caught on, being done in less than 20% of all Masses. The general practice seemed to be to use both bread consecrated at the Mass and hosts taken from the tabernacle.

During the distribution of Communion, there was congregational singing at three-quarters of the Sunday Masses, but only at a third of the Saturday evening Masses. On Saturday evenings, the accompaniment to Communion was as likely to be silence or an instrumental piece played on organ or guitar. At three Masses, the Communion Antiphon was simply recited, either by congregation or by the reader.

It is not universally clear that the Post-Communion prayer is the conclusion of the Communion rite. Not infrequently, it followed the announcements and immediately preceded the blessing and dismissal. Nearly three-quarters of all Masses concluded with a

final hymn or song; the others recessed to instrumental music or, in a couple of instances, in silence.

### *The Quality of the Celebration*

Our observer's instrument also contained considerable information about the overall quality of the celebration. The celebrant tended to dominate the liturgy to a noticeable degree in over half the Masses observed. This was particularly the case in small-town parishes, 74% of the time; celebrants there were also more likely than others to adopt an informal style. Celebrants in rural parishes were more formal, while suburban priests were again more informal in presidential style. Along with their formality, celebrants in rural parishes were generally more reverent than others, though the few cases of conspicuous lack of reverence were, in fact, in rural parishes. In one, a celebrant was proceeding with the Eucharistic prayer, looked at the wine, told the worshipers "This stuff is contaminated," walked off the altar into the sacristy and emerged with a different jug of wine, and proceeded with the celebration!

Not surprisingly, perhaps, suburban parishes were the most dedicated (78% of the Masses) and small-town parishes the least dedicated to implementing a postconciliar style of liturgy. Rural parishes, for all their formality, were surprisingly postconciliar in style (71%), but generally scored low in terms of religious fervor, awareness of the community gathered, and rapport between priest and congregation. Religious fervor was more evident in suburban parishes (47% of the Masses), with urban parishes in second place, but urban parishes also had more than their share of uninspiring liturgies, suggesting that urban liturgies are usually either very good or very bad. Liturgies in urban and suburban parishes showed the strongest awareness of the participating community, a measure on which rural parishes scored low.

Finally, while it is obvious that American parishes have radically transformed the practice of the liturgy in the years since the council, there are still some "soft" areas where the spirit of the liturgical renewal has yet to take hold. Among them must be numbered the Opening Rites (in part a problem with the *Ordo Missae*, the official ritual, itself), the engagement of the congregation in praying the Eucharist, the failure to make full use of lay ministers of communion (especially women) at all Masses, the continuing practice of using pre-consecrated hosts for communion, the widespread neglect of the cup, and the general issue of music and singing in the liturgy. We now look more closely at the state of liturgical music in the parishes, but we shall return to some of these issues in our next report, where we shall have the advantage of parishioners' own views on these matters.

### *Music and Song*

There has been a stream of official Church documents, beginning with Pius X's *Motu Proprio* of 1903, seeking to encourage sung liturgies and enhance the standards of liturgical music, but it is the general reputation of Catholics, not least in the United States,

that they have no tradition of liturgical singing in parish churches. Theoretically, music and song are intrinsic to good liturgy, so it is worth asking how American parishes, as represented in our sample, are doing. The bare statistics are as follows. Almost nine out of every ten Masses observed had some singing, ranging from 70% of Saturday evening Masses to well over 90% of Sunday Masses. This is undoubtedly a major change from preconciliar practice, where most Masses were "low Masses;" introducing music is one thing, however, and getting Catholics to join in *en masse* is another.

For a fair picture of the state of sung liturgy in the sampled parishes, some discrimination has to be made between congregational participation at different points in the Mass. When that is done, we find that full participation in the singing of the people's parts of the Eucharistic prayer was registered in slightly more than one in four Masses; at about the same proportion of Masses, these parts were simply recited. The proportion of people engaging in the Responsorial Psalm was slightly stronger: the great majority of the congregation joined in at nearly 60% of all Masses, but the Responsorial Psalm was recited more than half the time and we know that spoken participation is generally greater than sung participation. A clearer indication of the weakness of congregational singing is the fact that in only 12% of all Masses did the overwhelming majority of the people join in hymn singing; in another 18% at least two-thirds joined in. The singing of the common parts of the Mass (i.e., Kyrie or Gloria, Sanctus, etc.) was wholehearted at between a quarter and a third of the Masses. From this information, two things seem clear: the general level of congregational participation in the sung parts of the Mass is far from impressive, but the congregation does slightly better with repeated, familiar texts like the Sanctus than with texts which change from week to week, like hymns. But we can substantiate these findings and refine them by looking at the data more closely

One factor that should make a difference is the kind of material people have in their hands at Mass. We classified the wide range of worship aids into four categories: hymn books, missalettes, song books and parish collections. Of these, missalettes are most widely in use, appearing at three out of every four Masses. Slightly less than half the parishes had *hymn* books, such as *Worship II*, while about 40% had *song* books, such as *Glory and Praise*. Parish collections, almost all of the "contemporary folk" genre, were found in 10% of all parishes. Moreover, the distribution of these materials is interesting. Hymnals, missalettes and song books were each used in just over half the suburban parishes; small-town parishes rely heavily on missalettes (used at 93% of all Masses, as compared with hymnals found at only about half); urban parishes use missalettes (59%) and song books (45%), but few hymnals or parish collections; rural parishes use missalettes (89%) and parish collections (85%) almost exclusively.

There are indications that different types of materials can be linked to different kinds of liturgical celebration. We have already discussed the anomaly in sung and spoken participation as the result of publishers' and users' practices. The data speak most kindly of those hymn books that come nearest to integrating the entire Mass — sung and spoken parts, and hymns. But the very presence of such resources in the pew suggests that parish leadership places a premium on congregational participation in the sung Mass and will

devote financial and personnel resources to it. The missalettes, as a class, do not come off well in our data and perhaps attest lack of resources, understanding, or commitment at the parish level. They are used by the people more frequently at the Saturday evening Mass than at the principal Mass, and in fact, are rather strongly associated with those features of Saturday evening Masses which distinguish them from the principal Mass, and by the characteristics of small-town parishes that distinguish them from suburban parishes. This means that where missalettes are used, there will be less community awareness and the celebrant will tend to dominate the liturgy more strongly, acting for the people rather than with the people, and feeling freer to improvise as he goes along. Where missalettes are used, the selection of music to be sung is less likely to be influenced by the texts of the Mass of the day. There is also likely to be less rapport between the celebrant and the congregation in the rite, and the homilies preached tend to be more traditional in their teaching, less based on the readings for the day, and of less direct applications to life.

Musical leadership is a very significant element in how well a congregation sings, but it is also one which is heavily dependent upon the personnel and financial resources of a parish. (This is also related to the matter of liturgical planning, which we will take up in our next report.)

We found that an organist played at 60% of the Masses and is especially relied on in our urban parishes. There was a choir singing at 60% of Masses, a cantor led the singing at 40%, a guitarist played at about a third of all Masses and other musicians were employed at about a quarter of all celebrations. Apart from the guitarist, who was equally likely to play at Saturday and Sunday Masses, the others were more frequently found at Sunday Masses, which corresponds to the higher frequency of sung liturgies on Sundays. The cantor is almost a hallmark of suburban liturgies, appearing at four out of every five suburban Masses. Suburban parishes also make more use than others of the services of a guitarist. Folk groups lead the singing at a third of small-town parishes, more than any other. Rural parishes rely on an organist and/or cantor, but it is in rural parishes, too, that the congregation does most of the singing itself.

The presence of a choir was as effective in encouraging the congregation to sing as was the leadership of a cantor, and both of these were more likely to be associated with strong congregational singing than was the playing of a guitarist. Likewise, when the organ is played throughout the liturgy, congregational singing is likely to be more wholehearted than when a guitarist played. This probably has something to do with the positioning of the two instruments and with their relative ability to fill the church with sound. In our data, where a guitar is used, people at the front sing well, but people at the back sing less, if at all; the organ generally achieves more uniform participation. It may also have something to do with the fact that the organist is usually out of sight, behind the congregation, whereas the guitarist suffers both the advantages and disadvantages of attracting the community's attention and perhaps diverting it away from their own liturgical action. In the eyes of the congregation, it seems, there is a line between leaders as enablers and leaders as simply performers.



The role of the cantor seems to bear out this point, as well. At first glance our data indicate that the leadership of a cantor is not particularly effective, but this picture changes when we take into account how much of the singing the cantor usually does. Where the cantor sings less than 70% of the music, congregational participation rises sharply above that attained with any other kind of musical leadership. A similar phenomenon was observed with congregational singing itself. The congregation is much more likely to sing wholeheartedly if it is neither left to do all the singing nor virtually excluded by choir, folk group, cantor, or other musicians. In other words, a sharing of the singing among different elements in the assembly would seem to be the most effective way of enhancing sung participation.

The question of who sings what and how much is also tied up with the question of what kind of music is sung. In the parishes we surveyed, hymns and folk songs predominate, with a sprinkling of chant, polyphony, Gospel music and ethnic hymns here and there. In terms of their effectiveness in involving the congregation, hymns are above average, but they do even better in celebrations where they are used but do not dominate the celebration. Folk music, it must be admitted, emerges with very mixed results. Often it is associated with very enthusiastic participation, but the participation is by a limited part of the congregation; equally often, the congregation appears quite unresponsive. In the relatively few parishes where ethnic hymns were used, there was a high level of congregational singing, but the opposite was true for Masses using Gospel music — presumably because Gospel music is usually sung by a choir and calls for a different kind of participation on the part of the congregation. There were only a couple of parishes where chant was used, and even there it was only used for a part of the Mass; but if the experiences of these parishes are anything to go by, there is no reason for thinking that chant will inhibit full congregational participation.

Perhaps the most significant difference between good and poor congregational singing hinges upon the appropriateness of the music to the Mass of the day. In the judgment of our observers, where music was chosen for use at Mass, it was appropriate about 25% of the time, inappropriate 10% of the time, and the rest of the time it was only somewhat appropriate. Still, this does show that the choice of hymns and songs is not done entirely at random or solely on the grounds that the congregation can sing them. Indeed, more effort seems to be made with the selection of music in celebrations held on Sundays, in suburbs, and dominated by families. Inappropriate music was most commonly found on Saturday evenings, where the congregation is mostly over fifty, and in small-town parishes.

The appropriateness or inappropriateness of the music chosen clearly relates to the overall quality of the celebration and to people's satisfaction with the liturgy. The negative side of this can be stated quite bluntly: inappropriate music is worse than no music at all. For example, where there is no music, 56% of parishes had most people joining in the common parts of the Mass; but this figure drops to 8% where the music bore little relationship to the Mass of the day! Conversely, where the music is carefully chosen, people are much *more* likely to join in the singing and they are much less likely to follow

along the prayers of the Mass in books or missalettes. They are also much more likely to declare themselves happy that congregational singing is now part of the Mass.

In summary, the Church's ideal of a sung liturgy with full and active congregational participation appears most often to be realized in those parishes which provide hymnals rather than missalettes, which make careful selection of the music to be sung, and which judiciously deploy the music between choir or folk group, cantor, and congregation.

### *Social Dimension of the Liturgy*

Early in this report when describing the unfolding of the liturgy, we remarked upon the rarity of any kind of pre-Mass assembly and questioned whether Catholics have really grasped the notion of the "gathered community" or whether they still act as so many individual Mass-goers. In this last section, we would like to offer some select data relating to this question.

Actually, whether or not people gather before and after Mass seems as much a matter of parish location as anything else, and therefore probably of the life-styles of the parishioners in these different locations. For example, pre-Mass gatherings are most common in urban parishes, but virtually unknown in rural parishes; after Mass, however, it is the congregations of small-town and rural parishes who tend to linger and talk. Sixty-percent of the suburban Masses we observed had no after-Mass gathering. While less than one in four suburban churches served coffee after Mass, coffee was served following a third of the Masses in small-towns. In urban and especially in rural parishes, it is much more common for people to spend some time standing around outside church talking, but none of our rural parishes thought to serve coffee.

Does it make any difference whether people spend time together, before or after Mass? Gathering after Mass shows very strong association with parishioners' perception of their parish as a community, and is also linked to an emphasis on horizontal relationships within the assembly during the liturgy itself. It is also positively related to sermons that are this-worldly rather than other-worldly in their preoccupations, and to parish liturgies marked by fuller implementation of the postconciliar liturgy. In particular, formal gatherings after Mass — i.e., where people actually move to another building, such as a school or parish center — are related to homilies that address social moral issues and to liturgies that implement Vatican II. Liturgies with highly formal ritual and marked by strong awareness of the sacred are less likely than others to be followed by an after-Mass gathering.

Whatever happens before the Mass begins, the Introductory Rites are intended to serve as a means of welding this collection of people into a single worshiping body. The prelude and opening chants, the procession, the greeting and, above all, the celebrant's opening remarks to the congregation are all intended to foster a sense of the gathered community; in fact, we find a strong correlation between these opening remarks and the

general tone of the liturgy that follows. For example, if the opening remarks are omitted, the celebrant simply moving straight into the penitential rite, the whole liturgy is likely to be stiff and formal in tone. The same is true if the celebrant fails to strike a friendly note in his opening words. On the other hand, the data show that where the celebrant establishes contact with the congregation at this point, the ensuing celebration is likely to be marked by continuing good rapport between priest and people, by a strong horizontal awareness of the assembled people and even more prayerful community participation.

The data also show the kind of consistency one might expect between different kinds of homilies and the overall character of the liturgy. Sermons which stress private morality also tend to be preoccupied with life after death, rather than life before death. Sermons addressing issues of social morality (though there were not many that did so exclusively) tend to call attention to this world, but they are also associated with prayerful liturgies, with good rapport between celebrant and people, with a more lively awareness of the worshiping community, and are preached in parishes where people say their sense of parish community is strong. Such sermons are generally heard at Masses which best implement the postconciliar reforms. Similarly, liturgies which are clearly what Vatican II had in mind tend to score lower than average in terms of awareness of the sacred and formal ritual, but to be marked by more fervent participation, stronger sense of community and good rapport between priest and congregation. Liturgies that are very formal show a corresponding lack of community awareness but a strong sense of the sacred.

If one can risk generalization without suggesting that there is any marked polarization, urban and suburban liturgies are more characterized by their sense of the horizontal; rural and small town liturgies, by their sense of the vertical. With greater awareness of the horizontal dimensions of the liturgy (and of the Christian mysteries it celebrates) there is found greater implementation of Vatican II, relatively informal styles of presiding, greater religious fervor and better rapport between celebrant and people. All this occurs, however, without necessarily excluding awareness of the sacred. Good rapport between priest and people in the liturgy goes along with parishioners who consider their parish to have a strong community feeling and this is reflected in the awareness of the assembly in the rite itself. Where there is good rapport, there is also likely to be more prayerfulness among the congregation; a reasonably strong sense of the sacred is also found there.

*Report 6 will draw together more of the aspects of effective liturgies with the feelings of parishioners and the efforts of liturgical planners. While the data are complex and the same parish may celebrate quite different styles of liturgy from Mass to Mass, some carefully planned and others poorly thought out, a few reinforcing patterns are appearing in both our liturgical observations and our survey data.*

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Report #1

The U.S. Parish Twenty Years After Vatican II:  
An Introduction To The Study

Report #2

A Profile of American Catholic Parishes and Parishioners:  
1820s to the 1980s

Report #3

Participation in Catholic Parish Life:  
Religious Rites and Parish Activities in the 1980s

Report #4

Religious Values and Parish Participation

English translation in The liturgy of the Holy Apostles Adai and Mari. Together with two additional liturgies to be said on certain feasts and other days: and the order of Baptism. The order of the consecration of the Oblation and of Baptism. Complete and entire. V. Pathikulangara, Resurrection life and renewal: a theological study of the liturgical celebrations of the Great Saturday and the Sunday of Resurrection in the Chaldeo-Indian Church. Kottayam: Oriental Institute of religious studies, 1982. J. - M. Fiey, "Sur le calendrier syriaque oriental arabe de Bar Bahlul", *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. 106, pp. 259-271, 1988. A South Carolina parish demonstrates that reverent, beautiful liturgies "in the Ordinary and Extraordinary Forms" are possible in a modern American parish. December 3, 2013 Brian Mershon Interview 0 Print. We are all fellow members of the Body of Christ "so the life of charity flows from everything we do in the Eucharistic celebration. And I think when people begin to realize that is where you are coming from as a priest, not just kind of re-arranging the furniture, they begin to understand that this all has a deeper meaning rather than conclud[ing], "Father just likes to do things this way and is forcing it upon everyone." Parish Priest Chaplain, CMAA. Email. William Riccio. The text adds that "the experience of the goodness of God in the liturgy becomes a renewal of the gift of hope." "On freeing man's heart from daily anxieties," it continues, "the celebration of the liturgy gives new confidence; the moment of celebration communicates the joy of hoping for a better world, of living in the Church, of being loved by God and of being able to love again, of being forgiven and saved." "Thus, the liturgical celebration embraces several aspects of existence: the world of emotions and relationships, shared frailty and weaknesses, the experience of work and rest, always proclaiming the primacy of the love of God." ZE06082309. Copyright 2006 Zenit.org.