

The Liturgy Awaits the Faithful

Kathy Kuczka

Who in parish ministry will ever forget those early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic? Celebrating the Sacred Paschal Triduum in an empty church felt like an experience in a twilight zone. Several of our key symbols were missing—the washing of the feet, the adoration of the cross, the fire, the baptisms, the anointings, and perhaps most significantly—the community!

The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, a document of the Second Vatican Council, notes that Christ is present in several ways during the Mass.

Christ is always present in his Church, especially in its liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of his minister . . . but especially under the Eucharistic species. By his power he is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ himself who baptizes. He is present in his word, since it is he himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the Church. He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for he promised: “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 7)

The Triduum of 2020 included the minister, the Word, and the Eucharistic species, but the Church, the people of God, praying and singing, were absent. An essential part of the presence of Christ was missing. In the early days of the shutdown, I heard the faithful say, “We miss the community.” It is easy to take each member of the Body of Christ for granted until they are not present.

The literal translation of the word *liturgy*, from the Greek *leitourgia*, is “work done on behalf of the people.” Each member of the Body of Christ is needed to carry out the work of the liturgy. Liturgy is not something that the priest offers by himself, the faithful offer the liturgy together. One can easily see this by attending to the pronouns at Mass, nearly all of which are plural: “We praise you,” “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God,” and so forth. Not only is the presence of the faithful required, but their full, conscious, and active participation is demanded. As the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*



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reminds us, the participation of the faithful is not only their right, but it is their duty because of their baptism. At baptism each member of the faithful made a commitment, or a commitment was made for them, to be in a relationship with God and with the community of believers. Therefore, all the baptized are obliged to recall the dying and rising of the Lord on the Lord’s Day and to help one another discover the mystery of dying and rising in themselves.

Behind every face in our gathered assembly, there are stories of dying and rising. These are the stories of pain and loss, joy and thanksgiving and hope. These are the stories that put flesh on what it means to die and to rise. Our very gathering, therefore, symbolizes the paschal mystery of Jesus. Before the first note is played or the first prayer uttered, our gathering becomes a holy event. When we gather, we seek strength from each other and from God, who strengthens us in Word and sacrament. Our very gathering becomes a sign of God’s presence in and solidarity with the world.

Perhaps the pandemic offers a renewed opportunity to recognize the value of each member of the Body of Christ at the liturgy and to reach out to those who have been away and tell them that they are missed. Tell them that the Church depends on their presence. Tell them that, according to the Church, Mass begins when all the people are gathered. The liturgy awaits them.

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