

Part Two: Revelation and Rehearsal

Revelation

I remember when our daughter, Mary, was 5. On one of those long car rides between St. Cloud and Chicago, she innocently asked: “Daddy, why are there poor people?” Perhaps it was because I was deep into my theological studies, or perhaps it was the Holy Spirit at work – but I answered: “Because we don’t take the Mass seriously enough.” The more I have thought about that answer, the more I am convinced that it was correct. We are made for worship; if we do not embrace that vocation, then all our relationships suffer. Fagerberg puts it this way (Fagerberg, 25):

Happiness does elude us, because we have recanted our vocation as *homo adorans*. As a result, we have not only wronged ourselves, but we no longer “do” the material world the way it was meant to be done.

We often think that the liturgy is something we do, to meet our needs (whether for meaning or companionship or to pray). Instead, what if we realized that—and lived as if—the liturgy reveals and brings about (sacramentalizes) God’s Just Kingdom (Fagerberg, 192; Searle 2004, 7, 10, 16, 19)? To begin with, we need to understand what we mean by God’s justice. We’re not talking about justice defined in narrow legal terms. Rather, the liturgy proclaims that God is the source of justice; *is* justice (Searle 2004, 11). In other words, the justice of God is God’s revelation of God’s self. Justice in this sense is characterized by right relationships: between humanity and God, between human persons, and between humanity and all of creation. Justice is revealed when God’s will is done: when all act according to the purpose for which they were created (Searle 2004, 6, 10-16). Such is biblical justice.

We “learn God’s grammar in the liturgy in order to tell the world the truth about itself” (Fagerberg, 152). We need to be clear about what this means. This does not mean that the liturgy gives us a plan of action or specific strategies for addressing contemporary issues of justice. Biblical justice is not allied to any particular party, program, or platform. It does mean that the liturgy, which Searle calls an “enacted parable” (Searle 2004, 17), “should train us to recognize justice and injustice when we see it... [serving] as a basis for social criticism by giving us a criterion by which to evaluate the events and structures of the world,” including the Church itself (Searle 2004, 17). Parables open our eyes to seeing the world in new ways; they do not impose rules but invite us into their vision of the way things ought to be. Parables of God’s Reign, whether spoken or enacted by Jesus in the Gospels, or enacted today in the liturgy, invite us into that Reign. We are free to accept that invitation or not (Searle 2004, 18).

This does not mean that at every liturgy justice is perfectly revealed; more often than not our liturgical assemblies manifest the sins of division more than the unity of God’s Reign. Such will be the case until the eschaton. We can despair at that reality, or we can realize that we live in the tension of already (the Kingdom *has* come in Christ) and *not yet* (we await its fulfilment). As Searle put it, (Searle 2004, 14):

Justice is properly a mark of the Church, like her being one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Like these other qualities, it constitutes a tension rather than an achievement; something given, yet always to be realized.

If we give up living in that tension, we collapse back into injustice and accept power over others, poverty, racism, and other divisions as just the way things are (Searle 2004, 14).

Rehearsal

Mark Searle wrote of Virgil Michel's (see Introduction) contribution to the "first" liturgical movement (Searle 2006, 8):

[He] saw the liturgy as a practice, a learning-by-doing of the great truths of the Christian faith. These truths, forgotten in the privatistic devotional Catholicism of the nineteenth century, included the social dimension of the human person, the corporate character of the Church, the organic nature of society, the recognition that the Christian life is lived as part of a larger whole and for the sake of others, not just for the sake of oneself.... Liturgy, he felt, well done and properly understood, would generate an awareness of the social dimension of Christianity that would carry over into everyday life, into the world of daily living, of business, and of politics.... This, then, was one liturgical movement. Its goal was to adapt people to the liturgy so that, thus transformed themselves, Catholics would then be in a position to contribute more effectively to the transformation of society.

Searle developed these insights in his own work, holding that Christianity "is more caught than taught, and the model for learning is closer to that of an apprenticeship than that of a classroom" (Wilbricht, 63; see n. 94). He spoke of liturgy being "God's self-revelation to the world" (Wilbricht, 21) through ritual. We misunderstand ritual if we think it is about "us" – about expressing our feelings or trying to create a particular affective experience or emotional high, about getting our "needs" met, or even about being entertained (Fagerberg, 142; Searle 2006, 61). Such a subjective emphasis destroys ritual. Likewise, liturgy is not about ideas, about teaching facts (Fagerberg, 142). Liturgy, instead, is about identity: about inculcating a particular way of being in the world; about, as Searle put it, rehearsing those attitudes which mark the Christian life. "The Liturgy does not exist to stimulate worshippers, but to make them over into new sons or daughters of God" (Fagerberg, 122). As Searle wrote (Searle 2006, 62):

Liturgy will not leave us on an emotional high because that is not its purpose. But regular, persevering participation and growing familiarity with liturgy's images and gestures will eventually shape our attitudes, our thoughts, and even our feelings. To expect the liturgy to echo our feelings is to court disappointment; to try to shape the liturgy to manipulate people's feelings is to court disaster. The liturgy is there for us to enter into.... Liturgy is ritual: not improvisation but discipline, not spontaneity but practice. It is the rehearsal of a role we shall take a lifetime to grow into. It is our sanctification.

Searle claimed that entering into liturgy requires—and helps us develop—certain attitudes; a certain way of being. Such attitudes do not come naturally or easily, especially in our contemporary culture—which, like Michel's, is still marked by an exaggerated emphasis on the individual and on materiality. These attitudes need to be "rehearsed"—practiced—in the liturgy itself. And, as Searle noted, the very attitudes and way of being that we need to enter into the liturgy fully, consciously, and actively (CSL #7) are the attitudes that mark life in the Reign of God, a Reign characterized by justice properly understood: right relationships. "We learn who we are by doing what we do" (Wilbricht, 29; see n.49). Stephen Wilbricht writes of Searle's theology (Wilbricht, 35):

Searle was convinced that the liturgy reveals God's "attitudes" toward the world; that prior to our response, the liturgy expresses God's love for creation. However, if the liturgy is revelatory of God's "attitudes" towards us, then our faith response must involve "rehearsing" those same attitudes, learning to see the world as God sees it. Thus, liturgy is the "rehearsal of Christian attitudes." The liturgy is the locus for the celebration and appropriation of "right" attitudes, the place where the Christian community practices over and over again the worldview of God's reign. It is the event in which individual Christians rehearse surrendering their individuality in order to be fashioned into the Body of Christ. It is where the pattern of redemption is lived out, experienced bodily, and appropriated for the transformation of all life.

Similar ideas are found in the work of David Fagerberg. For Fagerberg, liturgy and life cannot be separated because "liturgy ritualizes identity" (Fagerberg, 17). Citing Robert Taft, he maintains that liturgy expresses in ritual what "should be the basic stance of every moment of our lives" (Fagerberg, 17). Liturgy makes us who we are. To describe this process of transformation, Fagerberg uses the term "capacitation" (Fagerberg, 127):

[L]iturgy capacitates a person. Capacities differ from a skill or activity in that capacities are formed and developed over a long period of time, and must be practiced consistently. They are normally not done by the hour but by the lifetime. A skill or activity has a beginning and an end ("I will read or study from noon 'til three") but it sounds odd to affix temporal parentheses to a capacity ("I will understand from noon 'till three"). The capacity of understanding is different than the skill of reading, or the act of studying. Capacities serve to shape a life; they are not so much the doing of something as the way in which something is done. So it is with capacities such as love, faithfulness, and hope; kindness, tastefulness, and the capacity to understand; gratitude, a sense of obligation, and being joyful.

Justice, characterized by right relationship, is among the attitudes rehearsed or capacities developed in the liturgy. This definition of justice comes across loud and clear in Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. Or, as Fagerberg, citing Aidan Kavanagh, reminds us: "liturgy is the Church doing the world the way the world was meant to be done" (Fagerberg, 16).

Sources

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