

### **Part Three: Romano Guardini Reconsidered**

In Part One of this series, I mentioned that in 1964 Romano Guardini had challenged the Church with the claim that if the liturgical reforms of Vatican II were to have any real effect then we would have to “relearn a forgotten way of doing things and recapture lost attitudes” (Searle 2006, 47). I also mentioned Mark Searle’s take on Guardini’s warning: “By ‘lost attitudes’ and ‘a forgotten way of doing things’ he seems to suggest a way of approaching the liturgy and engaging in its sights and sounds, its words and gestures, that had been eclipsed by the rise of individualism and the split between inner and outer dimensions of the self” (Searle 2006, 47). I concluded: we all need to understand that “participation” is not just a matter of externals, but of our whole being; that liturgy is not just participation in ritual behavior, but in the work of Christ being carried out in and through the Church (as his Body) and, ultimately, participation in the very Trinitarian life of God (Searle 2006, 44). Participation in the liturgy, which, for Searle, is ultimately a surrender of the self (Wilbricht, 9-10) requires both an openness to encounter (that is, mystery) and a capacity for ritual (and all that it entails).

An openness to mystery and a capacity for ritual. In addition to avoiding the traps of rationalism and sentimentalism when it comes to the liturgy (see Part Two), what else might be required? Before delving into the individual parts of the Mass in subsequent articles, I wanted to pause for a moment here and explore these ideas a little more deeply.

Liturgy is more time-centered (an event, a verb) than space-centered (a thing, a noun); we experience God’s presence actively unfolding in time more than in a (static) place. Therefore, in order to enter fully into the liturgy we need to start with having the right sense of time. Obviously, we experience the liturgy in the present—but it is a present defined by our remembrance of both past and future. We are used to speaking of remembering the past, but the future? And what do we mean by liturgical remembrance?

Liturgical remembering, or *anamnesis* in Greek, is more than simple recollection of past events or literal re-enactment of what has happened before. Liturgy is not about taking an event from the past and holding it up for our meditation (Fagerberg, 88). Such “historicizing” locks the liturgy in the past, rendering it incapable of having its transformative power in the present. No, liturgical memory (*anamnesis*) allows us to experience the past deeds of God in Christ, the paschal mystery, in the present by its effects (Dix, 161). Or, as Msgr. Kevin Irwin has put it, liturgy “is not a voyage into history to observe what happened then and there [but] is our present and ongoing experience of saving mysteries that cannot be confined to the historical past only” (Irwin, 585). We experience that past not literally (we are not time travelers) but sacramentally, through ritual symbols. More on that later.

True, one connection between past and future is that “[r]emembering past events allows a future hope to begin: because it happened once, it hopefully, may happen again” (Olson, 322). But the relationship between liturgical memory (*anamnesis*), the present, and God’s future (eschatology) goes deeper than that. In the liturgy, we do not simply recall, we re-present (make present again):

Re-presentation... has the potential to combine past action with present circumstance. To engage in historical commemoration — re-enactment of past events — defines what happened and potentially separates it from what is happening. Real presence — re-presenting past situations — brings a promise of communion: a uniting with each other and Christ, who has promised to be present in our midst. (Olson, 322-323)

What about the future? As Christians, we know how the “story” of creation ends; we are promised fullness of life in God’s eternal presence: the Reign of God. While this reign was inaugurated by Christ in time, it will continue to unfold until time itself ends. By re-membering (re-presenting) that past, we are also reminding ourselves of (remembering) the future. “The Eucharist, in recalling and proclaiming the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, brings past event to present circumstance {and} also includes expectation of future fulfillment so that in one moment of time three dimensions exist” (Olson, 319). Or, as Mark Searle put it, liturgy “is nothing less than the irruption of the eschatological *future* into the *present* on the basis of the *past*” (Searle 2006, 62).

Too often, we historicize the past and live only literally in the present, with no sense that we are being drawn into God’s future. Such an approach to time turns the liturgy into nothing more than an opportunity to stay nostalgically stuck in the past. Liturgy in the deep sense opens us to God’s future. As such, it commits us to living consonant with God’s Reign, committed to biblical justice (right relationship with God, neighbor, and creation).

As I wrote above, having the proper sense of liturgical time requires that we take our remembering not literally but sacramentally. We live in a very literal culture, one in which scientific materialism is becoming the dominant worldview. This way of looking at the world says (a) that what is real is *only* that which we can experience through the senses (measure) and (b) there is nothing else except what we can sense (what is physical). As such, non-literal ways of talking about reality (myth, metaphor, symbol, ritual) are all suspect.

Sadly, this way of thinking has crept into many of our hearts as well. We either fall into the trap of fundamentalism (treating the mysterious in the liturgy as literal) or reduce the liturgy to a didactic exercise, a way of illustrating doctrine, rather than as an epiphany, an encounter with the Divine, a revelation of what life on the “eighth day” is like (Fagerberg, 89).

So, in addition to recovering a sense of the eschatological, we need to recover a sense of the sacramental, the symbolic. By definition, symbols point beyond themselves to a deeper reality, and have many layers of meaning. More than that, they take part in the reality to which they point; they are not just “the sign of an absent reality” (Fagerberg, 91). They draw us in, revealing this deeper reality, and make us sharers in it.

A sacramental view of the world views all of creation as potentially revelatory of God because all creation shares in the life of God. As human beings, we can only experience the world through our senses; the same is true of our experience of God. So God humbles Godself to come to us in the “stuff” of this world. God reveals Godself through nature. God spoke through the prophets. In the fullness of time, God took on flesh—and Christ Jesus dwelt among us, Christ who still comes to us in word and sacrament, and in one another as Church, His Body. To experience the Divine presence, to enter into the liturgy and to be changed by it, requires that we have the eyes of faith to see sacramentally, to see that in the liturgy symbols are “not logical (this stands for that), nor analogical (this illustrates that), nor causal (this generates that) [but] epiphanous: this communicates the other.” (Fagerberg, 92). The faith to see that “liturgy is the epiphany of eighth-day existence, which is eschatological life in the kingdom” (Fagerberg, 92).

Not only is a sacramental worldview essential for liturgy, but embracing a sacramental worldview commits us to lives of biblical justice:

Sacramentality is a principle that is based on the goodness of creation, the value of human labor and productivity, and the engagement of humans in the act of worship. Sacramentality is a world view and a way of looking at life; it is a way of thinking and acting in the world. It invites us to be immersed more and more fully in the here and now on this good earth and not to shun the things of this earth and on this good earth. It asks us not to avoid the challenges that such earthiness will require of us. (Irwin, 108)

Our faith also tells us that we are a priestly people. What does that mean? In the history of religion, priests are those who offer sacrifice. But we need to understand what that word means. It does not mean to “give up” something in the hopes of appeasing an angry or needy deity. The root meaning of “sacrifice” is “to make holy”—and only God can make holy. Therefore, only God can “sacrifice”—and God’s sacrifice is self-emptying love. God sacrifices in making a space for creation, in taking on flesh, in dying on the cross, in coming as Spirit. God loves first.

What is our “sacrifice,” then? The prophets of the First Testament made it clear: a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, yes, but also the sacrifice of justice. In our own day, Pope Benedict XVI has written (*Sacramentum caritatis*, #82):

Pope John Paul II stated that the moral life “has the value of a ‘spiritual worship’ (Rom 12:1; cf. Phil 3:3), flowing from and nourished by that inexhaustible source of holiness and glorification of God which is found in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist: by sharing in the sacrifice of the Cross, the Christian partakes of Christ’s self-giving love and is equipped and committed to live this same charity in all his thoughts and deeds.” In a word, “‘worship’ itself, eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented.”

Liturgy is not only eschatological and sacramental, it is cosmic. It is not just about us, but about all of creation—the whole universe. God loves first; all we can do is love in return—and our love of God is verified, proven, in our love of neighbor (and all of creation): “We do not stand around the altar simply for our own benefit but because it is our vocation to stand before God on behalf of the world” (Searle 2006, 84). To be a priestly people means that we must move beyond ourselves.

Out of the sense of being a priestly people, a community of memory, a people who will not forget or escape into fantasy, arises a sense of solidarity with the rest of humanity, and especially with those who suffer, those who are powerless, and those who feel most keenly in their own flesh or their own spirit the terrible liturgy of the world. The liturgy requires of us a setting aside of the quest for personal satisfaction; it demands self-abnegation, self-emptying, self-forgetfulness, so that our emptiness may be filled with the memory of Christ and with the fullness of his Spirit, in whom we know we are one with all of God’s people. (Searle 2006, 85)

If we develop a renewed sense of eschatology and of sacramentality, if we embrace our vocation to be a priestly people, perhaps the connection between liturgy and justice might be revitalized.

Sources

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