

**Liturgical Celebrations  
on Weekdays**

**The Mass,  
The “Communion Service”  
The Liturgy of the Hours**

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# Liturgical Celebrations on Weekdays: The Mass, *the “Communion Service,”* *the Liturgy of the Hours*

## Introduction

Some time ago, the Liturgical Commission of the Diocese of London presented a proposal to Bishop Sherlock and the Council of Priests entitled, “Liturgical Celebrations on Weekdays”. In it the following proposal was made: “On weekdays when the community is not able to celebrate Eucharist because of the absence of a priest, Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer become the appropriate forms of liturgical celebration. A communion service is not a desirable option.” This proposal was accepted by the Council of Priests.

A question naturally arises: “Why should we not have a communion service on those weekdays when no Mass is celebrated because the parish priest is not present? Surely to receive Holy Communion is the next best thing to going to Mass, and is, indeed, what the Mass is all about.”

The question is a good one, founded on the devotion of Catholics to the celebration of the Eucharist and their belief in the Real Presence of our Lord in the Sacrament of the Altar. An explanation of the policy is in order.

In this document, we will survey and highlight several aspects of the celebration of the Eucharist itself to explore similarities and differences between the celebration of the Eucharist and a Liturgy of the Word with Holy Communion. Then we will examine the value of celebrating the Liturgy of the Hours (usually Morning or Evening Prayer) when Mass is not celebrated, and make some closing comments. Note that a good deal of explanation, commentary, points for good celebration, and issues currently being discussed in liturgical literature have been placed in the footnotes.

Our subject in this document is the *weekday* celebration rather than the Sunday celebration. Although many of the principles reviewed here would apply in the case of Sundays as well, a fresh consideration of the question would be necessary. Sunday is *the* great day of the celebration of the Eucharist by the whole Christian community. The option of the Sunday communion service is officially provided for,<sup>1</sup> yet many have serious reservations about it. Given the distinction between the Sunday and the weekday, arguments in favour of a communion service on a Sunday may not necessarily apply to the case of the weekday. Since

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<sup>1</sup> For example, cf. CC.C.B., Sunday Celebration of the Word and Hours - Pastoral Notes. Canadian, Studies in Liturgy, No.6, Ottawa: Concacan, 1995, pp.5, 21-23. These notes contain both the Congregation for Divine Worship's "Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest", and the Canadian Pastoral Notes. Also, several books and articles have been published outlining viewpoints about communion services in place of Mass, many of which express serious reservations. Several are noted in this work.

in this diocese we have not yet been brought to that point, the weekday remains our basic focus.

## 1. The celebration of the Eucharist: Action and presence

In this section, we compare the celebration of the Eucharist with both “communion services” and “the Liturgy of the Hours”. We begin by surveying what happens as the Eucharist unfolds, from two interrelated points of view: *action* and *presence*. The Church believes that Christ is present in a variety of ways, as the following statement makes clear:

“In the celebration of Mass the chief ways in which Christ is present in his Church emerge clearly one after the other. First he is present in the very assembly of the faithful, gathered together in his name; next he is present in his word, with the reading and explanation of Scripture in the church; also in the person of the minister; finally, and above all, in the eucharistic elements. In a way that is completely unique, the whole and entire Christ, God and man, is substantially and permanently present in the sacrament. This presence of Christ under the appearance of bread and wine is called real, not to exclude the other kinds of presence as though they were not real, but because it is real *par excellence*.”<sup>2</sup>

Christ is present in a variety of ways, and these ways “emerge” progressively, so they are related to the fact that the Eucharist is first of all an action:

“It is therefore quite right to think of the liturgy as the enacting of the priestly role of Jesus Christ. In the liturgy, the sanctification of human beings is being expressed through signs accessible to the senses, and carried out in a way appropriate to each of them. Furthermore the mystical body of Jesus Christ, that is the head and the members, is together giving complete and definitive public expression to its worship. This is why every liturgical celebration, inasmuch as it is the act of Christ the priest and his body which is the church, is above all an activity of worship. No other activity of the church equals it in terms of its official recognition or its degree of effectiveness.”<sup>3</sup>

This passage from Vatican II tells us that the liturgy is, first and foremost, an action of Jesus Christ, present in our midst, as he exercises his unique and perfect priesthood. In turn, the Church, as his Body and members on earth, participates in the priestly action of Jesus Christ. So we can say that the “visible” or “earthly” subject of the liturgy is the Church as a whole. Now the Church, as it is gathered in this time and place for this celebration, is the whole liturgical assembly. Thus, if we ask who is the “celebrant” of the liturgy, we can rightly say that “It is the whole community, the Body of Christ, that celebrates... the celebrating assembly is the community of the baptized...”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, “Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass”, #6, in International Commission on English in the Liturgy Documents on the Liturgy 1963-1979: Conciliar, Papal, and Curial Texts, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1982, DOL 279, #2198, p.694. See the basis of this passage on the various modes of Christ’s presence in Vatican II, “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy” (henceforth “SC”), #7.

<sup>3</sup> Second Vatican Council, “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy”, #7, in Norman P. Tanner, ed., Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Volume Two: Trent to Vatican II, Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990, p.822.

<sup>4</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church (Henceforth “CCC”), Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1994, #1140, and 1141.

It is also true that “the members do not all have the same function.”<sup>5</sup> Certain members are called to a particular service of the community through the sacrament of Holy Orders, presiding at the Eucharist and acting in the person of Christ the head. Still others are placed at the service of the baptismal priesthood through various ministries such as readers, auxiliary ministers of communion, servers, music ministers and others. These ministries too have a sacramental significance in the light of the priesthood and the sacramentality of the Church as a whole.<sup>6</sup> In sum, “in the celebration of the sacraments it is thus the whole assembly that is *leitourgos*, each according to his function, but in the ‘unity of the Spirit’ who acts in all.”<sup>7</sup>

The full effectiveness of the celebration of the Eucharist

“will best be accomplished if, after due regard for the nature and circumstances of each assembly, the celebration is planned in such a way that it brings about in the faithful a participation in body and spirit that is conscious, active, full, and motivated by faith, hope and charity. The Church desires this kind of participation, the nature of the celebration demands it, and for the Christian people, it is a right and duty they have by reason of their baptism.”<sup>8</sup>

In a nutshell, there are particular ministries in the Mass, but no spectators.

We can now say something about the unfolding of action and presence in each part of the Mass.

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<sup>5</sup> CCC #1142 and 1143. To start with a theology of the assembly as a whole, and then move to a consideration of the particular orders and ministries in particular, reflects the method found in Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (the liturgical assembly; especially if it is a eucharistic assembly gathered around the bishop, being a microcosm of the Whole Church), in which we start with the Church as a whole (chapters I and 2), and only then turn to its component parts in the subsequent chapters.

<sup>6</sup> "Building up the church now means helping the church realize its nature as sacrament. The many ministries occurring give 'visibility' to Christ's saving presence continuing in the world through the church. Liturgical ministries especially have a sacramental quality, for they are carried out within the liturgical assembly. When gathered for worship, the church is most sacrament according to Vatican II." (James Challancin, "Ministry as Sacrament", *Modern Liturgy* 18 (#4): 9-11, 1991, p.10; Cf. also Challancin, *The Assembly Celebrates: Gathering the Community for Worship*. New York: Paulist Press, 1989, pp.68-95.)

<sup>7</sup> CCC #1144. Among other things, this emphasis on liturgy as an act of the whole assembly underlines the fundamental unity of the whole worship space, versus "more holy" and "less holy" areas of the church interior. Cf. Building Commission of the Diocese of London, *Guidelines for Building a New Church*, Diocese of London, 1994, especially the sections entitled "The Church Building" and "The Sanctuary."

<sup>8</sup> General Instruction of the Roman Missal (Henceforth "GIRM"), #3, DOL 208, #1393, p.470. In 2000, a new edition of the GIRM was published. Since there is no official English translation at time of writing, we leave quotes from the previous edition, and note the parallel passages in the Latin "Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani" (Henceforth "IGMR 2000"). In the quotes used in the present work, the content in the 2000 edition seems to be essentially the same, often verbatim, or at least in substance, unless otherwise noted. (On this reference, cf. IGMR 2000, #18.)

**a) *The gathering of the assembly:***  
**The Introductory Rite**

The People of God come from the living of their Christian lives to gather together for the celebration of the Eucharist. In so many ways, they have been living out their baptismal share in the prophetic, priestly and kingly offices of the Lord, being a leaven in the world, and bringing the Gospel to the home, the work-place, society, and the life of the parish. Now, especially during the Sunday Eucharist, they come together in a way that most vividly manifests the reality which they are as one Church. So it is that

“in Christian usage, the word 'church' designates the liturgical assembly, but also the local community, or the whole universal community of believers. These three meanings are inseparable. 'The Church' is the People that God gathers in the whole world. She exists in local communities and is made real as a liturgical, above all a eucharistic, assembly. She draws her life from the word and the Body of Christ and so herself becomes Christ's Body.”<sup>9</sup>

This assembly — the Church called together in this time and place by God — is the first mode of the emerging presences of Christ. The dialogues, prayers and hymns of the introductory rite have two basic purposes. First, they bring us to an awareness of who we are as the gathered Church, the Body of Christ. The presiding minister, another of the modes of Christ's presence, helps give tangible expression to the initiative of God, who calls the members to gather in worship and welcomes them. Thus does the second function become apparent: the rite helps us prepare and open ourselves (even “surrender” ourselves) to God's saving action in the liturgy.<sup>10</sup> “In summary, then, the purpose of these rites is that the faithful coming together take on the form of a community and prepare themselves to listen to God's word and celebrate the Eucharist properly.”<sup>11</sup>

These reflections apply especially to the Sunday eucharistic assembly, whereas the weekday Mass has both common and distinct elements. No doubt the celebration of weekday Mass is genuinely the celebration of the Eucharist as such, and all of the modes of Christ's presence are manifested in the unfolding celebration. No doubt also, the Church esteems the practice of daily Mass.<sup>12</sup> Still, there is no “obligation” to celebrate the Eucharist on a weekday, since the gathering of the People of God to celebrate the Paschal Mystery on the Sunday — the Day of the Lord, the Day of the Resurrection, the Day of the Eucharist, and the Day of Assembly — takes precedence over the weekday. Indeed the “Sunday is the fundamental feast day; it should be presented as such...” in that

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<sup>9</sup> CCC#752.

<sup>10</sup> ...we speak of liturgy as worship, as praise and thanks we give to God. And surely it is that. Nevertheless, liturgy is God's work to which we give ourselves. Without God's initiative, liturgy is devoid of the Spirit's fruitful dynamism. Without self-surrender, liturgy is devoid of meaning.”(Joyce Ann Zimmermann, *Liturgy as Living Faith: A Liturgical Spirituality*. Scranton: University of Scranton Press; 1993, p.76.)

<sup>11</sup> GIRM #24, DOL 208, #1414, p.475. (Cf. also IGMR 2000, #46.)

<sup>12</sup> 12 Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical “*Mysterium Fidei*”, on the doctrine and worship of the eucharist, 1965, #66, DOL 176, #1210, p.390; and Code of Canon Law, 1983, canon 904.

the Sunday is the basis and center of the whole liturgical year.”<sup>13</sup> The Sunday assembly highlights the call to gather as a whole community in a way that is essential to that community's life and well-being.<sup>14</sup>

### **b) *God speaks to us; we listen and respond:* The Liturgy of the Word**

The second mode of Christ's presence to emerge in the liturgical action is his presence in the action of proclaiming the Word of God.

“In the readings, explained by the homily, God is speaking to his people, opening up to them the mystery of redemption and salvation, and nourishing their spirit; Christ is present to the faithful through his own word. Through the chants the people make God's word their own and through the profession of faith affirm their adherence to it. Finally, having been fed by his word, they make their petitions in the general Intercessions for the needs of the Church and for the salvation of the whole world.”<sup>15</sup>

The Liturgy of the Word is thus alive with ritualized dialogue between us and God: through a combination of words, objects and gestures,<sup>16</sup> the Scriptures are proclaimed aloud by the ministers,<sup>17</sup> and preached on by the homilist.

“The liturgical celebration becomes therefore the continuing, complete and effective presentation of God's word. That word constantly proclaimed in the liturgy is always, then, a living active word through the power of the Holy Spirit. It expresses the Father's love that never fails in its effectiveness toward us.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> SC#106.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. James Danen, *The Dilemma of Priestless Sundays*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994. p.46. This does raise the interesting question of the "purpose" or "function" of the weekday Mass, when compared to the Sunday Mass. For example, for Dallen (p.46), "weekday Eucharist nourishes personal devotion, but the Sunday Eucharist is vital to the community's life and well-being." Rightly expanding the picture beyond mere personal devotion, Zimmermann (*Liturgy as Living Faith*,) 993, p.78) suggests the weekday Eucharist is a time of renewal of the Christian identity based in our Christian initiation. In any event, the comparison of weekday Eucharist and Sunday Eucharist deserves further exploration.

<sup>15</sup> GIRM #33, DOL 208, #1423, p.477. (Cf. also IGMR 2000, #55.)

<sup>16</sup> Given that through liturgical proclamation of God's word, an event comprised of ritual words (greetings, scripture texts and acclamations), objects (the lectionary, book of the Gospels, ambo), gestures (greeting, procession, kiss, incense) and ministers (the various readers), one of the ways in which Christ is present is brought about, the proclamation of the Word has been said to have a "sacramental" quality about it. Not that it is an eighth sacrament strictly speaking, and yet it is an effective way in which Christ is present to us. "The more profound our understanding of the liturgical celebration, the higher our appreciation of the importance of God's word. Whatever we say of the one, we can in turn say of the other, because each recalls the mystery of Christ and each in its own way causes that mystery to be ever present." ("Lectionary for Mass: Introduction" (Henceforth "LMI"), #5 in *Lectionary: Sundays and Solemnities*, Ottawa: C.C.C.B., 1992, p.x.) Note also the use of terms that remind one of sacramental nourishment: "The readings lay the table of God's word for the faithful" (GJRM #34, DOL 208, #1424, p.477) (Cf. also IGMR2000, #57.)

<sup>17</sup> The liturgical vision of the church assumes that the proclamation of all readings is a ministerial and, not a presidential function, and thus that the presiding priest does not read any of the readings, including the Gospel. Having overseen the proclamation by the other readers, being in this a listener himself, he then is ordinarily the homilist. However, if there is no deacon (or concelebrating priest) present, he assumes the ministry of proclaiming the Gospel. (Cf. GJRM #34, DOL 208, #1424, p.477; LMI #38.) (Cf. also IGMR 2000, #59.)

<sup>18</sup> LMI#4.

In the proclamation of the Word, we are confronted with the challenge of the Gospel, with the presence and ideal of the One whose Body we are as Church, with the ways in which we fall short of our goal, and therefore with the reality that we are still “on the way”.<sup>19</sup> Thus, “when God shares his word with us he awaits our response, that is our listening and adoring ‘in Spirit and truth’ (Jn 4:23). The Holy Spirit makes our response effective, so that what we hear in the celebration of the liturgy we carry out in the way we live: ‘Be doers of the word and not hearers only’ (Js 1:22).”<sup>20</sup> With the responsorial psalm, the Gospel acclamation, the creed and the prayers of the faithful (in which “the people, exercising their priestly function, intercede for all humanity”),<sup>21</sup> we begin a response in faith to God's word proclaimed, a response that will unfold through the Liturgy of the Eucharist and beyond the ritual event into our everyday lives. Thus, “in the hearing of God's word the Church is built up and grows ...”<sup>22</sup>

“The preaching of the word is necessary for the sacramental ministry. For the sacraments are sacraments of faith and faith has its origins and sustenance in the word... It can never be forgotten, therefore, that the divine word read and proclaimed by the Church in the liturgy has as its one goal the sacrifice of the New Covenant and the banquet of grace, that is the Eucharist. The celebration of Mass in which the word is heard and the Eucharist is offered and received forms but one single act of divine worship.”<sup>23</sup>

There is thus a natural momentum from the proclaimed word to the celebrated sacrament, as the ways in which Christ and his Paschal Mystery are present rise to a crescendo in the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

### **c) *The culmination of “action” and “presence”:* The Liturgy of the Eucharist**

A framework is necessary from which to offer a helpful interpretation of the eucharistic “action” and the great “presence” which is brought about and given for us. In the classic historical work, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, Dom Gregory Dix points out that extremely early in Christian history the Eucharist took on its universal and permanent form, which he calls “the ‘four-action’ shape of the Eucharist.”<sup>24</sup> First the bread and wine are presented, taken and placed on the altar; second, the presider gives thanks to God for his saving works,

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Zimmermann, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, 1993, p.104ff. Zimmermann focuses on the proclamation of the Gospel when making this point.

<sup>20</sup> LMI #6.

<sup>21</sup> GIRM #45, DOL 208, #1435, p.479. (Cf. also IGMR 2000, #69.)

<sup>22</sup> LMI#7

<sup>23</sup> LMI#10.

<sup>24</sup> 24 Cf. Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*. Westminster: Dacre Press, 1945,1954, pp.48ff. Dix notes the contrast of this condensed scheme to that recounted in the New Testament: that is, a seven-action scheme of taking bread, giving thanks, breaking it, distributing it with certain words, taking a cup, giving thanks, and sharing it with certain words. He suggests that such a change occurred very early on, and could only have been made consciously, deliberately, and by those with a striking degree of recognized authority.



praying over the bread and wine which are transformed; third, the one Bread is broken; fourth, the transformed bread and cup are distributed. One easy summary of this fourfold action is: “take, bless, break, share.” These form one way of examining the basic and fundamental structure of the eucharistic action, and we need to dwell a moment on it.

### i) “TAKE”

The liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the presentation of the gifts and the preparation of the altar and gifts. After a basic preparation of the altar, the Lord's table,

“the gifts are then brought forward. It is desirable for the faithful to present the bread and wine, which are accepted by the priest or deacon at a convenient place. The gifts are placed on the altar to the accompaniment of the prescribed texts. Even though the faithful no longer, as in the past, bring the bread and wine for the Liturgy from their homes, the rite of carrying up the gifts retains the same spiritual value and meaning. This is also the time to receive money or gifts for the church or the poor brought by the faithful or collected at the Mass. These are to be put in a suitable place but not on the altar.”<sup>25</sup>

The full meaning of the presentation of the gifts derives from a time when the people themselves made the bread and wine. It thus represents the labour of their own lives and gives tangible expression to their intention to exercise their baptismal priesthood by offering themselves in worship to the Father during the eucharistic prayer which will follow.<sup>26</sup> Its full meaning was also most evident in those times and places in the past when all the people, lay and clergy, brought forth bread and wine (only some of which would be offered in the sacrifice).<sup>27</sup> Such a scene would have highlighted the corporate nature of the action more clearly than our own. For our purposes, we can recall that those participating in the procession of the gifts represent us all. Finally, if a first response of service was prayer on behalf of all during the prayers of the faithful, a second response in service is now evident: gifts (usually of money, but sometimes of other goods) are brought forward for the support of the church and the poor.<sup>28</sup> Then the priest, deacon and other ministers continue the preparation and finally the priest leads the whole assembly in brief preparatory prayers. Yet all of this is but a preparation for what is to follow.

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<sup>25</sup> GIRM #49, DOL 208, #1439, p.480f. (CF. also IGMR 2000, #73.) Note how the placing of the gifts on the altar (upon the completion of each of the “Blessed are you Lord God of all creation ...” prayers) is a significant ritual action, often visually lost when they are placed on the corporal before this point.

<sup>26</sup> It is most important to note, that the spiritual offering of self carried out by the priest and people in union with the offering of the Lord does not occur in the preparation rite, but rather at the offering: the eucharistic prayer. Hence any further usage of the term “offertory” for the preparation rite is best consigned to the pages of the history books. This also explains the rubric which states that when the bread and wine are held during the preparation prayers, they are to be held slightly raised above the altar - that is, any resemblance of this lifting to that during the eucharistic prayer is to be avoided.

<sup>27</sup> As suggested by Joseph A. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development*. Westminster: Christian Classics, Inc., 1955, 1992, Volume Two, pp.1-9, especially p.9.

<sup>28</sup> In keeping with both the ancient and the present day purpose of the collection, is a portion of our weekly collection going to the poor?

## ii) "BLESS"

"Now the center and summit of the entire celebration begins: the eucharistic prayer, a prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification. The priest invites the people to lift up their hearts to the Lord in prayer and thanks; he unites them with himself in the prayer he addresses in their name to the Father through Jesus Christ. The meaning of the prayer is that the entire congregation joins itself to Christ in acknowledging the great things God has done and in offering the sacrifice."<sup>29</sup>

This passage from the General Instruction contains many important points. First, "prayer" is used in the singular because it is a single prayer, beginning with the preface dialogue and ending with the Great Amen. Although it has many essential parts, its unity is fundamental.<sup>30</sup>

Second, this is a prayer of *praise and thanksgiving* ("eucharist" means thanksgiving) which probably has its roots in Jewish table blessings before special religious meals such as the Passover Seder and the meal beginning the Sabbath.

"For the Jewish people, *praise and thanksgiving* (berakah: the blessing of God) is a characteristic of prayer... Jesus taught us that our greatest response to our Father is praise and thanksgiving. Even when he faced suffering and death, Jesus offered himself in praise and thanksgiving to his Father. His self-offering is symbolized in the offering of bread and wine... In the Eucharist we are able to give praise and thanks to our Father because Jesus unites us to himself and joins our prayers to his. What is more, in a mysterious way, when we pray we speak for all humanity and all creation. Through us, creation itself is able to respond in praise to its creator."<sup>31</sup>

Third, because this prayer is an act of thanksgiving for the saving actions of God, it is also memorial. In particular it is an act of retelling, proclaiming, and "remembering" the Christian story, which culminates in the Paschal Mystery of the Lord — the Passover through

<sup>29</sup> GIRM #54, DOL 208, #1444, p.481. (Cf. also IGMR 2000, #78.)

<sup>30</sup> With the scholastic era and the dominance of Aristotelian philosophy, the sacramental actions have been spoken of as though they were natural objects having "matter" and "form". The change of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ was explained in terms of a substantial change in the elements. This necessitated the identification of an instant or "moment" of consecration. Western theology and doctrine firmly asserted (and still does) that this is during the institution narrative. An unfortunate side-effect of this doctrinal development was that some came to see the rest of the eucharistic prayer as incidental. Part of the liturgical work of our day is to maintain this doctrinal heritage in such a way as to also regain something of the older patristic heritage which better appreciated the eucharistic prayer as a single consecratory whole containing certain essential elements and texts necessary for consecration. (Cf. John H. McKenna, *Eucharist and Holy Spirit: The Eucharistic Epiclesis in Twentieth Century Theology (1900-1966)*. Great Woking: Mayhew-McCrimmon, 1975, pp.69ff., Richard F. Buxton, *Eucharist and Institution Narrative: A Study in the Roman and Anglican Traditions of the Consecration of the Eucharist from the Eighth to the Twentieth Centuries* Great Woking: Mayhew-McCrimmon, 1976, p.22.)

On a ritual note, some have wondered whether full changes of posture in the midst of the eucharistic prayer (usually shifts between standing and kneeling) reduce our awareness of the unity of the prayer, given that full posture changes usually accompany a new text or a shift to another part of the Mass. (Cf note 55.)

<sup>31</sup> Selected passages from Liturgical Commission, Diocese of London, *The Eucharist*. London: Guided Study Programs in the Catholic Faith, 1987, pp.5, 6.

Passion and Death to Resurrection and Ascension.<sup>32</sup> Here, memorial means far more than a mere intellectual recollection of a long past event; it is re-experiencing and making present in a certain way an event that is timeless.<sup>33</sup> So “the Eucharist is the memorial of Christ's Passover, the making present and the sacramental offering of his unique sacrifice, in the liturgy of the Church which is his Body.”<sup>34</sup>

Fourth, the prayer is one of *sanctification*. First of all, it is through the praying of the eucharistic prayer that the bread and wine are *blessed*, that is, sanctified and consecrated through the efficacious Word of Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit<sup>35</sup> — and so the final and climactic mode of Christ's presence emerges in the celebration:

“This presence is called ‘real’ — by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be ‘real’ too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say it is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present.”<sup>36</sup>

This action is intimately related to the fact that the Eucharist is sacrifice and memorial: “In the Eucharist Christ gives us the very body which he gave up for us on the cross, the very blood which he poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”<sup>37</sup>

Yet sanctification goes even further: as the Holy Spirit is invoked on the bread and wine, so the Spirit is called down upon us the Church, that as we are fed by the Lord at his paschal banquet, we too will become ever more what we are — Christ's Body the Church.<sup>38</sup>

Fifth, the prayer is *intercessory*. Since in the eucharistic offering the Church unites itself to the offering of the Lord, the Church also thereby unites itself to his intercession with the Father for all the living and for the faithful departed who are in their final purification.<sup>39</sup> Thus, we make intercession during the eucharistic prayer for the Pope, the Bishops, the whole Church, all peoples, and the deceased.

Finally, it is necessary to dwell at some length on the final clause of this passage from number 54 of the General Instruction: The priest

“unites them with himself in the prayer he addresses in their name to the Father through Jesus Christ. The meaning of the prayer is that the entire congregation joins

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. SC #5. Of course, these mysteries must always be seen in connection to his Incarnation and earthly life on the one hand, and to the sending of the Holy Spirit on the other. Cf. CCC #517, 606, 730, etc.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. CCC #1363.

<sup>34</sup> CCC #1362.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. CCC #1375.

<sup>36</sup> CCC #1374.

<sup>37</sup> CCC #1365. This, of course, must be read in the light of #1377: “Christ is present whole and entire in each of the species and whole and entire in each of their parts, in such a way that the breaking of the bread does not divide Christ.”

<sup>38</sup> Hence each eucharistic prayer has a “split” epiclesis: a “consecratory” epiclesis before the institution narrative (e.g. “Let your Spirit come upon these gifts ...”) and a “communion” epiclesis afterwards (e.g. “May all of us who share in the body and blood of Christ be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit.”). (Cf. “The Eucharistic Prayer”, *National Bulletin on Liturgy* 24 (#124): 1-60, 1991, pp. 10-13.)

<sup>39</sup> Cf. CCC #1368-1372.

itself to Christ in acknowledging the great things God has done and in offering the sacrifice.”

It is clear that the bishop or priest is a member of the assembly who has a unique and essential sacramental role in the celebration of the Eucharist. Besides the bishop, who is chief pastor and presider,

“the presbyter is another who possesses the power of orders to offer sacrifice in the person of Christ. He therefore presides over the assembly and leads its prayer, proclaims the message of salvation, joins the people to himself in offering the sacrifice to the Father through Christ in the Spirit, gives them the bread of eternal life and shares it with them. At the Eucharist he should then, serve God and the people with dignity and humility; by his bearing and by the way he recites the words of the liturgy he should communicate to the faithful a sense of the living presence of Christ.”<sup>40</sup>

He thus conveys one of the modes of Christ's presence; his priestly ministry is necessary for the eucharistic offering; he (ultimately, of course, the Holy Spirit, working through the priest's sacramental ministry) consecrates the bread and wine,<sup>41</sup> and, as we see in the latter part of the passage, he carries out the functions of presiding.<sup>42</sup> The passage closes by challenging the priest to develop a presiding “style” that is prayerful, inviting and mindful of the assembly in whose name he addresses God.

“in describing (the priest's) role as ‘presiding’, the (General Instruction) and the (Order of Mass) make it clear the liturgy is not his private function. Nor can the priest as presider be considered the only instrument of Christ's activity. Rather, all of the members baptized and confirmed in Christ through the charisms of the Holy Spirit are the instruments of Christ's activity in the eucharistic celebration.”<sup>43</sup>

As we have seen, Vatican II pointed out that “liturgical functions are not private actions but celebrations of the church, which is ‘the sacrament of unity’, the holy people drawn into an ordered whole under their bishops.”<sup>44</sup> Second, we see in conciliar teaching the renewed emphasis on the equal dignity of all members of the Body of Christ.<sup>45</sup> Third, given this common dignity as a backdrop, Vatican II and the liturgical documents that follow offer

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<sup>40</sup> GIRM #60, DOL 208, #1450, p. 485. (Cf. also IGRM 2000, #93.)

<sup>41</sup> Sacred Congregation for Rites, “Eucharisticum Mysterium”, 1967, #12, DOL 179, #1241, p.402.

<sup>42</sup> ... overseeing the celebration as a whole, as well as the other ministries, he offers greetings, blessings, instructions which express the loving initiative of God in calling his people together, and he addresses “the prayers (i.e., the eucharistic prayers, opening prayer, prayer over the gifts, prayer after communion) to God in the name of the entire holy people and all present. Thus there is good reason to call them ‘the presidential prayers’.” (GIRM #10, DOL 208, #1400, p.4n.) (Cf. also IGRM 2000, #30.)

<sup>43</sup> James Challancin, “The Whole Local Community Celebrates”, *Ephemerides Liturgicae*, 91:454-482, 1977, p.473. Much of what follows in the next couple of paragraphs is indebted to Challancin's synthesis.

<sup>44</sup> SC #26.

<sup>45</sup> “There is a common dignity of the members from their regeneration in Christ ... And if some are appointed, by the will of Christ, as teachers, dispensers of the mysteries and pastors for the others, yet there is a true equality of all with regard to the dignity and action common to all the faithful concerning the building up of the body of Christ.” (Second Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church” (henceforth LG), #32, in Tanner, p. 876)

a renewed emphasis on the priesthood of all the baptized and the consequence that the whole people of God is a priestly, prophetic and kingly people.<sup>46</sup>  
Finally, Jesus Christ

“associates them intimately with his life and mission and also has given them a share in his priestly office of offering spiritual worship, so that God may be glorified and human beings saved... For all their works, if done in the Spirit, become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ: their prayers and apostolic works, their married and family life, their daily work, their mental and physical recreation, and even life's troubles if they are patiently born.”<sup>47</sup>

It is then that the active role of the baptized in the eucharistic prayer becomes most apparent:

“In the eucharistic celebration these are offered with very great piety to the Father along with the offering of the body of the Lord. In this way the laity too, as worshippers carrying out their holy activity everywhere, consecrate the world itself to God.”<sup>48</sup>

“in the celebration of Mass the faithful are a holy people, a people God has made his own, a royal priesthood: they give thanks to the Father and offer the victim not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him and learn to offer themselves. They should endeavour to make this clear by their deep sense of reverence for God and their charity toward all who share with them in the celebration.”<sup>49</sup>

The People of God bring their own living out of, and participation in, the Paschal Mystery — they bring their own many experiences of “dying” (to self) and “rising” (in Christ)<sup>50</sup> — and in a most vivid manner unite them to the Paschal Mystery of the Lord made sacramentally present in the eucharistic action. Thus,

“after meeting the ideal we are to become in the Liturgy of the Word, we are given the opportunity to hear the Christian story and give ourselves over to it in such a way that the story becomes our own. In this way-within the very shape of the ritual action-we are invited to become that ideal... By entering into the story we live the story... We

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<sup>46</sup> “... that is to say, the “faithful, who, since they have been incorporated into Christ by baptism, constitute the people of God and, in their own way made sharers· in Christ's priestly, prophetic and royal office, play their own part in the mission of the whole Christian people and in the world.” (LG #31.)

<sup>47</sup> LG #34.

<sup>48</sup> LG #34.

<sup>49</sup> GIRM #62, DOL 208, #1452, p.486. (Cf. also IGRM 2000, #95.)

<sup>50</sup> E.g. cf. Romans 6: 1 ff., Philippians 3: 10, etc. They can only do this with full awareness if they have previously reflected consciously on the pattern of the Paschal Mystery being played out concretely in their everyday lives: “The structure of Jesus' death and Resurrection is not only interpretive of his actions at the Lord's Supper, it is also a perfect analogue to our Christian living. At the Lord's Supper there is a prior participation by the apostles in the death-Resurrection events. The table talk outlines the characteristics of that participation: misunderstanding but willing, weak but turning with strength, unfaithful but sustained by a relationship with the Lord. The Paschal Mystery holds all these realities of life in dynamic tension.” (Zimmerman, *Liturgy as “Living Faith*, 1993, p.69.)

hear the Christian narrative in such a way that, by being drawn into the story, we give the same response as did the historical respondent's.<sup>51</sup>

What is to be emphasized here is the active role which the whole baptized assembly has in the offering of the eucharistic prayer. While it is true that most of the prayer is verbalized only by the priest, he "addresses these prayers to God in the name of the entire holy people and all present."<sup>52</sup>

Why does this active role of the assembly need to be emphasized? We have emerged from a period when the unique role of the priest was so emphasized that the offering of the eucharistic sacrifice was seen more as a ritual to be watched with devotion than a prayer of thanksgiving in which all participate according to their offices.<sup>53</sup> While taking into account the unique sacramental role of the priest as outlined earlier, nevertheless, this was seen by many as a relatively "passive" part of the Mass, rather than an active joining in the offering of the prayer, albeit for the most part in silence.<sup>54</sup> The result was at times a popular impression that the people's participation in the liturgy of the Eucharist was largely limited to the presentation of the gifts and to communion. Of course, there was sincere faith and good spiritual fruit here.

What emerged from this approach was a profound devotion to the Lord made present on the altar by the consecrating action of the priest. The result was a deep belief in the Lord sacramentally present. And yet good as this is, such an outlook does not do justice to the full degree of the people's participation in the eucharistic prayer and the connection of this action to the whole of their Christian lives. Indeed, it can be asserted that just as the ordained priesthood reaches its most concentrated exercise during the eucharistic offering, so too, in its own way, the baptismal priesthood does as well. The Church in its documents has clearly sought to restore this broadened understanding, and there have been varying degrees of success thus far.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Zimmermann, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, 1993, p.108.

<sup>52</sup> GIRM #10, DOL 208, #1400, p.472. (Cf. also IGRM 2000, #30.)

<sup>53</sup> "Witness the attitude immediately prior to Vatican II in which the Church's pastoral activity was the responsibility of the hierarchy alone. It belonged to the laity only to the extent they were called to be helpers of the hierarchy. Our conception of the Church tended to be that of an institution outside and above the faithful which activated the means of salvation for them - doctrine; sacraments, norms of discipline. The participation of the faithful in the eucharistic celebration tended to be solely devotional and pietistic, attempting to concentrate one's psychic powers of attention while at Mass. Their sacrifice became an interior, moralized sense of offering emotionally identifying their lives with the passion of Christ." (Challancin, 1977, p. 462.) What is said here of the Mass in general applied to the eucharistic offering in particular. Some saw the eucharistic prayer as a time to "watch" the "spectacle" of Jesus "coming down from heaven" at the moment of consecration. Of course, Jesus had been present in their midst all along in the liturgy, albeit under different modes of presence. (Cf. note 2)

<sup>54</sup> The fact that very little of the prayer is actually verbalized by the people may mistakenly lead to the impression that the role of the people in the prayer is primarily passive. Such a possibility simply underlines the importance of catechesis on their participation in the prayer as the priest verbalizes it on their behalf, and the importance of the eucharistic acclamations, which tangibly express the people's participation in the whole prayer. Along with the responses in the preface dialogue, these three texts (the Holy Holy, the Memorial Acclamation and the Great Amen) are the most central texts which the assembly verbalizes. Thus, for example, if anything at a given Mass is sung, it should be these texts (along with certain others such as the Gospel Acclamation). We can see from this that the good old "four hymn Mass" places musical priorities precisely upside down!

<sup>55</sup> We are in a time of transition in this regard. Still, we can now see the beginnings 'of the fruit of renewal. The challenge for now is to continue to move gradually and prudently forward, despite the corporate discomfort we are experiencing, through means such as comprehensive theological catechesis, and continued efforts to improve the quality of our liturgical celebrations. Cf. *Liturgical Ministry*, "Recovery of 'Mystery in Liturgy,'" Vol. 8 (Summer 1999); "Liturgy in a New

The first two movements of the eucharistic action (take and bless) are continuous with the second two (break and share), which are essential elements of the Communion Rite of the Mass. Thus,

“the Mass is at the same time, and inseparably, the sacrificial memorial in which the sacrifice of the cross is perpetuated and the sacred banquet of communion with the Lord's body and blood. But the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice is wholly directed toward the intimate union of the faithful with Christ through communion. To receive communion is to receive Christ himself who has offered himself for us... it is in keeping with the very meaning of the Eucharist that the faithful, if they have the required dispositions, receive communion each time they participate in the Mass ...”<sup>56</sup>

### iii) “BREAK”

After the people's affirmation of the eucharistic prayer with the Great Amen, the various texts and actions of the Communion Rite follow.

“Since the eucharistic celebration is the paschal meal, it is right that the faithful who are properly disposed receive the Lord's body and blood as spiritual food as he commanded. This is the purpose of the breaking of the bread and the other preparatory rites that lead directly to the communion of the people.”<sup>57</sup>

Notice how, among all the elements of preparation for communion, the breaking of the bread stands out:

“in apostolic times this gesture of Christ at the last supper gave the entire eucharistic action its name. This rite is not simply functional, but is a sign that in sharing in the one bread of life which is Christ we who are many are made one body (see 1 Cor 10: 17).”<sup>58</sup>

Given the importance and meaning of this gesture, the ideal would be that the breaking of the bread be a substantial action of some duration. We often fall short of this picture, although some degree of improvement is always possible.<sup>59</sup>

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Millennium,” Vol. 8 (Fall 1999); “Eucharist,” Vol. 9 (Winter 2000).

<sup>56</sup> CCC #1382, 1388.

<sup>57</sup> GIRM #56, DOL 208, #1446, p.483. (Cf. also IGMR 2000, #80.)

<sup>58</sup> GIRM #56c, DOL 208, #1446, p.483. (Cf. also IGMR 2000, #83.)

<sup>59</sup> In such a fully functional rite, the pieces of the sacrament to be distributed to the faithful are taken from a single consecrated “host” or “loaf”. So it is that “the nature of the sign demands that the material for the eucharistic celebration truly have the appearance of food. Accordingly, even though unleavened and baked in the traditional shape, the eucharistic bread should be made in such a way that in a Mass with a congregation the priest is able actually to break the host into parts and distribute them to at least some of the faithful. (When, however, the number of communicants is large or other pastoral needs require it, small hosts are in no way ruled out.)” (GIRM #283, DOL 208, #1673, p.522.) (Cf. also IGMR 2000, #321.) Where there are too many communicants to receive from one host or loaf, thus necessitating the use of small hosts, it is desirable to minimize the number of vessels of bread (and wine) on the altar before

#### iv) "SHARE"

The action of communion—the sharing of the consecrated bread and wine among presider and assembly — is the culmination of the whole eucharistic movement of taking, blessing and breaking. Here, "action" and "Presence" come together in a most striking manner. We can make several basic observations about the nature of the action.

*First, it is an action that is continuous with those 'that have come before':* the presentation of the gifts, the eucharistic prayer, and the breaking of the bread (as well as the liturgy of the word which has preceded them). On this note, the continuity between the eucharistic prayer and the communion is very important, and often neglected. The communion sacramentally expresses, confirms, and “seals” what has happened in a most concentrated manner during the eucharistic prayer — that is, our entry into the Paschal Mystery, our celebration of the New Covenant, our self-giving to the Father, and our growth in self-awareness and reality as the Church, the Body of Christ.

“It is only because we know ourselves to be the Body that we dare eat the Body. We are nourished on the Body and Blood of the Lord because we have lived who we are in the story and this nourishment is all that will satisfy us. Communion, then, makes sense only within the dynamic flow of the whole Liturgy of the Eucharist. In this context, communion is our response to the story. When detached from the proclamation of the Christian story, receiving communion risks being little more than devotional practice. When integrated with the Liturgy of the Eucharist, communion is a profound manifestation of who we are and are becoming.”<sup>60</sup>

In this light, the following directive takes on its full force:

“It is most desirable that the faithful receive the Lord's body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass and that, in the instances where it is permitted, they share in the chalice. Then even through the signs communion will stand out more clearly as a sharing in the sacrifice actually being celebrated.”<sup>61</sup>

Receiving communion is not, therefore, an isolated moment—it is continuous with the actions that preceded it.

this point, in order to at least approximate the "one bread", "one cup" symbolism. Also, note in the rubrics of the sacramentary how the chant which accompanies the fraction rite, the Lamb of God, can continue on as long as needed to accompany the action: the threefold form we usually use is but a minimum. Finally, in considering the purchase of new altar vessels, it is also desirable that there be a clear distinction of appearance between the vessels for the bread/hosts, and those for the wine. Many of our traditional ciboria bear an unfortunately strong resemblance to a chalice, thus fogging the visual impact of "bread and cup", especially from a distance.

<sup>60</sup> Zimmermann, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, 1993, p.1 09.

<sup>61</sup> GIRM #56h, DOL 208, #1446, p.484. (Cf. also IGMR 2000, #85.) Without pondering the implications, we often give communion at Mass from the Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle: in this case the very eucharistic action in this celebration is broken — it is something akin to inserting a communion service to the sick into the middle of Mass. Thus any efforts are welcome which attempt to introduce a system in which the amount of bread offered closely corresponds to the number of persons receiving communion. Of course, it is also necessary to occasionally change the reserved Sacrament, and so, in this case, give communion from this source. However, this method of giving communion at Mass should be exceptional rather than the norm.



Second, receiving communion is a communal action.

“Although many parishes have made great strides in fostering a communal atmosphere during worship, it is still common that people imitate a pre-Vatican II practice immediately after partaking in the eucharistic bread and wine, shifting into a very personal and individualistic piety. Sharing the eucharistic bread and wine should be a high point of the Mass, a moment that expresses the unity of the assembly as the Body of Christ.”<sup>62</sup>

With the communion procession (and communion song, if sung) having finished, then there is time for silent prayer and possibly a “hymn, psalm or other song of praise.”<sup>63</sup>

Third, the *symbolism of food and nourishment should be readily apparent*. If the eucharistic action is fully visible, then what was “taken” — *both* bread and wine—will be “shared” after it is transformed into the body and blood of the Lord. “Holy communion has a more complete form as a sign when it is received under both kinds. For in this manner of reception a fuller light shines on the sign of the Eucharistic banquet.”<sup>64</sup>

#### **d) We are sent forth: the Concluding Rite**

Finally, the blessing and dismissal “sends each member back to doing good works, while praising and blessing the Lord.”<sup>65</sup> The dismissal, while very brief in form, is extremely important. The people of God are sent forth to imitate what they have just celebrated: the pattern of the Paschal Mystery, and hence the Lord's example of self-giving in the service of others. Nourished at the Lord's Table, they go forth to live out who they are as members of the Church, the Body of Christ.

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<sup>62</sup> Smolarski, pp. 82-83. This is illustrated well in the General Instruction's comments on the communion hymn: "During the priest's and the faithful's reception of the sacrament the communion song is sung. Its function is to express outwardly the communicants' union in spirit by means of the unity of their voices, to give evidence of joy of heart, and to make the procession to receive Christ's body more fully an act of community. The song begins when the priest takes communion and continues for as long as seems appropriate while the faithful receive Christ's body." (GIRM #56i, DOL 208, #1446, p.484.) (Cf. also IGMR 2000, #86.) True, it may be difficult for all to fully participate in the communion hymn if one has to carry a hymnal and receive communion (especially under both species) at the same time. One helpful suggestion is the use of selections which have easily remembered refrains or chants, such that people need not carry hymnals. Catholic Book of Worship III, for example, offers many such selections. To have all remain standing through the time of the communion procession, to show the unity of the communion action, is a fitting possibility. (CF. GIRM #21 (DOL 208, #1411, p.474.) (CF. also IGMR 2000, #43.), and Carmen Vinella, "Standing for the Communion Rite at Sunday Worship", *Modern Liturgy* 21 (#9):8-9, November, 1994.)

<sup>63</sup> GIRM#57b, DOL 208, #1447, p. 485 (The point, though still valid, appears missing in IGMR 2000, #90.)

<sup>64</sup> " ... Moreover there is a clearer expression of that will by which the new and everlasting covenant is ratified in the blood of the Lord and of the relationship of the eucharistic banquet to the eschatological banquet in the Father's kingdom ... according to the Catholic faith Christ whole and entire, as well as the true sacrament are received even under one kind only; that, therefore, as far as the effects are concerned, those who receive in this manner are not deprived of any grace necessary for salvation ... At the same time the faithful should be guided toward a desire to take part more intensely in a sacred rite in which the sign of the eucharistic meal stands out more explicitly." (GIRM #240, 241, DOL 208, #1630, 1631, p.512.) (Cf. also IGMR 2000, #281, 282.)

<sup>65</sup> GIRM #57b, DOL 208, #1447, p. 485. (The point, though still valid, appears missing in IGMR 2000, #90.)

## 2. “Communion Service” or Liturgy of the Word with Holy Communion presence without action?

We are now in a position to discuss the differences between a celebration of the Eucharist and a “communion service”, and elucidate some of the difficulties with the latter.

We have seen how the eucharistic action is a continuously unfolding movement, which we have looked at from the point of view of the framework of “take, bless, break and share”. The first striking difference which we note is that in the “communion service” the final action, “sharing” (that is, the receiving of communion), has been broken off from the rich liturgical, theological, and participative reality of the other three. Even several aspects of the Communion Rite itself, including the “sharing”, have been altered.<sup>66</sup> In summary, the “presence” of the Lord in the Sacrament has been removed from the context of the whole eucharistic action”. Put more theologically, the sacrificial meal has been cut off from the action of sacrifice.<sup>67</sup>

Is this a serious issue? We note that certain aspects of our attitudes and practice may have dulled our sensitivity to the problem. For example, if we are breaking the movement of the eucharistic action on a daily basis by giving communion from the tabernacle during Mass, a communion service does not look that much different. Further, if people see their real participation in the fourfold action to be largely limited to the reception of communion, then the communion service not seem that different.<sup>68</sup> In each case, the significance and meaning of the communion as a communal as well as personal moment is potentially fogged.

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<sup>66</sup> For details on these differences in the four stages, refer back to the extensive commentary on , the four stages in this work, and note how many elements are missing in a communion service. For an extensive and focused list of missing elements, cf. "Differences between the Eucharist and Liturgies of the Word with Holy Communion", National Bulletin on Liturgy 23 (#123): 246-252, 1990. On the question of the Communion Rite itself, the cited article notes that "Communion from the cup is, not possible ... Bread that really looks like food will most probably not be used because it is not so easily reserved ... Communion appears to be more the distribution of food from the tabernacle than the sharing of food from the Lord's table. The altar is less like a real meal table... Some of the prayers after communion found in the sacramentary will be inappropriate or misinterpreted ('the priest petitions for the effects of the mystery just celebrated' - GIRM #56k) (Cf. also IGMR 2000, #89.) ... The sign of peace has its roots in the eucharistic prayer, and this connection is lost... "(p.249.),

<sup>67</sup> "The separation of Communion from the celebration of the eucharist can also continue a preconiliar separation between the sacrament and the sacrifice. In the preconiliar period it was common to distribute Communion either before or after Mass and to see Communion during Mass as an interruption. This attitude led to an isolation of Communion from the Eucharistic celebration. The sacrament is then exposed to the danger of excessive privatization, as almost exclusive focus is placed on the consecrated elements. The integral celebration of the sacrament, on the other hand, is more apt to be perceived as something we do together, transforming not only the objects but engaging the community in becoming one Body in Christ." (Michael Henchal, "Sunday Assemblies in the Absence of a Priest", *The Jurist* 49: 607-631, 1989, p.626. Cf. also William Marvee, "'Priestless Masses' - At What Cost?", *Eglise et Theologie* 19:207-222, 1988, pp.211 ff., and Dallen, p. 79.)

Finally, even our language betrays this problem: while it is true that there is a eucharistic aspect to the communion service, in that the eucharistic Body of Christ is given, it sometimes leads us to call the Mass or celebration of the Eucharist, by contrast, the "complete Mass as such", "the Eucharist as a whole", etc. "These phrases are incorrect, however, if they are used to imply that there can be some kind of partial or incomplete celebration of the eucharist. This is not possible. A liturgy is either the Eucharist (or Mass) or it is not. It is either the Eucharist (Mass) or it is some other kind of service which is not and cannot be the Eucharist (Mass)." (NBL, #123, p.247.)

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Dallen, pp.87f.

Again, if the sacramental species at Mass is seen as a sort of “static”, holy “object”, rather than the ultimate mode of the presence of the Lord who has been (and is now) personally present and active throughout the Mass in many ways, then the “sudden” appearance of the Species as it is brought out from the tabernacle — without the context of the previous stages of the eucharistic action — at a communion service might not seem that different.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, the proliferation of communion services might even reinforce these poor practices and attitudes concerning the Mass, in addition to further blurring an awareness of the differences between the Mass and the communion service. Therefore, to take the whole eucharistic action in its continuity seriously is to take the problem of communion services seriously as well.

Now it is certainly true that people receive communion outside of the context of Mass, and this needs to be taken account of. To shed light on this, we need to turn for a moment to the purposes which the Church proposes for reserving the sacramental species in the tabernacle.

“The primary and original reason for reservation of the eucharist outside Mass is the administration of viaticum. The secondary ends are the giving of communion and the adoration of our Lord Jesus Christ present in the sacrament. The reservation of the sacrament for the sick led to the praiseworthy practice of adoring this heavenly food that is reserved in churches.”<sup>70</sup>

Several distinctions can be made here. It is apparent that the distribution of communion outside of the celebration of the eucharist is meant primarily for the sick and the dying. These are the persons who are unable to attend the parish celebration, and so communion is brought to them for the purposes of sacramental communion and as a means of being connected with the celebration of the community. But when we speak of the celebration of the community, we are here referring primarily to the *Sunday* celebration, that is, the prime weekly Eucharist of the whole local community.<sup>71</sup>

This principle has a few implications: first, it underlines that the continuity with the Sunday celebration is most vividly apparent when communion is taken to the sick and shut-ins immediately from the Sunday celebration (although it could also be taken at another time); and second, it illustrates why a communion service in, for example, a nursing home or

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<sup>69</sup> True, during exposition of the eucharistic Body of Christ outside of Mass, the sacramental element is exposed for adoration (often) without the context of the celebration of the Eucharist. Still, in distinction from a communion service, the purpose is not immediate sacramental communion in a way akin to Holy Communion at Mass. Further, even when speaking of the worship of the Sacrament outside of Mass, the Church emphasizes its connection to the celebration of the eucharist: “The celebration of the eucharist in the sacrifice of the Mass, moreover, is truly the origin and purpose of the worship that is shown to the eucharist outside Mass (#2) ... In order to give right direction and encouragement to devotion to the sacrament of the eucharist, the eucharistic mystery must be considered in all its fullness, both in the celebration of Mass and in the worship of the sacrament reserved after Mass in order to extend the grace of the sacrifice (#4)... Exposition of the holy eucharist, either in a ciborium or in a monstrance, leads us to acknowledge Christ’s marvelous presence in the sacrament and invites us to the spiritual union with him that culminates in a sacramental communion (#82)” (SCDW, “Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass, DOL 279, #2194,2196,2208, pp.693ff.)

<sup>70</sup> SCDW, “Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass”, #5, DOL 279; #2197, p.693.

<sup>71</sup> In the first centuries, the Eucharist of the Sunday was generally the only Eucharist of the week, with a gradually growing number of exceptions.

other institution — assuming a priest does not come to celebrate the Sunday Eucharist with the residents — is a good deal more palatable than a communion service at a parish where Sunday Eucharist is celebrated. Thus if one *does* take part in the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist, it is much more problematic to extend the “sick and dying” principle to widespread parish communion services on a weekday.<sup>72</sup>

“Opponents of the communion service argue that appending it to the liturgy of the word implies that Christ is not present in the gathering of the community or in the word that is proclaimed and listened to in faith.”<sup>73</sup>

To elaborate on this, we must return for a moment to our commentary on the earlier parts of the Mass, that is, the gathering of the assembly and the proclamation of the word of God. We have already seen that these are among the first “modes” of Christ's active and saving presence in the unfolding dynamic of the eucharistic celebration. Since Vatican II, Catholics have been growing into a gradually increasing appreciation of these two ways in which Christ is present, and the old Catholic-Protestant polemic of word versus sacrament is happily dissolving. This being said, there is still an unspoken feeling among many Catholics that if there isn't Mass (or at least communion), then somehow the gathering for communal worship isn't “real”, or it is at least a very distant shadow of worship at Mass.<sup>74</sup> True, the celebration of the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Church's worship, but such an attitude towards other forms of worship is inadequate: we need to grow in our appreciation of the fact that the tradition of the Church has a rich variety of worship forms of which the Eucharist is at the center, but not alone.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> There is, of course, one striking exception to this principle in present practice: the reception of communion at the solemn celebration of the Lord's Passion on Good Friday. However, the unique history and circumstances of this rite make it difficult to argue from the Good Friday celebration to widespread weekday communion services. The Good Friday observance appears to have originated in Jerusalem, with an observance of the Way of the Cross (with a of liturgy of the word at each station), and a veneration of the wood of the Cross at Golgotha. In seventh century Rome, the papal liturgy (no doubt the form that had been in use in Rome for some time) consisted only of biblical readings (especially the passion according to John) and the solemn prayers of the faithful. There was no Mass and no communion because Good Friday and Holy Saturday were days of fasting in anticipation of the Easter Vigil. However, around this period in the parish churches of Rome a more popular form developed in which the liturgy of the word was accompanied by the veneration of the cross and communion from elements consecrated on Holy Thursday. With time, this second form was adopted even in the papal liturgy, although by the thirteenth century only the presiding prelate took communion. It was 1955 before communion for all the people was restored. It would seem then, that the historical core of the Good Friday celebration is the liturgy of the word and the veneration of the cross - the latecomer, with an ambiguous history of application, was the communion, and this all the more ambiguous since Good Friday is a day of paschal fasting, during which, “according to the Church's ancient tradition, the sacraments are not celebrated today or tomorrow.” (Sacramentary, Ottawa: C.C.C.B., 1983, p.225.) (Cr. A. G. Martimort, *The Church at Prayer: An Introduction to the Liturgy*, Volume IV: *The Liturgy and Time*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1986, pp.49-50; and Nathan Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy: The Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass*. Collegeville: Pueblo/Liturgical Press, 1982, pp.94f, 221ff.)

<sup>73</sup> Dallen, p.52. Cf. also Marreeve, pp.214f.

<sup>74</sup> Again, note our language: “it is an oversimplification to call liturgies of the word with holy communion simply ‘communion services’”. This phrase underrates the word of God that is proclaimed, preached and responded to in these liturgies and undervalues the gathering of God's people.” (NBL #123, p.247.)

<sup>75</sup> The idea that we have to have a Mass at everything, though having roots that go back many centuries, is really a very recent phenomenon. Many Catholics will remember that in former times, it was common to go to Church for services other than the Mass - these usually took the form of corporate popular devotions such as rosaries, novenas, stations of the cross, benedictions, etc., as well as more technically liturgical worship such as Sunday vespers (i.e. the evening prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours). (Cf. Patrick Malloy, “The Rich Liturgical Palette of the Church: Part 1: Eucharist Only?”, *Today's Liturgy* 15 (#4): 17-21, 1993. pp.17f.)

Further, it has been suggested that there is a decline of faith in the Real Presence of the Lord in the sacramental elements, and this might in fact be the case. Will a growing appreciation of the presence of the Lord in the assembly and the

Other reasons have been given for treating communion services with great caution, some of which may be of greater or lesser applicability to our particular pastoral circumstances, especially given that the Sunday is not here at issue. These include the blurring of the distinction between ordained minister (as sacramental minister and sacramental link to the diocesan and universal church) and lay ministers, a blurring of the connection between re-presenting the perfect self-offering of the Lord in the celebration of the Eucharist and the call to works of charity and justice, and a blurring of the need to keep a concern for vocations to the priesthood before us.<sup>76</sup>

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Word further undermine an appreciation of the Lord present in the Sacrament? Hardly. It is one and the same Lord present to us in all of these marvelous ways - surely an appreciation of his presence in one way, if it has depth and quality, will lead to a deeper appreciation of his presence in the other ways, both within and beyond the ritual moments of liturgical worship.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. the Bishops of the State of Kansas, "Pastoral Letter: Policy Restricts Sunday Communion without Mass", *Origins* 25 (#8): 121-124, July 13, 1995, p.123. For other points, particularly as they concern the Sunday celebration, cf. Kathleen Hughes, "Sunday Worship in the Absence of a Priest: Some Disquieting Reflections", *New Theology Review* 8 (#1): 45-57, 1995.

### 3. The Liturgy of the Hours

The Liturgical Commission has recommended the Liturgy of the Hours be celebrated rather than a communion service on the weekdays for several reasons (aside from the difficulties with communion services outlined above).

First, the celebration of an hour of the Liturgy of the Hours is a genuine ecclesial act of liturgical worship in which Christ is present. It is the Church's natural liturgical complement to the celebration of the Eucharist. The Church "is continually praising the Lord and interceding for the salvation of the whole world, not only by celebrating the eucharist, but also in other ways, above all by carrying out the divine office."<sup>77</sup> It can thus help the appreciation for liturgies of the Word to continue to develop.

Second; in its ancient roots, in a time even before the practice of daily weekday Mass had become commonplace, this worship form (especially morning prayer and evening prayer) was the standard form of daily communal prayer for the people of God.<sup>78</sup> Such a strong claim cannot be made for communal communion services.<sup>79</sup>

Third, although the Liturgy of the Hours had dwindled into a practice largely of the religious and clergy, Vatican II and the subsequent liturgical reforms sought to restore the Liturgy of the Hours as public communal prayer for all the People of God. Obviously, progress in realizing this intention has been slow. Perhaps the use of morning or evening prayer when eucharist cannot be celebrated on the weekday will be one small contribution among many in exposing our people to this great expression of our tradition of worship. Finally, we might add that such an occasion provides the opportunity for our people to experience a liturgy at which a lay minister presides, a practice which will become more and more common in the future. (Of course, other ministries, such as readers, cantors, etc., should also be operative.)

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<sup>77</sup> SC#83.

<sup>78</sup> "Early Christians held the (Sunday) in such high esteem that; during the first few centuries of Christianity, the Sunday was the only day of the week when they celebrated the eucharist. On the other days of the week, those who were able assembled for other kinds of prayer, which we today would call "offices" or the Liturgy of the Hours. These services included generally psalms, sometimes hymns, occasionally a brief-reading and almost always prayers of petition and thanks. Other sacraments and rites, such as baptism, penance and ordination, were celebrated when the occasion called for them. Weekly eucharist and the daily liturgy of the hours, however, were the 'bread and butter' of the church's public prayer." (Patrick L. Malloy, "The Rich Liturgical Palette of the Church: Part 2: Safeguarding the Balance", *Today's Liturgy* 16 (11-i5, 1994, pp. 1 ff.) Over the centuries, as the Liturgy of the Hours became increasingly more complex and lengthy, it was largely lost to the people as a whole, and became the near exclusive practice of the religious and clergy. On the other hand, as the centuries passed, such occasions as the feast days of martyrs and other special occasions increased the numbers of weekday eucharists until daily eucharist became the standard in the parishes.

<sup>79</sup> One can find occasional references (such as in Hippolytus, in Rome, ca. 215 A.D.) to ancient Christians taking communion each day, but this was in the context of private reception at home from a portion of the sacrament brought home from the Sunday celebration. This was not a "communion service", but rather a way of stretching the Sunday eucharist out over the week. The practice soon faded away in the centuries following. (Cf. Dallen, p.35) SCOW, "Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass", #13-53 offers instruction on giving Holy Communion outside Mass.

#### 4. Going Down the Road?

Finally, the question will arise as to whether some will choose to find another parish to go to weekday Mass; and whether this is appropriate. This is a delicate question, and people will respond in a variety of ways. Two basic questions come into play here: On the one hand, the Eucharist is the central manner in which the Church offers its worship, and many people have a deep love for celebrating the Eucharist on a daily basis. Especially in urban centers, a weekday celebration of the Eucharist may be held at a nearby parish, and thus be easily accessible. On the other hand, there is an inherent value in joining one's own community for worship, in order that members of the local community as such may gather as a liturgical assembly for liturgical prayer, be strengthened in their spiritual life, and grow in their sense of identity and mission. In this way the faith is celebrated in the community where it is lived. Most of the writers who deal with considerations like the centrality of the Eucharist and the importance of gathering with one's own community have been concerned primarily with their application to worship on Sunday.<sup>80</sup> However, these considerations also shed at least some light on the question of the weekdays, while always recalling that there are certain distinctions as well. In any event, various people will arrive at various decisions, although we can certainly say that it is worthwhile to offer a celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, and make it available for those who fittingly seek weekday worship in their own parish community.

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<sup>80</sup> Henchal (pp.611-614) summarizes the two sides of the argument as they concern the Sunday. Cf. also Hughes, p.49.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has outlined some of the reasons why the Liturgical Commission of the diocese has recommended the use of the Liturgy of the Hours on weekdays when no Mass is celebrated, rather than a Liturgy of the Word with Holy Communion. Our discouragement of the use of the latter alternative does not reflect a lack of esteem for the celebration of the Eucharist, but rather illustrates a serious appreciation for it, and a desire for us to continue to grow in our understanding of it and the depth of our participation in it. The paper also outlines some of the reasons for our recommendation in favour of the Liturgy of the Hours. Another booklet, exclusively devoted to introducing the history, theology and structure of the Liturgy of the Hours, is also available from the Liturgy Office, and this will help to fill out Section Four of the present work. Further, it will be necessary to prepare such liturgies well, and practical resources in this regard will also be made available from the office.