CALENDAR NOTES

SEP 1
- WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR CREATION – Several options are given in the Ordo on how to liturgically celebrate this day.

SEP 4
- LABOR DAY – Suggested: Mass for the Sanctification of Human Labor, VN #26 A or B.

SEP 11
- Remembering the Events of 9-11-2001 — The events can be remembered in the following ways: in the Universal Prayers, an intercession may be made for the country, emergency responders, those who have died, etc.; Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation II or Eucharistic Prayer for Use in Masses for Various Needs III may be prayed; music and hymns appropriate for the theme of reconciliation and healing may be sung. Suggested Mass texts: For those in Public Office, VN #22 or For the Preservation of Peace and Justice, VN #30.

SEP 14
Exultation of the Holy Cross
- The Gloria is said.

SEP 21
St. Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist
- The Gloria is said.

SEP 29
Sts. Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, Archangels
- The Gloria is said.

Looking Ahead
- Oct 15: Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help – outside of the cathedral parish, this anniversary is not observed this year since it falls on a Sunday.

ARS CELEBRANDI

PROGRESSIVE SOLEMNITY, PART III

Having reflected on the introduction of the concept of Progressive Solemnity with the promulgation of Musicam Sacram and how it may be implemented in the liturgy through music, we may now consider two other aspects of liturgy that may benefit from an analogous application of the concept. In this article, we will consider art and environment and its relation to Progressive Solemnity, and in the next article, we will undertake a consideration of optional rites and their relation to Progressive Solemnity.

First, a word regarding the phrase “art and environment”: in the United States, this phrase seemingly finds its provenance from the Bishops’ Conference document entitled Environment and Art in Catholic Worship, a document published in 1978 which gives principles “for those involved in preparing liturgical space for the worship of the Christian assembly” (Quinn, forward to Environment and Art in Catholic Worship). The controversial document also goes on to describe principles for the construction of new churches, and was updated in 2000 with the publication Built of Living Stones. Nonetheless, many parishes began to found committees of “art and environment” to accomplish what may described bluntly as church decoration. The words “decoration, ornamentation, and décor” all seem to connote something merely aesthetic or external, and the activity of decorating a church is not merely for the sake of increasing aesthetics. On the other hand, the word “environment” might suggest a lack of interest in beauty and order for the sake of “setting the mood” for worship. Nonetheless, “art” taken in its foundational sense of participating in the creative work of God to reveal the truth adds a layer of meaning to this word “environment” which approaches the true scope of this dimension of the liturgy. No word or phrase adequately describes this liturgical phenomenon, and yet “art and environment” is widely understood as the appropriate decoration and ornamentation of the church for the celebration of the liturgy precisely to adorn the sacred actions which take place in the church.

The focus of “art and environment” is the altar itself which is adorned with many symbols of its importance. First, there is a cloth which covers the mensa of the altar. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal indicates that there is to a cloth that is “white in color, whose shape, size, and decoration are in keeping with the altar’s structure.” (GIRM 304) However it also indicates that other cloths may be used in addition which have a festive significance as long as the uppermost cloth is the white cloth which is the altar cloth. The other cloths provide an opportunity to employ progressive solemnity. Cloths which vary in color might be used for the various liturgical seasons and feasts. Furthermore, cloths of differing degrees of complexity or intricacy of
design might be used to differentiate between the different degrees of solemnity. It is important to remember, however, according to the GIRM that the upper-most cloth is to be the white altar cloth which is designed for the altar and should thus be an appropriate size for the mensa and not merely a large corporal.

Most art and environment committees focus on the use of flowers. The GIRM prefaces its instruction on flowers with the simple phrase, “Moderation should be observed in the decoration of the altar.” (305) This, of course, remains quite vague and open to much interpretation; however, the subtext is that there are clearly many displays of ornamentation which may arguably be excessive, and such displays should be avoided. The GIRM continues its instruction by delineating the privileged seasons of Advent in Lent in the use of flowers. In Advent, “the floral decoration of the altar should be marked by a moderation suited to the character of this time of year, without expressing in anticipation the full joy of the Nativity of the Lord.” (305) The fuller decoration of the Church for the Christmas Season should happen as close to Christmas Day as possible so as to anticipate the joy of Christmas. Using evergreens to adorn the altar and sanctuary might be appropriate as long as there remains a distinction between the decoration in Advent and that of Christmas. In Lent, “it is forbidden for the altar to be decorated with flowers. Exceptions, however, are Laetare Sunday (Fourth Sunday of Lent), Solemnities, and Feasts.” (305) Holy Thursday would appropriately utilize floral decorations, but Good Friday would not. The last line of the paragraph reiterates the first: “Floral decoration should always show moderation and be arranged around the altar rather than on the altar table.” Flowers should never be placed on the altar, but instead “around” the altar. The Latin does use “circa,” literally around, however its undesirable to place flowers which obscure the altar, the central focus of the church. It is more appropriate to place floral arrangements on either side so as to truly accentuate the altar, thereby fulfilling the purpose of decorating it.

Other floral arrangements in the sanctuary should likewise be arranged to attract attention to the liturgical action and not to themselves. Whereas flowers symbolize beauty and life and thus are well suited for decorating an altar or sanctuary, other décor such as sand, rocks, cacti, or dead trees do not seem as appropriate. Such symbols which evoke a desert-theme consonant with the Lenten season nonetheless fail to properly decorate the altar and draw attention to the liturgical action. They can become a distraction as they draw attention to themselves instead. Simply a lack of floral arrangements as instructed by the Roman Missal is sufficient for creating a thirst.

The GIRM speaks of candlesticks which may be placed on the altar or around it for the celebration of the Mass. (306) It references an earlier paragraph which specifies there must always be at least two candles, but that “even four or six, especially for a Sunday Mass or a Holyday of Obligation” may be used. (117) Using different numbers of candles is part of the tradition of the Roman Rite Mass where two candles were used for the low Mass and six were used for the solemn Mass. However, the three options given for use ad libatum provide an opportunity to express Progressive Solemnity by use of varied number of candles. Whereas most daily Masses may only use two candles, Feasts might use four, and Sundays and Solemnities might use six. When the diocesan bishop is present, it is appropriate to use seven candles. The GIRM does not envision using more candles than these for the celebration of the liturgy, likely to keep the decoration of the altar “moderate” as described earlier. If more candles are used, they should likewise function to draw attention to the altar. Much like excessive flower arrangements, a surplus of candles can draw attention to themselves if improperly arranged.

Whereas banners or other displays of bunting in the church are not referenced in the Roman Missal, despite being often considered by committees of Art and Environment, the GIRM considers images of Saints to be appropriate in the decoration of a Church. (318) It may be appropriate to include a dignified image in a particular celebration in a church for a saint’s feast day, or to moderately adorn a permanent image in the church with flowers and even candles. Such displays would be imbalanced, however, if they draw attention away from the altar.

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RESOURCES FROM OUR OFFICE

Mary and the Liturgical Year
A Pastoral Resource
Katharine E. Harmon

In Mary and the Liturgical Year: A Pastoral Resource, liturgical scholar and professor Katharine E. Harmon offers an engaging survey of Mary’s role in the Church’s liturgical prayer from the first days of the early Church to our own day. In this unique resource, Harmon examines the twelve prominent Marian solemnities, feasts, and memorials celebrated throughout the liturgical year. Pastoral ministers, theology students, and persons seeking to reflect on Mary as a source of wisdom and faith will discover the riches of Marian theology and will come to understand how Mary always leads us to a deeper and more intimate relationship with her son, Jesus.