

Orantes

Newsletter of the Office for Divine Worship
of the Diocese of Worcester

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OFFICE FOR DIVINE WORSHIP
160 Mechanic Street
Leominster, MA 01453

508-798-0417
ofworship@worcesterdiocese.org

Monsignor James P. Moroney
Director

Reverend Alfredo Porras
Associate Director

Elizabeth Marcil
Associate Director

Deacon Colin Novick
Assistant Director

This issue of *Orantes* offers the first of a series of detailed commentaries on the prayers and rites for particular liturgical celebrations. Pope Francis, in his Apostolic letter *Desiderio Desideravi*, challenges us to “recover the capacity to live completely the liturgical action.” This can only be accomplished only if “pastors themselves, in the first place, become thoroughly imbued with the spirit and power of the liturgy, and undertake to give instruction about it” (*Sacrosanctum concilium*, no. 14). For this reason, the Holy Father urges us, “to find the channels for a formation that is the study of Liturgy...it is important now to spread this knowledge beyond the academic environment, in an accessible way, so that each one of the faithful might grow in a knowledge of the theological sense of the Liturgy.”

In this issue, we provide commentaries on **the Chrism Mass**, that celebration in which “the Bishop concelebrates Mass with his presbyterate and blesses the holy oils and consecrates the Chrism.” (*Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and Calendar*, no. 31). We begin with a commentary on the Blessing of Oils, drawn largely from an audience talk given by Pope Benedict XVI in 2011 (page 2). This is followed by reflections on the Renewal of Priestly Promises (page 7) and the Preface customarily used at the Chrism Mass and at ordinations to the priesthood. (Page 12).

On the Blessing of Holy Oils

The Oil of Catechumens

Lord God, protector of all who believe in you, bless + this oil and give wisdom and strength to all who are anointed with it in preparation for their Baptism. Bring them to a deeper understanding of the Gospel, help them to accept the challenge of Christian living, and lead them to the joy of new birth in the family of your Church. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.



COMMENTARY

“This oil indicates a first way of being touched by Christ and by his Spirit – an inner touch, by which the Lord draws people close to himself. Through this first anointing, which takes place even prior to baptism, our gaze is turned towards people who are journeying towards Christ – people who are searching for faith, searching for God. The oil of catechumens tells us that it is not only we who seek God: God himself is searching for us. The fact that he himself was made man and came down into the depths of human existence, even into the darkness of death, shows us how much God loves his creature, man. Driven by love, God has set out towards us. “Seeking me, you sat down weary ... let such labour not be in vain!”, we pray in the *Dies Irae*. God is searching for me. Do I want to recognize him? Do I want to be known by him, found by him? God loves us. He comes to meet the unrest of our hearts, the unrest of our questioning and seeking, with the unrest of his own heart, which leads him to accomplish the ultimate for us. That restlessness for God, that journeying towards him, so as to know and love him better, must not be extinguished in us. In this sense we should always remain catechumens. “Constantly seek his face”, says one of the Psalms (105:4). Saint Augustine comments as follows: God is so great as to surpass infinitely all our knowing and all our being. Knowledge of God is never exhausted. For all eternity, with ever increasing joy, we can always continue to seek him, so as to know

him and love him more and more. “Our heart is restless until it rests in you”, said Saint Augustine at the beginning of his Confessions. Yes, man is restless, because whatever is finite is too little. But are we truly restless for him? Have we perhaps become resigned to his absence, do we not seek to be self-sufficient? Let us not allow our humanity to be diminished in this way! Let us remain constantly on a journey towards him, longing for him, always open to receive new knowledge and love!”¹



The Oil of the Sick

God of all consolation, you chose and sent your Son to heal the world. Graciously listen to our prayer of faith: send the power of your Holy Spirit, the Consoler, into this precious oil, this soothing ointment, this rich gift, this fruit of the earth. Bless this oil + and sanctify it for our use. Make this oil a remedy for all who are anointed with it; heal them in body, in soul, and in spirit, and deliver them in every affliction. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

COMMENTARY

“Arrayed before us is a host of suffering people: those who hunger and thirst, victims of violence in every continent, the sick with all their sufferings, their hopes and their moments without hope, the persecuted, the downtrodden, the broken-hearted. Regarding the first mission on which Jesus sent the disciples, Saint Luke tells us: “he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal” (9:2). Healing is one of the fundamental tasks entrusted by Jesus to the Church, following the example that he gave as he travelled throughout the land healing the sick. To be sure, the Church’s principal task is to proclaim the Kingdom of God. But this very proclamation must be a process of healing: “bind up the broken-hearted”, we heard in today’s first reading from the prophet Isaiah (61:1).

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Holy Thursday, 21 April 2011.



The proclamation of God's Kingdom, of God's unlimited goodness, must first of all bring healing to broken hearts. By nature, man is a being in relation. But if the fundamental relationship, the relationship with God, is disturbed, then all the rest is disturbed as well. If our relationship with God is disturbed, if the fundamental orientation of our being is awry, we cannot truly be healed in body and soul. For this reason, the first and fundamental healing takes place in our encounter with Christ who reconciles us to God and mends our broken hearts. But over and above this central task, the Church's essential mission also includes the specific healing of sickness and suffering. The oil for anointing the sick is the visible sacramental expression of this mission. Since apostolic times, the healing vocation has matured in the Church, and so too has loving solicitude for those who are distressed in body and soul. This is also the occasion to say thank you to those sisters and brothers throughout the world who bring healing and love to the sick, irrespective of their status or religious affiliation. From Elizabeth of Hungary, Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, Camillus of Lellis to Mother Teresa – to recall but a few names – we see, lighting up the world, a radiant procession of helpers streaming forth from God's love for the suffering and the sick. For this we thank the Lord at this moment. For this we thank all those who, by virtue of their faith and love, place themselves alongside the suffering, thereby bearing definitive witness to the goodness of God himself. The oil for anointing the sick is a sign of this oil of the goodness of heart that these people bring – together with their professional competence – to the suffering. Even without speaking of Christ, they make him manifest.”¹

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Holy Thursday, 21 April 2011.

The Oil of Holy Chrism

God our maker, source of all growth in holiness, accept the joyful thanks and praise we offer in the name of your Church. In the beginning, at your command, the earth produced fruit-bearing trees. From the fruit of the olive tree you have provided us with oil for Holy Chrism.

The prophet David sang of the life and joy that the oil would bring us in the Sacraments of your love. After the avenging flood, the dove returning to Noah with an olive branch announced your gift of peace. This was a sign of a greater gift to come. Now the waters of Baptism wash away the sins of men, and by the anointing with olive oil you make us radiant with your joy.



At your command, Aaron was washed with water, and your servant Moses, his brother, anointed him Priest. This too foreshadowed greater things to come. After your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, asked John for Baptism in the waters of Jordan, you sent the Spirit upon him in the form of a dove and by the witness of your own voice you declared him to be your only, well-beloved Son. In this you clearly fulfilled the prophecy of David, that Christ would be anointed with the oil of gladness beyond his fellow men.

And so, Father, we ask you to bless + this oil you have created. Fill it with the power of your Holy Spirit through Christ your Son. It is from him that Chrism takes its name and with Chrism you have anointed for yourself Priests and kings, Prophets and Martyrs. Make this Chrism sign of life and salvation for those who are to be born again in the waters of Baptism. Wash away the evil they have inherited from sinful Adam, and when they are anointed with this holy oil make them temples of your glory, radiant with the goodness of life that has its source in you.

Through this sign of Chrism grant them royal, priestly, and prophetic honor, and clothe them with incorruption. Let this be indeed the Chrism of salvation for those who will be born again of water and the Holy Spirit. May they come to share eternal life in the glory of your Kingdom. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

COMMENTARY

“The most noble of the ecclesial oils is Holy Chrism, a mixture of olive oil and aromatic vegetable oils. It is the oil used for anointing priests and kings, in continuity with the great Old



Testament traditions of anointing. In the Church this oil serves chiefly for the anointing of confirmation and ordination. Today's liturgy links this oil with the promise of the prophet Isaiah: "You shall be called the Priests of the Lord, men shall speak of you as the ministers of our God" (61:6). The prophet makes reference here to the momentous words of commission and promise that God had addressed to Israel on Sinai: "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:6). In and for the vast world, which was largely ignorant of God, Israel had to be as it were a shrine of God for all peoples, exercising a priestly function vis-à-vis the world. It had to bring the world to God, to open it up to him. In his great baptismal catechesis, Saint Peter applied this privilege and this commission of Israel to the entire community of the baptized, proclaiming: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people" (1 Pet 2:9f.) Baptism and confirmation are an initiation into this people of God that spans the world; the anointing that takes place in baptism and confirmation is an anointing that confers this priestly ministry towards mankind. Christians are a priestly people for the world. Christians should make the living God visible to the world, they should bear witness to him and lead people towards him. When we speak of this task in which we share by virtue of our baptism, it is no reason to boast. It poses a question to us that makes us both joyful and anxious: are we truly God's shrine in and for the world? Do we open up the pathway to God for others or do we rather conceal it? Have not we – the people of God – become to a large extent a people of unbelief and distance from God? Is it perhaps the case that the West, the heartlands of Christianity, are tired of their faith, bored by their history and culture, and no longer wish to know faith in Jesus Christ? We have reason to cry out at this time to God: "Do not allow us to become a 'non-people'! Make us recognize you again! Truly, you have anointed us with your love, you have poured out your Holy Spirit upon us. Grant that the power of your Spirit may become newly effective in us, so that we may bear joyful witness to your message!"¹

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Holy Thursday, 21 April 2011.

On the Renewal of Priestly Promises

Bishop: Beloved sons, on the anniversary of that day when Christ our Lord conferred his priesthood on his Apostles and on us, are you resolved to renew, in the presence of your Bishop and God's holy people, the promises you once made?

Priests, all together, respond: I am.



Bishop: Are you resolved to be more united with the Lord Jesus and more closely conformed to him, denying yourselves and confirming those promises about sacred duties towards Christ's Church which, prompted by love of him, you willingly and joyfully pledged on the day of your priestly ordination?

Priests: I am.

Bishop: Are you resolved to be faithful stewards of the mysteries of God in the Holy Eucharist and the other liturgical rites and to discharge faithfully the sacred office of teaching, following Christ the Head and Shepherd, not seeking any gain, but moved only by zeal for souls?

Priests: I am.

Then, turned towards the people, the Bishop continues:

As for you, dearest sons and daughters, pray for your Priests, that the Lord may pour out his gifts abundantly upon them, and keep them faithful as ministers of Christ, the High Priest, so that they may lead you to him, who is the source of salvation.

People: Christ, hear us. Christ, graciously hear us.

Bishop: And pray also for me, that I may be faithful to the apostolic office entrusted to me in my lowliness and that in your midst I may be made day by day a living and more perfect image of Christ, the Priest, the Good Shepherd, the Teacher and the Servant of all.

People: Christ, hear us. Christ, graciously hear us.

Bishop: May the Lord keep us all in his charity and lead all of us, shepherds and flock, to eternal life.

All: Amen.

While the name for the Chrism Mass is taken from the blessing of holy oils, the rubrics prescribe that the Chrism Mass should also be seen as “a manifestation of the Priests’ communion with their Bishop.”¹ For this

¹ *Roman Missal*, rubrics for the Chrism Mass, no. 4.

reason, the Church encourages all Priests to concelebrate the Chrism Mass with the Bishop.



This unity is rooted in the fidelity of the Bishop and each of the members of his presbyterate to the promises which they made at their ordinations.

What is the Priesthood?

Christ is our great High Priest, offering the holy and living sacrifice upon the altar of the Cross. He is the Priest and victim, the giver and the gift.

In Baptism, we are each given a share in Christ's Priesthood, joining the sacrifices of our lives to his perfect sacrifice.

Christ, then chose Apostles, and their successors, the Bishops, "that we might continue to exercise his office of Teacher, Priest, and Shepherd."¹ Priests are ordained at the hands of the Bishop and thereby joined to this priestly office.

The Bishops, and the Priests of his presbyterate exercise this priesthood, then, in three ways: As teacher, sanctifiers and shepherds.

Conformity to Christ

The rites of Ordination of a Bishop or Priests make clear, then, that the first requirement of the ordained is an unwavering Christo-centrism. The Priest exercises his ministry only when it is clear to him and to others that it is not about him, but about Christ and that it is no longer I who live, but Christ Jesus who lives in me.² Thus the authentic Priest is the one who seeks to decrease, that Christ might live through him.³

¹ *Rite of Ordination of a Priest*, Homily, no. 123.

² Cf. Galatians 2:20.

³ Cf. John 3:30.



Thus does the Priest promise at his ordination “to be united more closely every day to Christ the High Priest, who offered himself for us to the Father as a pure Sacrifice, and with him to consecrate yourselves to God for the salvation of all.”

Thus the first question asked of the Priest at the Chrism Mass is whether he promises “to be more united with the Lord Jesus and more closely conformed to him, denying yourselves...”

This is foundational and essential question, without which an authentic share in the priesthood of Christ is impossible. Thus does the Priest kneel, placing his hands and his life in the hands of the Bishop and his successors, promising obedience and respect.

The kenotic dimension of such a promise cannot be overstated, for in giving “up their lives for [God] and for the salvation of their brothers and sisters, [Priests] strive to be conformed to the image of Christ himself and offer [to God] a constant witness of faith and love.”¹

The Triplex Munera

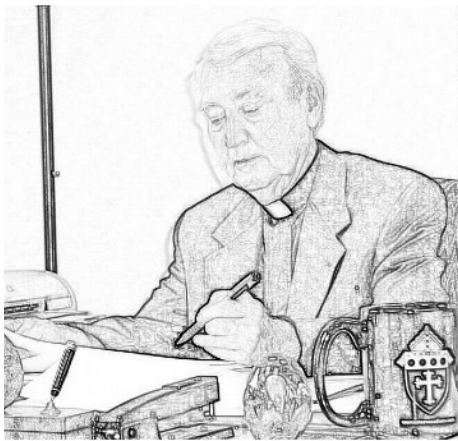
The priest lives out this self-donation in the way that he exercises his ministry.

When they promise to “discharge faithfully the sacred office of teaching” (*munus docendi*), Priests are called upon to “present, in the confusion and bewilderment of our times, the light of God's Word, the light that is Christ himself in this our world...[he] does not teach his own ideas, a philosophy that he himself has invented, that he has discovered or likes; the Priest does not speak of himself, he does not speak for himself, to attract admirers, perhaps, or create a party of his own; he does not say his own thing, his own inventions but, in the medley of all the philosophies,

¹ Preface for the Chrism Mass.

the Priest teaches in the name of Christ present, he proposes the truth that is Christ himself, his word and his way of living and of moving ahead.”¹

Likewise, when they aspire to be “faithful stewards of the mysteries of God”² (*munus sanctificandi*), the Priests must recognize that it is Christ who acts in the Liturgy through him. He acts in Christ’s own person, “the same now offering, through the ministry of Priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross,”³ Thus, whenever the Bishop or his Priest celebrates the Eucharist, “the work of our redemption is accomplished.”⁴



Finally, the Priest promises to exercise "the office of Christ, Head and Shepherd”⁵ (*munus regendi*), ever united to and subject to his Bishop. He is called to “strive to bring the faithful together into one family, so that you may lead them to God the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit,” ever keeping before his eyes “the example of the Good Shepherd who came not to be served but to serve, and who came to seek out and save what was lost.”

Two promises taken by the Bishop at his ordination can serve as guides to Priests and Priests seeking to govern in the model of the Good Shepherd. The first, is the promise to be “welcoming and merciful to the poor, to strangers, and to all who are in need.”

The second is “to seek out the sheep who stray and gather them into the Lord’s fold”

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, 14 April 2010.

² *Roman Missal*, Chrism Mass: Renewal of Priestly Promises.

³ Council of Trent, Session XXII, Doctrine on the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, c. 2..

⁴ *Roman Missal*, Prayer over the Offerings for the Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper.

⁵ *Ordination of a Priest*, Prayer of Ordination. And CHRISM PROMISE.

Conclusion

Recent surveys and press reports frequently highlight divisions in the Church, not only between members of the faithful, but even between Priests and Priests. The Renewal of Priestly Promises at the Chrism Mass suggest that the solution to such problems is not to be found in the socio-political or organizational realms, but in the relationship of Priests and Priests to Christ, and in their willingness to renew “those promises about sacred duties towards Christ's Church which, prompted by love of him, you willingly and joyfully pledged on the day of your priestly ordination.”¹



¹ *Roman Missal*, Chrism Mass: Renewal of Priestly Promises.

On the Preface for the Chrism Mass

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God. For by the anointing of the Holy Spirit you made your Only Begotten Son High Priest of the new and eternal covenant, and by your wondrous design were pleased to decree that his one Priesthood should continue in the Church.

For Christ not only adorns with a royal priesthood the people he has made his own, but with a brother's kindness he also chooses men to become sharers in his sacred ministry through the laying on of hands. They are to renew in his name the sacrifice of human redemption, to set before your children the paschal banquet, to lead your holy people in charity, to nourish them with the word and strengthen them with the Sacraments. As they give up their lives for you and for the salvation of their brothers and sisters, they strive to be conformed to the image of Christ himself and offer you a constant witness of faith and love.

And so, Lord, with all the Angels and Saints, we, too, give you thanks, as in exultation we acclaim:



The *Roman Missal* recommends the same Preface be used for the Chrism Mass and for the Ordination of Priests. It carries the title *The Priesthood of Christ and the Ministry of Priests* and provides a remarkably succinct meditation on what Priesthood is all about.

It begins, as does our entire lives, with Christ the High Priest, who by “the anointing of the Holy Spirit”¹ was made the “High Priest of the new and eternal covenant.” Our High Priest is the “one mediator between God and men.”² who “by offering himself on the Altar of the Cross as a spotless sacrifice” has accomplished the redemption of the world.³

But, God our Father “by [his] wondrous design” also willed that the Priesthood of Christ should continue in the Church. Thus, in Baptism, those who are joined to

¹ Cf. *Roman Missal*, Preface: *The Priesthood of Christ and the Ministry of Priests*. Subsequent quotations from the Preface are included without attribution.

² Cf. 2 Tim 2:5.

³ Cf. *Roman Missal*, Preface: Christ, King of the Universe.

Christ in his dying and rising are adorned with a share in his holy and royal Priesthood” and are empowered to offer the “spiritual sacrifices [of their lives] to God through Jesus Christ.”¹ It is precisely these innumerable sacrifices offered each day by the people of your parish, which you acknowledge and join to Christ’s perfect Sacrifice when you invite them, not only to pray that your sacrifice (offered by virtue of your ordination) might be acceptable, but that *their sacrifices*, ‘the very offerings of their lives.’² “may be acceptable to God the almighty Father.”³



But even this great Baptismal sharing in his Priesthood was not enough for Christ, who “with a brother’s kindness, also chooses men to become sharers in his sacred ministry through the laying on of hands.” To these he gives the work of carrying out “publicly in his name, and on behalf of mankind, a priestly office in the Church.”⁴ And by his mysterious design, he chooses even men like you and me.

This great and sacred work which Christ gives to us is described by the Preface in terms of the threefold work which he accomplished upon the Altar of the Cross.

First, we are called to celebrate the Sacraments with fidelity and a complete donation of heart and soul, body and mind, especially in placing the Paschal Banquet before his sons and daughters. Second, we are called to proclaim the Gospel with courage and joy, believing what we read, teaching what we believe, and practicing what we teach.”⁵ Finally, in imitation of the Good Shepherd, we are called to lead his people in charity: to guide them to him by urging them to love one another as he has first loved us.

¹ *Presbyterorum Ordinis* [PO], no. 2.

² Cf. PO, no. 5.

³ *Roman Missal*, Order of Mass.

⁴ *Rite for the Ordination of Priests* [OP], Instruction.

⁵ OP, Instruction.

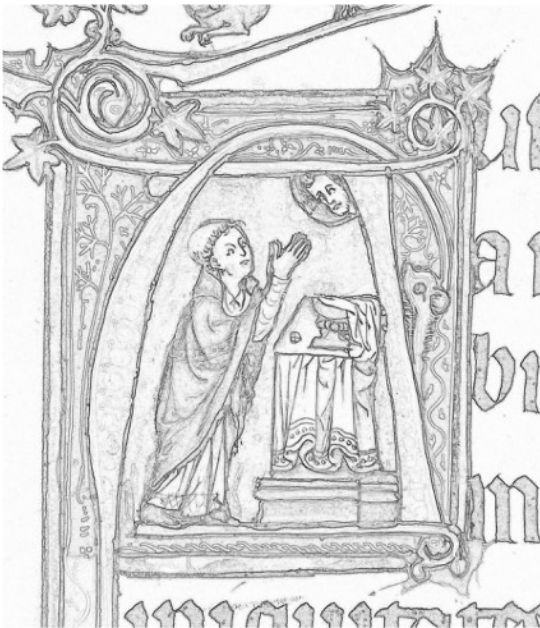
And how do we accomplish such a task? The Preface provides us with three suggestions.

First, we must give up our lives for God and “for the salvation of [our] brothers and sisters.” For it is not possible for a Priest to offer the perfect Sacrifice of Christ unless he first offers himself entirely to God.¹

Second, we are called to “strive to be conformed to the image of Christ himself.” The first time this was asked of you was on the day you were ordained as a Priest, when, as the Bishop placed the prepared Chalice and Paten into your hands, he exhorted you to conform your life to the mystery of the Lord’s Cross.²

Thus, the last suggestion of the Preface is a summary of the first two: “offer...a constant witness of faith and love.”

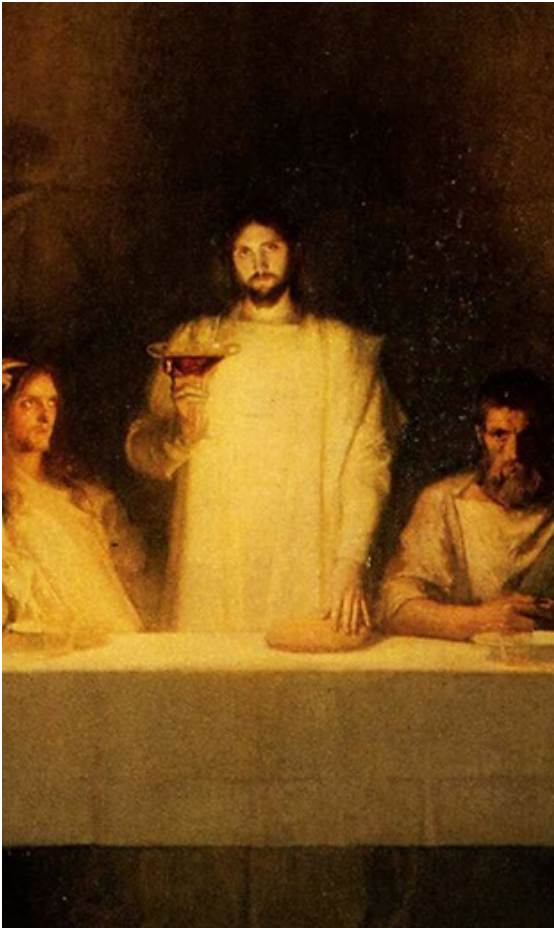
We have been striving for all the years of our priesthood to make this offering. As Bishop McManus proclaims this Preface at the Chrism Mass this year, may we renew our prayer that God might bring to conclusion what he has so well begun in us.



¹ PO, no. 213.

² OP, Presentation of the Chalice and Paten.

Diocesan Prayer for Eucharistic Revival



Lord Jesus Christ,
who by the gift of your Body and Blood,
are really present in our lives,
hear the prayers of the Church in Worcester.

Give us the faith of your Church, confident in your
presence in our Masses, our tabernacles and our
lives.

Give us the faith
to offer our lives to you,
joined with the perfect sacrifice,
which you offered on the altar of the Cross.

Good and loving Shepherd,
teach us how to lead your children home,
that we might long together
to glorify your name
at the Supper of the Lord.

For you are Lord, forever and ever. Amen.

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