



From A Bishop's Journal (621)

Richness of the Liturgy of the Word

At the request of the priests senate and the Diocesan Liturgy Commission, the following is a working paper concerning an eventual practical Guide for our diocese, giving specific guidelines in simple and concrete language on Word liturgies in the diocese of Edmundston. Parishes, communities, and pastoral zones are invited to submit to the Liturgy Commission, in the weeks to come, the corrections, additions, or modifications they would like to see.

Richness of the Word

Those in charge of our Christian communities will spare no effort to show the people the richness of the Word, the importance of listening to it, of celebrating it, and of sharing it. We remember the invitation of Vatican Council II to bring to all the baptised the treasures of Holy Scripture. "In order to restore and adapt the liturgy, we must promote the sweet and living taste for Holy scripture which the venerable tradition of the eastern and western rites witness to."

Celebration of the Word

Leaders of Christian communities will remind the people often that the Lord revealed to his disciples that whenever two or three are gathered in his name, he is there with them. Christ is present through his word, but the Risen Christ himself is present in the midst of the assembly in a very special way. His members form the Body of Christ. Without minimising the Eucharistic celebration, it is important to note the outstanding value of every celebration of the Word. Besides, one calls forth the other. However, for many reasons it is not always possible to do eucharist after having celebrated the Word.

Discernment

Leaders of Christian communities, especially moderators of parish pastoral teams and in relation with the others concerned, must determine whether there should be a celebration of the Eucharist or a celebration of the Word only. Due to existing conditions, care will first be taken to ensure that a parish community has a Sunday Eucharistic celebration, before this alternate possibility of a Word liturgy is offered for a wedding or funeral. Except for major reasons, there shall be no Word liturgies on two consecutive Sundays. People concerned will be encouraged to have a liturgy of the Word for the celebration of weddings and funerals. However, this should never be seen as a second-rate celebration or as punishment because those involved are not "regular or irregular church-goers."

Reasons given may be multiple: absence of priests, family or community conventions, a full schedule, varied beliefs, etc. However, the main pastoral reason must first be the situation of the people themselves.

Presiding

The pastoral team moderator shall appoint a person to preside the Word liturgy for weddings, funerals, Sundays, or weekdays. This person must be duly qualified and be mandated by the bishop, knowledgeable about Holy Scripture and the liturgy, able to relate to the worshipping assembly, respected for his/her faith, behaviour, and commitment to the Church. We should never ask anyone to animate a Word liturgy on the spur of the moment.

Unfolding of the Liturgy

The Ritual approved by the Bishops' Liturgy Commission and published in February, 1995, is a quality guide for the unfolding of Word liturgies for Sundays, and psalm liturgies. Good use should be made of this Guide. The principles of the liturgical reform must show through, especially regarding the principle of full, active participation of the faithful in the different celebrations. This ritual for Word liturgies is available at the Diocesan Centre.

Communion

If the Word liturgy is not held in the parish church, communion is not given. Hence, if the celebration is held at the funeral home, a summer camp or a family residence, the Word liturgy without communion is to be held. On weekdays, a Word liturgy could be accompanied by communion, but we must take care that this celebration of the Word is not considered a "second rate Mass" or a "short Mass". If communion is given, there should be appropriate times of preparation and thanksgiving. On Sundays, communion may be given, and the people should be reminded that the Word liturgy is being celebrated in expectation of the Eucharistic celebration. Time could be taken to explain to the people what is a Word liturgy and what is a Eucharistic liturgy, and their respective importance in the life of the baptised.

Evaluation

At this time when Word liturgies are being celebrated more often, it would be important to remain attentive to everything that could be said regarding these celebrations, either at funerals or at weddings. It is important to really get the pulse of the People of God, the "*sensus fidelium*", regarding these changes. It shall also be important for the parish and the zone pastoral teams to do a serious evaluation of the subject. May our meditations of the Word of God, may our "*lectio divina*", our pastoral and Bible sessions, our prayer meetings, and our family- and parish-based catechesis make us happy to hear the Word of God.

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