

## Catechism on the Liturgy I, 3

Continued from Catechism on the Liturgy I, 2

4. Another danger to participation is the lack of silence. If the celebrant is convinced that his role is to keep the congregation interested – or worse entertained...anything but bored – then he can be tempted to think that the Mass without a sermon is lacking; Mass without him speaking from the pulpit is missing the key element. With too much of an intellectual approach, the imagination, affect, emotion and aesthetics are not given enough room and only the intellect is fed.

a. Liturgy is not the time or place for catechesis. Liturgy is its own end, which is worship. True, catechesis can take place in the sermon, but when the priest takes off the maniple, descends from the altar, looks the faithful in the eye and addresses them in the vernacular – all these are clear signs that the Mass is being interrupted for a time.

b. Liturgy should not be used as a means to disseminate information. We try to keep announcements to a bare minimum. Concerns about the parish hall or other things should be handled in the bulletin, which can be read after Mass. Worship of God is primary.

c. It should never be used as a warm-up for some other activity. That is, if the main activity of the

parish is to be a parish picnic, the Mass must not be seen as a way to get everyone together first. It must always remain elevated over every other activity of the parish.

d. The Fathers of the Church adhered to a principle which held that the deepest catechesis (called mystagogical in Greek) should come only after the faithful had received the sacraments of initiation; Baptism, Penance and Confirmation. Prior to baptism, the instructions they received were limited to moral instruction and teaching on the Christian way of life. Immediately after baptism at Easter, they were instructed on the deep meanings of the sacraments. Their entire method of teaching was structured around a framework of questions and answers such as “Did you notice that...?” Celebrate and worship first, then understand. That is the tradition. How different from the modern conception that all must be understood immediately!

e. We do not adhere to the letter on this pedagogical approach. Pius XII warned about archeologism, which seeks to yank some practice from an earlier century and bring it willy-nilly into ours (my language, not his!). But the principle is sound. No catechism will succeed unless it is grounded on a stable, solid,

reliable and faithful celebration of the Mass. Many a convert has seen a great lack of continuity between the catechism and a sloppy, irreverent celebration of Mass.

5. The danger of trying to make the readings more interesting by rhetorical devices and theatrics must also be avoided. I can remember in seminary (not an FSSP seminary!) when we were instructed not to read the Word of God, but to proclaim it. This led to the reader or priest imposing his emotions and emphases on the texts – emphases and emotions which the texts simply do not have. Reading the scriptures in the liturgy and even before the sermon is not acting; rather the reader must allow himself to be a humble instrument of a word which comes from heaven. His eyes ought to be downcast, his voice plain and his gestures non-existent.

6. *Imitami quo tractatis*...says Pope St. Leo the Great in the ancient text from the liturgy of ordination to the priesthood. “Do in practice what you do in the liturgy.” The application of the liturgy to everyday life is a big part of proper participation. Perhaps the worst danger to participation is to leave our good

behavior behind in the church, and not apply it to daily life.

a. For example, do you have problems respecting God’s Holy Name? Then bow your head at the name of God every time you hear it, and it will do wonders for helping you learn how to respect His name. That is required in the liturgy (more on this later) and can be applied not only to grow in respect for the Name, but also to make reparation for the misuse of His Name. It’s hard to correct the people at work who misuse His Name, but you can surreptitiously bow your head each time you hear His Name, or the name of the Blessed Virgin or the pope or the saints, and make reparation for their disrespect.

b. Do you have problems with custody of the eyes? Then use the example of the priest who does not let his eyes wander around during the Mass, but keeps them focused on a particular point. At every moment of the Mass he is required to look at something, and not just anything to which he is inclined. The Mass can be a perfect training for custody of the eyes.