

# Sacramentals

In the Light of Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Liturgical Documents

Lit 12

Simon Peter Kyambadde



©2004 by Simon Peter Kyambadde

These notes are still in draft form. They are meant for lecture purposes only, for students of Kinyamasika National Seminary. They are not in their final form, and have not been subjected to the last proof-reading. Nor are they meant for re-distributions and multiplication, except in the context mentioned above.



# Contents

## **INTRODUCTION 6**

## **SACRAMENTALS IN GENERAL 8**

MEANING 8

MINISTERS OF SACRAMENTALS 9

TYPES OF SACRAMENTALS 9

PASTORAL CONCERNS REGARDING SACRAMENTALS 10

GUIDELINES FOR THE PROPER USE OF SACRAMENTALS 11

## **SACRAMENTALS AS OBJECTS OF CHRISTIAN DEVOTION 13**

CRUCIFIXES AND CROSSES 13

WATER 14

SACRAMENTALS RELATED TO PARTICULAR SEASONS 16

RELICS 21

## **SACRAMENTALS OF A NON-MATERIAL NATURE 25**

CHRISTIAN FUNERALS 26

WORSHIP OF THE EUCHARIST OUTSIDE MASS 54

BLESSINGS 69

DEDICATIONS OF A CHURCH 96

HEALING AND EXORCISM 107

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY 117**

## INTRODUCTION

The work of a priest is in some way comparable to that of a general advocate. In order to be able to defend cases of politicians, business people, doctors or clergy, the lawyer needs to some extent, besides acquiring the requisite knowledge in law, to be familiar with the world of these different areas. Similarly a priest in the modern world is prepared to serve the needs of men and women in different fields, peasants as well as politicians, traders as well as teachers. Now, while lawyers may specialise so that one finds legal representatives specifically for copyright law or computer technology, priests do not generally do so, with the exception perhaps of a few areas such as prison and military chaplains or those trained to form other priests. Adequate seminary training therefore, aims at producing priests who are “all rounded”, and who can feel comfortable in the different sectors of the ever-changing society. In working towards this end, seminary authorities have introduced, among other things affiliation to universities, local or foreign. This has in turn led to overloading of the seminary syllabus, to the bewilderment of students who have to cover so much more, as well as traditional seminary staff who must compress so much academic material within the given time, while at the same time giving enough room to the necessary spiritual and moral formation of the seminarians. The result is that in spite of the seven years of post-college training – a period which is longer than most university degrees – the time in the major seminary is hardly enough to produce an academically “well-baked” priest, not mentioning the other aspects of a priest’s training which are in no way less important.

This booklet is one in a series that emerged in the course of liturgy lectures in St. Paul’s National Seminary, at the time of affiliation to external universities. The writer realised like other fellow lecturers, that it was almost impossible to cover the material taught before the affiliation, while at the same time giving due time to the new university program. On the other hand reducing the areas covered in liturgy would have meant sending out priests who were ill-prepared for their ministry in that all-important aspect of a pastor’s life. The alternative course of action would then be to cover less in class,

while giving a future priest a package of ready reference in his pastoral activity.

The series therefore is a form of liturgical companion, written particularly with a pastoral orientation. It is written with the realisation that in the modern world of fast-moving technology the most important thing is not to know all that is necessary in one's area of work, for that is absolutely impossible. Rather, it is to know where to look for the answers in case of questions. For that reason, a lot of effort has been put in referring to the basic liturgical sources that are available to pastors.

Because it is a form of "liturgical companion" it renders itself beneficial also to those priests and other pastoral workers who are already in the field. The book is not a substitution for the actual rituals. That would be both unnecessary since such rituals are available and impossible since it would imply reproducing a great bulk of material. Rather, it is a parallel to the corresponding ritual. It helps the pastor to see the rationale behind the rubrics. It brings in focus the importance of the General Introduction, Instructions or Norms, relating them to other relevant liturgical sources as well as adapting them to the present situation.

## **SACRAMENTALS IN GENERAL**

### MEANING<sup>1</sup>

Sacramentals bear some resemblance to sacraments. The word “sacramental” gives us a clue to what it means. What comes immediately to mind is its relation to the more familiar term “sacrament”. Sacraments are sacred signs that signify and effect of grace for our sanctification. The same can be said of sacramentals. The difference is with regard to their origin and importance. The sacraments can directly or ultimately be traced back to Jesus as their origin. For that reason their effectiveness does not depend on the holiness of the minister, even though God prefers to work through holy ministers. Christ’s words “whatever you loose on earth will also be considered loosed in heaven...” are usually quoted in reference to the sacrament of Reconciliation, but in a way they apply to all the sacraments. When a proper minister baptises that person is marked by God forever. When people are bound in Matrimony or Ordination they are bound by God and for keeps. The same does not apply to sacramentals. Sacramentals are instituted by the Church and depend on the intercession of the Church. They do not therefore function automatically. However, both sacraments and sacramentals ultimately derive their effectiveness from the Paschal Mystery.

---

<sup>1</sup> SC 60; CIC can. 1166; Patrick Bishop, "Sacramentals" in the *New Dictionary of Sacramental Theology*.



**Table 1: Comparison of Sacraments and Sacramentals**

|                      | <b>Sacraments</b>                                   | <b>Sacramentals</b>   |
|----------------------|---|---|
| <i>Origin</i>        | Directly or indirectly from Christ                  | Instituted by the Church <sup>2</sup>   |
| <i>Purpose</i>       | For the sanctification of the major aspects of life | For the sanctification of other aspects of life.<br>They enhance the sacramental life |
| <i>Efficacy</i>      | Ex opera operato                                    | Depends on the intercession of the Church <sup>3</sup>                                |
| <i>Examples</i>      | Baptism, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing              | Funerals, Blessings, consecration, dedications, Exorcisms,                            |
| <i>Nature</i>        | Sacred signs effecting divine grace                 | Sacred signs effecting divine grace, similar to sacraments                            |
| <i>Beneficiaries</i> | The Baptised  | Other believers may receive them under certain conditions <sup>4</sup>                |

## MINISTERS OF SACRAMENTALS

The minister of the sacramentals is a cleric who has the requisite power. In accordance with the liturgical books and subject to the judgement of the local Ordinary, certain sacramentals can also be administered by lay people who possess the appropriate qualities.<sup>5</sup> However, in the presence of a cleric non-clerical ministers, even if authorised, give way.

## TYPES OF SACRAMENTALS

One speaks of a rosary or of holy water as sacramentals. At the same time one describes blessings and dedication of a church as a sacramental. It is not easy to see the connection between the two

---

<sup>2</sup> “Only the Apostolic See can establish new sacramentals, or authentically interpret, suppress or change existing ones.. Can. 1167 §1.

<sup>3</sup> Can. 1166.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. while blessings are to be imparted primarily to Catholics, they may be given also to catechumens and, unless there is a prohibition by the Church, even to non-Catholics. Can 1171.

<sup>5</sup> Can. 1168.

realities. Sacramentals can broadly be set under two categories: there those which are in form of objects or articles used in devotions. Secondly, there those of a non-material nature. The first example refers to the former and the second to the latter.

Some of the sacramentals in the form of articles or objects are used in official liturgy. these include for instance: incense, holy water (as that used at baptism, at the Eucharist, the water which the priest mixes with the wine); relics of saints such as those put in the substructure of the altar, crosses on the altar at the celebration of the Eucharist or the cross carried in procession, Easter candle and the candles used during Mass, ashes which are smeared on the foreheads of the faithful during Ash Wednesday. All these are used in the official liturgy. there are on the other hand those used in popular devotions. These include rosaries, holy water (such as the water used in the rite of blessing of various objects and persons), scapulars, medals, crosses worn around the neck, etc.

Sacramentals of that are immaterial or which are in the form of prayer include those listed in the Ceremonial of Bishops. These are blessing of persons such as abbots and abbesses, blessing of objects such as churches, altars, baptisteries, cemeteries; consecration to a life of virginity, installation of acolytes and lectors, vows (excluding the marriage vows which constitute a sacrament), funerals,<sup>6</sup> laying of a foundation stone for a church, dedication of churches and of altars, processions and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

## PASTORAL CONCERNS REGARDING SACRAMENTALS

Many well-meaning members of the faithful and of the ordained ministry are sometimes disturbed by the Church's use of sacramentals, particularly those of a material nature. The reasons for this are several. It may be because of their close resemblance to the magical and to manipulation of God. At least to an outside, the blessing, say of farm equipment that their use may yield abundant fruits may appear an attempt to manipulate God. Some feel that in the use of sacramentals one makes religion a little bit too

---

<sup>6</sup> However, in the code of Canon Law and in other books on the Liturgy Funerals are grouped in a category of their own putting them apart from both sacraments and sacramentals.

materialistic when actually authentic religion is essentially spiritual. Some may object to sacramentals because of the embarrassment to display what they believe in and thus open themselves to the possibility of ridicule. Many might feel embarrassed to wear scapulars or even a rosary. Such display of religiosity is associated with simplistic old women or people who are mentally unstable. Others object to the use of sacramentals because of scanty biblical basis to back them up, at least in respect to some of them. Sacramentals can also be said to be counter-productive in the ecumenical sphere. Many non-Catholic Christians find them typically Catholic and quite objectionable. Again some people are made uneasy with sacramentals because of the actual and possible abuses of them which tend to invite superstition in authentic worship.

Such challenges must be met by a conscientious pastor who must ensure that he does not upset the faith of both those who use sacramentals as well as those who genuinely find them disturbing. One must admit the possibility of a superstitious attitude towards sacraments, and guard against such abuses. Secondly one must acknowledge the secondary value of sacramentals in relation to the liturgy. He should guide with understanding those who value sacramentals for their faith. He must bear in mind that the real purpose of the sacramentals is to lead souls to praise and love of God, and not just to secure benefits especially of a material kind.

#### GUIDELINES FOR THE PROPER USE OF SACRAMENTALS

In the first place sacramental blessing prayers should draw their inspiration from Scripture. Indeed the wording itself should be as much as possible scriptural. That is particularly observable in the official book of blessings. Most of the prayers therein follow a definite pattern in which the first part of the prayer is an Anamnesis of what God did in the past. Only after that comes the petition based on God's bounty shown in the past.

Secondly, sacramentals should be in harmony with the official liturgy. They should not draw the people's attention away from the liturgy. Rather they should help people to appreciate the liturgy more. They should harmonise with the liturgical seasons.

Thirdly they are meant to be a help not a burden to the spirituality of the believer. One must learn to differentiate between sacramental and sacramental. The sacramentals that are attached to the official liturgy are not optional. Those that are attached to devotions of a universal nature are more obliging, for instance the Way of the Cross that is celebrated on Holy Friday. Those that are attached to private devotions are optional though recommended by the Church.

## **SACRAMENTALS AS OBJECTS OF CHRISTIAN DEVOTION**

|                                   |    |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| <i>Advent Wreath</i> .....        | 16 |
| <i>The Christmas Crib</i> .....   | 17 |
| <i>The Christmas Candle</i> ..... | 18 |
| <i>The Christmas Tree</i> .....   | 18 |
| <i>Christmas Carols</i> .....     | 20 |

### CRUCIFIXES AND CROSSES<sup>7</sup>

Strictly speaking the difference between a crucifix and a cross is that the former bears the figure of the crucified while the later does not. However, in ordinary usage a crucifix may also be referred to as a cross.

Crucifixes and crosses are venerated as a symbol of Christ's victory over sin which he accomplished by suffering and dying on the cross. They remind his followers are also reminded of their Christian task to carry their personal crosses in following Christ. Writing about the cross each individual Christian St. Francis de Sales once said:

*"The everlasting God has in His wisdom foreseen from eternity the cross that He now presents to you as a gift from his inmost Heart. This cross He now sends you He has considered with His all-knowing eyes, understood with His divine mind, tested with His wise justice, warmed with loving arms, and weighed with His own hands to see that it be not one inch too large and not one ounce too heavy for you. He has blessed it with His holy Name, anointed it with His grace, perfumed it with His consolation, taken one last glance at you and your courage, and then sent it to you from heaven, a special greeting from God to you..."*

To bear one's cross and follow Jesus means in actual terms, to bear with faith the hardships in one's life.

---

<sup>7</sup> Ann Ball, *A Handbook of Catholic Sacramentals*, pp. 42-54.

The emperor Constantine is said to have won the battle of Milvian Bridge under the sign of the cross. An apparition of the cross was seen in the heavens which bore the words "*in hoc signo vinces.*" Constantine had the sign placed on his banner and did indeed win under that sign.

## WATER

As mentioned above water is used in sacraments such as baptism and the Holy Eucharist. But it is also used as a sacramental in blessings, at the rite of sprinkling at the beginning of Mass, at the entrance of churches where people sign themselves with it, at the sprinkling of the coffin and the grave during funerals, and in the rite of exorcism. Many pious Christians carry holy water to their homes, to sprinkle their houses with it. Some even drink it in times of illness.

"The purpose of giving to water and then using it to bless ourselves with the same by sprinkling or dipping our hands in it and make the sign of the cross is to obtain, through the intercession of the Church, the renewal of the graces given us at baptism. In the water of baptism we were cleansed of our sins and given the new life of adopted children of God. Being sprinkled with Holy Water should help us to repent of our sins and have them forgiven and make us grow in grace as God's children, and protect us from evil and from the evil one."<sup>8</sup>

Water is also often related to particular places where Our Lady or some other saint has appeared. Many of the faithful are familiar with water from Fatima, Lourdes or even in more recent times, Medjugorje. Of course one has to be careful with such water, particularly if one has to buy it in some other place apart from the place of apparition itself. Some of it may not be authentic; people may use the opportunity to make easy money. Apart from water people may carry some other material from a place of apparition, such as dust, plants, stones, or rosaries with images associated with the place of apparition.

---

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Willigers, *Pastoral Letter on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal*, Diocese of Jinja, 18<sup>th</sup> Oct. 2001. P. 4.

The water of Lourdes originates with the apparition of Our Lady to a girl called Bernadette Soubirous in 1858. In a trance she was instructed by the Blessed Virgin to dig a little hole in the earth. A trickle of little dirty water came out which she was told to drink from and wash her face with. Those who were watching thought that she had gone crazy. Later the trickle of dirty water became clear and abundant water, a stream. Today it is a clear stream that gives off over 30,000 gallons a day. This water is shipped all over the world for devotional use. By 1981 65% of the cases reported as miracles connected to this water were verified as authentic.

The water of Fatima is connected with Our Lady's appearance in 1917 to three children at *Cova da Iria* in Fatima, Portugal. The soils around were of a porous nature and could not retain water of the stream of pilgrims that continued to come during and after the apparitions. For that reason the local Ordinary decided to build a concrete cistern to hold rain water. As ground was broken for the project in 1921 a pure spring of water started to flow on its own. Up to today the spring flows from the exact place of the apparitions. This water is also used by the faithful all over the world for devotional purposes.

At Namugongo in Uganda the water of the little lake near the shrine has also become to be used for devotional purposes. Around 1879 twenty-two more than martyrs faced their death in different places, but the majority of them were martyred at Namugongo. Most were burnt to death, but a few were butchered with machetes. The executioners washed their knives in a small stream at Namugongo. At the building of the present Catholic shrine the stream was expanded to form a small lake. On a kind of peninsular in the middle of the lake was built the sanctuary. It is usually the case that many of the pilgrims draw water from this small lake, with faith in the intercession of the martyrs. Some even drink from this water. However, this is one of those cases where faith apparently comes in conflict with common sense. The water is stagnant and from the hygienic point of view, a health hazard. Faith does not mean putting God to the test.

The faithful that use water from such holy places ought to be cautioned, not only against taking the necessary hygienic precautions when the water is not safe to drink, they should also guard against

inauthentic water distributed by unscrupulous individuals for their own financial gain. They also need to guard against a superstitious use of such water, such as when someone rejects medicine which is available to combat a particular disease, in favour of “holy water”. People should also know that such water does not replace ordinary blessed water. When water is to be blessed, this should be made properly. In his Pastoral letter to the Diocese of Jinja, Bishop Willigers wrote regarding improper blessing of water: “All exaggerations related to the use of Holy Water should be avoided. In particular, the practice... of having people bring large containers with water before and during and after the Mass to stand around the altar and then take that water as having been blessed or wanting the priest to bless it after the Mass with a simple sign of the cross is to be discouraged.”<sup>9</sup>

## SACRAMENTALS RELATED TO PARTICULAR SEASONS

### *Advent Wreath*

The Advent wreath is made up of evergreens which are woven together and which may be suspended from the ceiling or placed at a table or some other suitable place. Four candles are then fastened to the wreath representing the four weeks of Advent. At the beginning of the Advent season one of the candles is lit. At the beginning of the second week a second candle is lit along with the first one, and so on. In a liturgical setting the candles are lit each day at Mass, morning prayer, etc. In a home the family may gather at a certain time each day for a short religious observance at which they light the candles according to the time in Advent.

The four candles symbolically announce the birth of the Messiah. They remind the faithful of the Old Testament times when humanity awaited the Messiah. The wreath itself is an ancient symbol of victory. As such it symbolises the fulfilment of time in the come of Christ. The Advent wreath has its origin in the Lutheran tradition. It originated in Eastern Germany a few hundred years ago.

---

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Willigers, *Pastoral Letter on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal*, Diocese of Jinja, 18<sup>th</sup> Oct. 2001. P. 5.



## *The Christmas Crib*

There are various representations of the Christmas story in three-dimensional art called the Christmas crib. Whatever the representation according to the imagination and available resources to the artist, the central figure is the new born child Jesus in the manger. In many areas the crib takes different shapes and sizes. The average crib contains, besides the new-born Jesus, the figure of Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, usually with their lambs, the animals in the manger: an ass and an ox, or more; and sometimes the magi and their gifts. But some cribs are much more elaborate, depicting also the landscape of the time, the star of the Magi, and all sorts of details such as fountains, waterfalls, houses or even the entire village of Bethlehem, etc. Whereas some cribs can be as small as pieces of a chess game, others on the other hand may be life-size statues, such as the cribs that one finds set out in the basilica of St. Peter in Rome. There are even cribs made up of living human beings, with a live infant, animals, etc.

Usually the Christmas crib is set up some days before the Christmas day, but without the child. The manger is prepared and left empty. On the Christmas night, sometime during or after Mass there is introduced the rite of placing the child into the manger. This may be accompanied with a suitable song and incensing. Then the lights of the crib are switched on fully.

The origin of the Christmas crib is accredited to St. Francis of Assisi in 1223. He is said to have asked his artist friend Giovanni Velitta to prepare what he would tell him. Then he narrated to him the story of Bethlehem: the memory of Jesus-child, deprived of all comforts other babies usually have. He was to be depicted lying in a manger between an ass and an ox. After the crib was ready according to the prescription of St. Francis, Mass was celebrated in which Francis delivered a homily about the infant child. From that the tradition of the Christmas crib spread and grew.

## *The Christmas Candle*<sup>10</sup>

The use of the Christmas candle is not so much in practice today, at least not in all places. However, it is necessary to say something about it because of its connection to the origin of the Christmas tree. The Christmas candle was used in the early centuries to symbolise the Christ the light of the world. This makes sense if we remember that the solemnity of Christmas developed in replacement of the pagan Roman feast of the Sun-god. For the Christians Christ was their sun, their light. So it was meaningful to represent his birth with light. The candle would be lit on Christmas vigil and burn throughout the holy night. It would then be lit every night throughout the Christmas season. The Christmas candle was presented differently in different countries. In the Ukraine it was stuck in a loaf of bread. In South America it is decorated with symbols and pictures of the nativity. In France and England three candles are twisted to represent the Trinity. In Germany the candle was put on a wooden pole decorated with evergreen plants.<sup>11</sup> Alternatively many candles were placed on a corn-shaped wooden structure. This would then be adorned with evergreen plants and other decorations.

## *The Christmas Tree*

On Christmas Even it is common to see people searching about for fur trees. Often in search of these trees peoples hedges are not exempt! In the Western world there people and firms that make it their business to grow plantations of fur trees simply for sell at Christmas time as Christmas trees. One finds Christmas trees set up in public places such as shops, banks, town squares, etc. It is common to find in big cities “Christmas trees” made up of intricate scintillating lights that attract onlookers who come over long distances to watch the trees. In St. Peter’s Square in Rome, for instance, companies vie with each other to set up enormous life-size fur trees, mainly for the advertisement of their own products! There is no limit to imagination in the decoration and lighting of these

---

<sup>10</sup> Ann Ball, *A handbook of Catholic Sacramentals*, 63-64.

<sup>11</sup> Ever-green plants have been used in Christmas symbolism partly because in the Western world they are the only available during Winter, partly because they symbolise eternal life.

trees. They are decorated with scintillating lights, balloons, candy, cotton wool to symbolise snow, even with Christmas cards received that year or accumulated over the years. Today, many people who set up the Christmas tree do so out of social convention rather than religious piety.

The use of the Christmas tree is fairly recent. Its origin is traceable in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It springs from a combination of two medieval religious symbols: the Paradise Tree and the Christmas Candle seen above.

The Paradise Tree originates from around the 11<sup>th</sup> century. At the time plays were composed narrating the story of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. In this story the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil played an important role. Included also would be the episode of expulsion from the Garden of Eden. It was customary to use a fur tree with red apples as symbol of the tree in the garden. The apples symbolised the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. Later wafers were also appended on the tree to symbolise the Eucharist. These plays were acted in Advent, before the celebration of the incarnation, to emphasise the importance of salvation brought by Christ after the fall and hopelessness of the human race. With time abuses crept in these plays, as for instance when they sought to graphically reproduce what it was that led to the expulsion of the couple. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century these plays were banned due to those abuses. In the Eastern Churches, however, the tree was retained on the feast of Adam and Eve.<sup>12</sup> The custom of the Christmas tree was passed on to the West without the religious significance attached to it in the Eastern Churches. The apples were in time replaced by wafers which in turn were replaced by candy: the sweet fruits of Christ's redemption.

In Germany people started combining the Christmas tree and the custom of the Christmas light. Thus lights and other decorations were transferred to the tree. On top of the tree was placed the symbolic of the star of Bethlehem. From there the custom of the Christmas tree with lights spread to other places. Today it is not uncommon to combine the Christmas tree with the Christmas crib.

---

<sup>12</sup> In the Eastern Churches the feast of Adam and Eve is kept up to today on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December. Adam and Eve are not celebrated as saints in the West.

## *Christmas Carols*<sup>13</sup>

The word “Carols” originates from the Greek word “Chorauline” meaning a dance accompanied by flute music. This was a popular dance in Greek culture, and later in the Roman world, performed in circles. Today the term “carols” depicts so much a particular type of hymns, as the setting for these hymns. Christmas carols (and Easter carols) are sung both in the liturgy and outside of it. However, they are called “Carols” only when they are sung outside of the liturgy.

The Romans took both the custom and the name to Britain. Medieval English carols were ring dances accompanied with singing. But up to that point they were secular songs. The origin of Christmas carols in a religious setting is again traceable to St. Francis of Assisi in Italy. In the first place Francis is renowned for his joyful spirit. But along with that he composed a Christmas hymn called *Psalmus in Nativitate*, which might be taken as the first Christmas carol. Many other Christmas hymns were composed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

During the Reformation Carols were in general discouraged by the Calvinists. They were suppressed altogether by the Puritans. The Methodists on the other hand introduced many Carols in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Lutherans also wrote many of the carols we have today, especially in Germany. Many religious sects in America added to the number of Carols.

Today Carols seem to enjoy a particular ecumenical freedom. The same carols, or at least similar tunes, can be found across different Christian denominations. They are adapted from one denomination to another. Some of them are quite old. One can easily find this out in many hymnbooks where the composer and the date of composition of a hymn are given. Several other local Carols have joined the number.

One can speak of the enduring nature of Carols. They are enduring masterpieces often across many centuries. It is not easy therefore to add to their number. Usually a hymn becomes a recognised masterpiece with the test of time. Hymns that are below the

---

<sup>13</sup> Norwood Hinkle, ed., *The Ditson Christmas Carol Book*, (with stories of the carols, for mixed voices and unison singing), Oliver Ditson Company. MCMXXXVI.

necessary standard fall in disuse with time, while those that are good endure in the process of a kind of natural selection.

#### RELICS<sup>14</sup>

The word “relics” is derived from the Latin word “reliquiae”, meaning “remains”. It refers to remains of saints or of objects connected to the earthly life of Jesus and of the saints. These are remains are venerated out of love for the saints; in the same way as people treasures memories of people they love. One may retain a photograph, a lock of hair or a toy of a person they love, particularly if the beloved is deceased. Relics are venerated because the bodies of the saints were temples of the Holy Spirit in which he found a ready home. God has time and time again shown approval for the veneration of the relics of saints by working miracles through them.

Relics are of different types. There are those which are actual bodily remains of the saint. But besides these, the instruments of martyrdom for saints who were martyrs are also grouped as relics. Thirdly objects that have been in close contact with the early life of saints may be grouped as relics of a third category, such as utensils, clothings, shoes, etc. Yet another category of relics are those that have been touched to the body or relic of a saint. Such may be rosaries, etc.

We have several examples of relics in the history of salvation, starting with scripture itself. For instance there is reference to the relics of Elisha in the second book of Kings: “So Elisha died, and they buried him. Now bands of Moabites used to invade the land in the spring of the year. As a man was being buried, a marauding band was seen and the man was thrown into the grave of Elisha; as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he came to life and stood on his feet.”<sup>15</sup> Another reference is that of relics of St. Paul in the Acts of the Apostles: “God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that when the handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were brought to the sick, their diseases left them, and the evil spirits came out of them.”<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Ann Ball, A handbook of Catholic Sacramentals, 37-41.

<sup>15</sup> 2 Kings 13:20-21.

<sup>16</sup> Acts 19: 11-21.

In the history of the Church one might appropriately begin by referring to the relics of the Lord himself. Obviously in this case one is not concerned with remains of his body which position is excluded with faith in the resurrection and the evidence of the empty tomb. Rather we speak in the first place about the relic of the holy cross on he died. It is believed that this cross was discovered by St. Helena, mother of emperor Constantine in 326. After three crosses had been excavated from the hill of the Lord's execution, each of the them was applied to a seriously sick woman to find out which of them was the authentic cross of Our Lord. Two of the crosses had no effect on the ill woman. The third cross applied to her procured immediate recovery. In the course of history that cross has seen numerous dissection. Today the larger and authentic pieces are to be found in Jerusalem, Ghent, Brussels and Rome. Many of the pieces claimed to be of the cross of the Lord may have been inauthentic.

Another relic of Our Lord is that of the shroud of Turin. This is the cloth in which the body of Christ was wrapped at burial. The cloth which underwent an involved history bears the image of a scourged and crucified man. The image was engraved by the mixture of blood, body fluids and embalming. Scientific tests show among other things, that the stains are truly of human blood; that the dating goes to the time of Jesus according to carbon 14 and that pollen grains found on the cloth are those of plants typical in Palestine. The shroud was displayed in Turin, in Italy for Catholic veneration in 1998. Today the images and photographs of it are in circulation.

Secondly we consider relics of the early martyrs that were killed in the early persecutions. For instance the faithful disciples gathered the bones of St. Ignatius after he was fed to the lions in 107 AD. Again those of Smyrna gathered the ashes of St. Polycarp after he had been burnt to death in AD 156. Many other martyrs were buried in catacombs in secret during the time of persecution. Later these catacombs became a kind of treasury of relics. But the possession of these relics later caused much rivalry so they were often divided. Such dissection of the dead is repugnant, but one has to bear in mind that it was done out of veneration and not desecration. After the persecutions graves of martyrs were often turned into sanctuaries and locations of basilicas. For Churches built apart from catacombs relics of martyrs were enshrined in the altar

substructures, thus setting off the practice of inserting relics in altars that has continued up to today. The reasoning behind this practice was that since on the altar was offered the Son of Christ martyred for our salvation, it was appropriate that under that altar should be placed those who had given their life, like him, and following his teaching and example. When eventually there was shortage of relics of martyrs those of other saints were used, since holiness is another form of daily martyrdom.

During the Middle Ages the veneration of relics grew to a peak. As a result many relics were simply fabrications for commercial purposes. At the same time superstitious use of relics cropped in. The Church had to intervene in order to regulate the veneration of the saints and martyrs. Thus St. Augustine condemned false monks that profited by selling of false relics. The Council of Lyons (1245) prohibited veneration of recently found relics that had no Church approval. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) ordered bishops to be careful in distributing relics. The Code of Canon Law of 1917 set penalties for the abuse of relics. Currently there is a Vatican Office in charge of relics which is responsible for the reception, authentication, custody and distribution of relics of saints and the Blessed. Any local Church may apply through appropriate channels for the reception of such relics, say for dedicated altars. Such relics are not to be sold, although a fee may be charged for the expenses involved. Anyone with what they consider to be authentic relics must first submit them to this office.

As for the Church's position on relics one can say that it neither encourages nor discourages their veneration. The real value is the authentic honour of the saints, and this is what the Church promotes. While the honour and veneration of relics is commendable, provided superstitious practices do not accompany it, Our Lord himself, in an apparition to St. Brigit the Great, mentioned a non-materialistic relic that all Christians would do well to consider. The saint had desired to have some relics of the wood of the cross. Our Lord said to her, "If you desire to have some relics which will draw My Heart into yours, read My Passion, and meditate attentively on every word contained therein and it will be to you a true relic which will merit more graces for you than any other... Thence you may know and be assured that the words which I uttered when on earth are the most precious relics which you can

possess."<sup>17</sup> This answer also is adequate in representing the Church's position on relics.

---

<sup>17</sup> Ann Ball, *A Handbook of Catholic Sacraments*, p. 40.



## **SACRAMENTALS OF A NON-MATERIAL NATURE**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| CHRISTIAN FUNERALS .....                   | 26  |
| WORSHIP OF THE EUCHARIST OUTSIDE MASS..... | 54  |
| BLESSINGS.....                             | 69  |
| DEDICATIONS OF A CHURCH .....              | 96  |
| HEALING AND EXORCISM .....                 | 107 |

## CHRISTIAN FUNERALS<sup>18</sup>

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <i>Preliminary Considerations</i> .....                    | 28 |
| Meaning of celebrating Christian funerals .....            | 28 |
| Attention to the existential situation .....               | 29 |
| Respect for the body of the deceased .....                 | 30 |
| The time of vigil for the deceased .....                   | 31 |
| <i>The Three Forms of Celebrating Funerals</i> .....       | 32 |
| The first plan with three stations .....                   | 32 |
| The second plan with two stations .....                    | 33 |
| The third plan with one station .....                      | 33 |
| Description of funerals in an African environment .....    | 33 |
| <i>Description of the Prayers at Funerals</i> .....        | 36 |
| The Wake .....   | 36 |
| The Office for the Dead .....                              | 38 |
| The Funeral Mass .....                                     | 38 |
| Preparation .....  | 38 |
| The Opening Rites .....                                    | 38 |
| The Liturgy of the Word .....                              | 38 |
| The Liturgy of the Eucharist .....                         | 39 |
| The Concluding Rite .....                                  | 41 |
| The Final Commendation .....                               | 41 |
| The Burial Ceremony .....                                  | 41 |
| The Last Funeral Rites .....                               | 41 |
| <i>Offices and Ministries towards the Dead</i> .....       | 41 |
| Ordained Ministers .....                                   | 42 |
| Lay Ministers .....  | 43 |
| The Christian Community .....                              | 43 |
| <i>Cremation</i> .....                                     | 43 |
| <i>Funerals for Children</i> .....                         | 44 |
| <i>Time of Celebration</i> .....                           | 45 |
| <i>Adaptations</i> .....                                   | 45 |
| Adaptations by the Conference of Bishops .....             | 45 |
| Adaptations as Options Available to the Priests .....      | 47 |
| <i>Ecumenical and Pastoral Implications</i> .....          | 48 |
| Non-Catholics who are granted Catholic Funeral Rites ..... | 48 |
| Catholics who are Denied Funeral Rites .....               | 49 |
| Burial of Suicide Cases .....                              | 52 |

---

<sup>18</sup> Further information on Christian funerals: Liturgy of funerals GIRM 335-41; music for funerals MCW 80, 83; LMT 22-26; 30-33; Revision of rite for funerals, SC 81-82.

### Bibliographical References:

- “Christian Funerals”, in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p.411.
- “Church Funerals”, in *Code of Canon Law*, can. 1176-1185
- “Funeral Rites”, in John H. Huels, *The Pastoral Companion: a Canon Law Guidebook for Catholic Ministry*. Chicago, The Franciscan Herald Press, 1982, pp. 279-286.
- “Funerals”, in International Commission on English in the Liturgy. *Documents on the Liturgy 1963-1979: Conciliar, Papal and Curial Texts*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1982. DOL 413-418.
- “Rite of Funerals”, in *The Rites of the Catholic Church...* (English Trans. By ICEL). New York: Pueblo Publishing House, 1976. Pp. 645ff.
- “We Celebrate Death in the Light of Christ’s Resurrection” in Joseph Bragotti & others eds., *We Pray and Sing to the Lord*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1991. Pp. 183-191.
- Decree on the Public Celebration of Mass in the Catholic Church for other Deceased Christians*, S.C.D.W., *Accidit in diversis*, 7 11 June 1976. (See Vatican Council II, More Conciliar Documents, pp. 59-61).
- General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 339-341.
- Jinja Diocese Liturgical Commission, *Emikolo Egy’okuziika Omukristu*. Imprimatur Joseph Willigers, 7<sup>th</sup> February, 1972. (Includes secondary funeral rites for adults and children).
- Kampala Archdiocese Liturgical Commission, *Emikolo gy’Eklezija mu Kufiirwa*. Kisubi: Marianum Press, 1998.
- Liturgy Conference of England and Wales and ICEL, *Order of Christian Funerals: Committal Rites*, Geoffrey Chapman, 1990.
- Liturgy Conference of England and Wales and ICEL, *Order of Christian Funerals*, Geoffrey Chapman, 1990.
- Peter E. Finks, *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*. Pp. 141-149.
- SCDF, *Decree on the Public Celebration of Mass in the Catholic Church for other deceased Christians*, (*Accidit in diversis*, 11 June, 1976.)

SCDF, *The Reality of Life after Death*, (*Recentiores episcoporum synodi*, 11 May, 1979.)

SCDF, *The Reality of Life after Death*, (*Recentiores episcoporum synodi*, 11 May, 1979.)

Sicard, D. "Christian Death", in A.G. Martimort (ed.), *The Church at Prayer*, vol. III. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1986. Pp. 221-240.

## ***Preliminary Considerations***

### MEANING OF CELEBRATING CHRISTIAN FUNERALS

Although almost every culture has its own way of conducting funerals for its dead, there are some factors almost common to all cultures. These include respect for the body of the deceased, catering for the pain of bereavement, provision for those that were under the charge of the deceased and some form of belief in the life hereafter.

Christian burial shares all these common factors, but it is much more than that. It is principally a celebration of Christ's paschal mystery in hope. Vatican Council II established that the Rite of Funerals be revised in such a way that "expresses more clearly the paschal character of Christ's death<sup>19</sup>." Those who have been baptised in Christ have died with him. So when they die the physical death they have the hope of rising like him to a life with him. They may have to undergo purification before they are welcomed in the company of saints. They all look forward in blessed hope for his Second Coming and for the reunification of their souls with the risen and glorious bodies.

The celebration of the Eucharist is a celebration of Christ's Passover from death to life. It is the ideal prayer in which the Church makes

---

<sup>19</sup> SC, 81

prayers and petitions for the deceased. It is also a moment at which we pray for the consolation of those that are bereaved.

#### ATTENTION TO THE EXISTENTIAL SITUATION<sup>20</sup>

In conducting Christian funerals the pastor needs to be particularly sensitive to the feelings of those mourning. Bereavement is one of the moments of deepest human sorrow. It is important not to deny this sorrow in the name of Christian faith. It is not a lack of faith to express this sorrow at such a time. The classic example is that of Jesus moved to tears at the loss of his friend Lazarus and at the pain he saw in the sisters mourning for him. He wept even though he well knew that he was the resurrection and that he who believed in him, as indeed Lazarus did, would rise on the last day. Moreover he knew that he intended to bring Lazarus back to life there and then. Nonetheless he wept and his tears were not just pretence. The expression of sorrow usually has a healing effect for the need pain caused by the bereavement. Otherwise unexpressed sorrow may result into psychological problems later on. This is not to say that the expression of sorrow should be exaggerated as to show no sign of faith. Mourners should not wail in such a way that they interrupt the funeral liturgy. The period of vigil should be one at which space is given to prayer and songs of Christian faith in the resurrection.

The pastor also needs to pay attention to the practice of the time and place. Every culture had a way of mourning its dead. These cultural practices are deeply ingrained in the people's minds. What is not contrary to Christian faith should be treated with respect. What is actually helpful to the faith should be promoted. It would be a big mistake for instance to do away with the secondary funeral rites exercised among many African cultures. For many funerals are incomplete until these rites are carried out. Certainly they may need pruning in the light of Christian faith, but not exclusion. The practice of inheritance of widows by the brothers of the deceased to be their own wives does not square with Christian faith, particularly when the inheritor is already married. Leaving faith apart, such a practice has also been channel of spread of AIDS in recent times where it is practised, in those cases where the deceased died of the disease. Occasionally it may occur of course, that a man marries the

---

<sup>20</sup> Rite of Funerals, no. 2.

wife of his dead brother, if he is single and if the marriage is out of mutual consent and not coercion. The sojourn at the home of the deceased is a good practice to help the family cope with its sorrow. But this should not be so prolonged so as to be a burden to the family. The installation of an heir to the deceased has nothing contrary to Christian faith. In fact prayers have been formulated for the installation of a successor. However care should be taken that the rights of the widow and children are protected. The heir should not have unlimited power over the family, nor inherit the property of the deceased to the detriment of the family.

There are other social practices which a pastor does well to promote, such as the encouragement of assistance by neighbours to bereaved families in the form of contribution of food, firewood and labour. It is also usual to have several speeches from relatives and even civil leaders. These may even be given a place next to the time of the liturgy, as long as their number is not exaggerated, and as long as they are not used as an opportunity to promote a political agenda of the speaker.

#### RESPECT FOR THE BODY OF THE DECEASED<sup>21</sup>

In the discussion on the reason behind the preservation of relics of saints in the Catholic Church we said that these are preserved out of the love we had for these people as they lived, and out of respect for their bodies that were temples and instruments of the Holy Spirit. The same rationale serves also for the respect given to the bodies of our deceased at their disposal. They too were temples of the Holy Spirit, although in less worthy ways than those of the saints. Moreover we also believe and profess in the creed that these bodies are destined for the resurrection on the last day. They are destined for imperishability. A third reason is out of respect for the sorrow of the bereaved. It does not serve this sorrow to tell someone who has lost a dear one in the lake, that why bother the divers? Let him feed the shark! People insist to look for their dead whether these have drowned or even died in a plane crash.

The disposal of the bodies of the deceased therefore should be done with dignity. It is known that some cultures were unceremonious

---

<sup>21</sup> Rite of Funerals, no. 3.

regarding disposing the dead. The Maasai are known to have abandoned the bodies of the dead on trees and then deserted that camp. Vultures would then pick these bodies to the bones. This sounds rather extreme, but even in their context this would have been a respectable way of disposal that at the same time sought to safeguard the health of the living in this humid and hot climate, where disease can easily break out because of putrid flesh. Most cultures however, would be more delicate in their methods of disposal.

In maintaining a respectable farewell to the dead exaggerations must be avoided. Lavish funerals that deprive the living ought to be avoided. The funerals of ancient Egyptian kings is with enormous wealth is an extreme example. But today it is common to find funeral caskets and tombstones that are very expensive. A question may then arise whether it is right to lavish so much wealth on the dead when there are many of the living that need it. In some cases the wealth that accompanied the dead also betrayed a belief in the life hereafter which was contrary to the Christian belief. That applies to cultures where it is customary to bury the dead with treasures, in the belief that these dead will need the treasures in the next world. In extreme cases certain personages, particularly kings and chiefs were buried along with the living, in the belief that these personages needed the services or the love and companionship of their spouses and servants. Naturally such a practice, if it exists anywhere, would have to be abandoned in the life of faith.

The conducting of disproportionately expensive funerals, sometimes with little regard to the living, may betray an attitude or a culture whose only hope is in the material life. It is a hopeless attempt to retain the contact with the dead, unaware that death is a radical detachment from the material world. What the dead need most from the living is prayer and intercession.

#### THE TIME OF VIGIL FOR THE DECEASED<sup>22</sup>

The time between death and burial should ordinarily be sufficient for people to pray for the deceased as well as to express and perhaps shade some of their grief. Each culture had a particular length of

---

<sup>22</sup> Rite of Funerals, no. 3.

time for mourning. For the Jews it was forty days.<sup>23</sup> For many African cultures the mourning lasted between the time of burial and the second funeral rites, which at times was months. Economical reasons today demand that the time be much more shortened. Still it is not uncommon to find places where relatives remain in the home of the deceased and leave, like locusts, when everything edible has been cleaned out. Where the time of mourning lasts between death and burial, this too has at times to be shorted for hygienic reasons especially in those areas where the climate is hot and where the methods of preservation of the body are rudimentary. Prolonged vigils could become a health hazard.

### *The Three Forms of Celebrating Funerals*<sup>24</sup>

The Rite of Funerals for adults offers three different plans, “to take into account conditions in all parts of the world<sup>25</sup>”. The first plan involves three stations: in the home of the deceased, in the church and at the cemetery. The second plan has two stations: in the cemetery chapel and at the grave. The third plan has one station at the home of the deceased. Each region of the world was expected to find at least one of these plans suitable as a general structure for the celebration of Christian funerals. Now we consider each of these three plans.

#### THE FIRST PLAN WITH THREE STATIONS

The first plan was the one found in the Roman Ritual before the revision of Vatican Council II. Ordinarily it includes three stations, at least when celebrated in rural areas. These stations are in the home of the deceased, in the church, and at the cemetery, with two intervening processions. Such processions, however, are uncommon or inconvenient for various reasons, especially in large cities. On the other hand, priests are frequently unable to lead the services in the home and at the cemetery because of the limited number of clergy or the distance from the church to the cemetery. The faithful themselves should therefore be urged to recite the appointed prayers

---

<sup>23</sup> Bathsheba mourned forty days for her husband Uriah before she was taken to become wife to king David.

<sup>24</sup> Rite of Funerals, no. 4-8.

<sup>25</sup> Rite of Funerals, no. 4.



and psalms in the absence of a priest or deacon; if this is impossible, the stations in the home and at the cemetery may be omitted.

According to this first plan, the station in the church usually includes the celebration of the funeral Mass. The latter is prohibited only during the Triduum of Holy Week, on solemnities and on the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and the Easter season. For pastoral reasons the funeral rites may be celebrated in church on such days but without Mass (which should be celebrated on another day if possible). In such cases the celebration of the liturgy of the word is prescribed. Thus the station in the church will always include the liturgy of the word, with or without the Eucharistic sacrifice, and will be completed by the rite formerly called the “absolution” of the deceased and now called “final commendation and farewell”.

#### THE SECOND PLAN WITH TWO STATIONS

The second plan has only two stations, in the cemetery chapel and at the grave. The Eucharistic celebration is not provided for, but it will take place, in the absence of the body, either before or after the funeral. This plan basically works in those places where cemeteries and cemetery chapels are existent.

#### THE THIRD PLAN WITH ONE STATION

The funeral rite, according to the third plan, is to be celebrated in the home of the deceased. In some places this plan is not at all useful, but in some regions it is actually necessary.

#### DESCRIPTION OF FUNERALS IN AN AFRICAN ENVIRONMENT<sup>26</sup>

The present Rite of Funerals permits the adaptation of local rites to the circumstances of the place, as we have seen above. This adaptation, however, should be made within the limits of the three plans elaborated above. To this effect the Congregation further states:

“When particular rituals are prepared in harmony with the new Roman Ritual, the conference of bishops may retain the three plans

---

<sup>26</sup> Based on the third plan, but with some modifications.

for funeral rites, change the order, or omit one or other of them. It may be that in a country a single plan, for example, the first one with three stations, is the only one in use and therefore should be retained to the exclusion of the others; in another country all three plans may be necessary. The conference of bishops, after considering pastoral needs, will make suitable arrangements.”<sup>27</sup>

This instruction does not envisage the possibility of a fourth plan. But the situation in many places in Africa does not seem to square exactly with any of the three plans. This is because, with regard to the first plan, in many places people are too far from the church and transportation is difficult. At the same time there are no common cemeteries. Instead there are family burial grounds. The lack of easy access to the church and the absence of a cemetery would seem to exclude the use of the first plan. At the same time the lack of cemetery chapels excludes the second plan as well. The usual practice is to have a service or Mass at the home of the deceased and from there to move in procession to the family graveyard. This is not exactly patterned on the third plan. That is why one can say that the practice in many places seems to go by a fourth plan, namely at home and at the graveyard.

But a deeper understanding of the three plans shows that the two stations, in the home of the deceased and at the grave, do not actually constitute a fourth plan. Suppose in the home of the deceased first there are prayers said for the deceased, say at the day before the actual burial. Then on the day of burial Mass is conducted in the home, followed by a procession to the grave; this in effect would be commensurate to the first plan. The church is, as it were, transferred to the home of the deceased, while the family burial ground is equivalent to a parish or communal cemetery in other cultures. Alternatively, if the liturgy of the word and the prayers of commendation are conducted by a catechist in the home, followed by burial; this would correspond to the second plan.

With respect to the third plan, the Congregation adds moreover, that “in view of the variety of circumstances, specific points have not been considered, but it seems desirable to mention this rite so that it may include elements common to the others... For the rest the

---

<sup>27</sup> Rite of Funerals, no. 9.

conference of bishops may make their own arrangements.”<sup>28</sup> It is this instruction therefore that makes it possible to make an arrangement of funerals in accordance both to the Rite of Funerals and to the peculiar African circumstances which requires that the funeral rites be centred around the home of the deceased.<sup>29</sup>

Another peculiar feature to many African cultures which needs to be incorporated with the rite funerals is the rite of second funeral rites in which the relatives meet, usually after a certain period of time after the burial, for another rite which is joyous in nature. This rite concludes the period of mourning so that people may resume life as before. Moreover it was on this occasion that the last will of the deceased was read publicly and executed, the property bequeathed would be distributed appropriately while a successor was nominated, usually according to the will. In many places a rite has been formulated in which there are prayers for the successor. On that occasion the one who installed the successor also made prayers for a blessing over him or her. At the same time the successor was exhorted to imitate the virtues of the deceased.

The idea of a successor finds corroboration in the Scriptures as well. One can point for instance at the succession of the patriarchs: Isaac succession of Abraham, Jacob's succession of Isaac, Juda's succession of Jacob. The kings too had successors. In fact in each family there was succession. The evangelists trace the lineage of Jesus not because each of those mentioned had a single child, but only one, the successor is mentioned. In a Christian sense Jesus appointed to apostles to succeed him. They in turn appointed others to carry on their work, not blood heirs but, successors in the faith. This biblical basis gives ample material for a formulation of a rite in which prayers for the heir can be given a biblical touch.

In many areas, due to the constraints of modern life and the money economy and the difficulty of feeding relatives, the second funeral rites are held on the same day as the funeral itself. Christianity, answering to the needs of the time, can incorporate the rite of

---

<sup>28</sup> Rite of Funerals, no. 8.

<sup>29</sup> See also SC 81 which requires that funeral rites should "correspond more closely to the circumstances and traditions found in the various regions. This also applies to the liturgical colours."

installing the heir as an extension of the funeral rite. Indeed in many dioceses this is the case.

## *Description of the Prayers at Funerals*

### THE WAKE

According to the Order of Christian Funerals, a vigil or celebration of God's word may be held in the home of the deceased, under the leadership of a priest or a lay person. This celebration may be arranged as follows: after an introductory explanation, a psalm and prayer may be said, as indicated in nos. 33-34 of the rite. These are followed by a reading from among those listed in nos. 83-107, 128-144. Other scripture readings may be used, especially those which express and develop the Christian view of death. The readings may be interspersed with songs, especially from the psalms or from the Office of the Dead. After the readings the priest may give a homily. The vigil concludes with the general intercessions and the Lord's Prayer or with some other suitable prayer (see nos. 56, 167-169 of the Rite).

The vigil may also take place in the church at a suitable time, provided it is not held immediately before the funeral Mass lest the funeral service be too burdensome and the liturgy of the word duplicated.

In certain cultures it is customary to spend an entire night or series of nights in prayer for a deceased in church or in the home of the deceased, usually in the presence of the body. The question then arises how to occupy the long hours Christian prayer. Sometimes even the prayers for vigils suggested in the Order of Christian funerals and mentioned above are not available in the local language. Sometime the Christian community improvises with a series of songs, the rosary, and litanies. But sometimes priests who attend the vigil may decide to celebrate or concelebrate a series of Masses and different intervals through the night. These priests should be aware of the regulation in Canon 905 paragraph 1: "Apart from those cases in which the law allows him to celebrate or concelebrate the Eucharist a number of times on the same day, a priest may not celebrate more than once a day." Some of those occasions allowed are listed in the General Instruction to the Roman Missal no. 204:

For a particular reason, having to do either with the significance of the rite or of the festivity, the faculty is given to celebrate or concelebrate more than once on the same day in the following cases:

- a. A priest who has celebrated or concelebrated the Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday may also celebrate or concelebrate the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper;
- b. A priest who has celebrated or concelebrated the Mass of the Easter Vigil may celebrate or concelebrate Mass during the day on Easter Sunday;
- c. On the Nativity of the Lord (Christmas Day), all priests may celebrate or concelebrate three Masses, provided the Masses are celebrated at their proper times of day;
- d. On the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls' Day), all priests may celebrate or concelebrate three Masses, provided that the celebrations take place at different times, and that the norms established regarding the application of second and third Masses are observed;<sup>104</sup>
- e. A priest who concelebrates with the Bishop or his delegate at a Synod or pastoral visitation, or concelebrates on the occasion of a meeting of priests, may celebrate Mass again for the benefit of the faithful. This holds also, with due regard for the prescriptions of law, for groups of religious.

Apart from the areas just mentioned there is also the case of pastoral work where a number of Masses are scheduled each day either at the parish or in oratories and sub-parishes, or for different associations. However, these do not include serial Masses at funeral vigils. It appears prudent that a minister seeks clarification from the local Ordinary,<sup>30</sup> and not take for granted the multiplication of Masses.

In areas where celebration of a series of Masses for the dead is practiced, ministers would do well also to exploit alternative means of keeping the vigil, including the prayers suggested in the Order of

---

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *General Instruction to the Roman Missal 2002*, no. 202: "It is for the Bishop, in accordance with the norm of law, to regulate the discipline for concelebration in all churches and oratories of his diocese. In turn a bishop might have recourse to *General Instruction 2002*, no. 201 in making a directive for concelebration at funerals: "Where there is a large number of priests, concelebration may take place even several times on the same day, wherever necessity or pastoral benefit suggest it. Nevertheless, it must be held at different times or in distinct sacred places."

Christian Funerals, as well as the celebration of the Office for the dead.

## THE OFFICE FOR THE DEAD

The Church employs the prayers of the psalms in the office of the dead to express grief and to strengthen genuine hope. Pastors must therefore try by appropriate catechesis to lead their communities to understand and appreciate at least the chief psalms of the funeral liturgy. When pastoral considerations indicate the use of other sacred songs, these should reflect a “warm and living love of sacred scripture” and a liturgical spirit.

In places where, by particular law, endowment, or custom, the Office of the Dead is usually said not only at the funeral rites but also apart from them, this office may continue to be celebrated with devotion. In view of the demands of modern life and pastoral considerations, a vigil or celebration of God’s word (nos. 27-29) may take place of the office.

## THE FUNERAL MASS

### Preparation

“In the arranging and choosing of the variable parts of the Mass for the Dead, especially the Funeral Mass (e.g., orations, readings, Prayer of the Faithful), pastoral considerations bearing upon the deceased, the family, and those attending should rightly be taken into account. Pastors should, moreover, take into special account those who are present at a liturgical celebration or who hear the Gospel on the occasion of the funeral and who may be non-Catholics or Catholics who never or rarely participate in the Eucharist or who seem even to have lost the faith. For priests are ministers of Christ's Gospel for all.”<sup>31</sup>

### The Opening Rites

### The Liturgy of the Word

#### *Readings*

---

<sup>31</sup> *General Instruction 2002*, no. 385.

In celebrations for the dead, whether the funeral service for any other, emphasis should be given to the biblical readings. These proclaim the paschal mystery, support the hope of reunion in the kingdom of God, teach respect for the dead and encourage the witness of Christian living.

#### *Homily*

“At the Funeral Mass there should, as a rule, be a short homily, but never a eulogy of any kind.”<sup>32</sup>

#### *Intercessions*

In the prayers, too, the Christian community expresses its faith and intercedes for adults who have died so that they may enjoy eternal happiness with God. This is the happiness which deceased children, made sons of adoption through baptism, are believed to enjoy already. Prayers are offered for the parents of these infants, as for the relatives of all the dead, so that in their sorrow they may experience the consolation of faith.

### The Liturgy of the Eucharist

#### *The Collection*

Money is a delicate thing. It is used to procure so much good, but it also evokes many feelings including gratitude, relief, but as well as vices like avarice, greed, jealous, etc. Even at such moments of sorrow such as funerals there should be clear policies regarding the distribution of money collected.

There are usually three collections at funerals that must be distinguished. There is a collection that is usually made by one of the close relatives or somebody else appointed by them. It is customary in many parts of Uganda to identify such a person, seated somewhere with a book to note the names of those that bring in their contributions, as well as the amount they give. People who are unable to attend the funeral but who otherwise would have been expected to do so if often send a condolence message accompanied with a sum of money. Others will attend, and as well as that still

---

<sup>32</sup> *General Instruction 2002*, no. 382.

make a contribution. Other cultures put in their contribution and assistance to the bereaved family in some other form. This money belongs to the close family. Part of it is usually spend to meet the funeral expenses: food and shelter for those gathered, costs for the coffin, transport expenses, making of announcements, payment of the funeral home, etc. However, sometimes it happens that among the contributions sent in, particularly those accompanied with a condolence message, there are those that specify that a certain sum is given as a stipend for a Mass intention for the deceased. This money should be taken subtracted and given to the Church authority for the purpose for which it was offered. Depending on the different pastoral situations, it may be necessary that in a certain area the Christian community is also required to contribute to the transportation of the minister, if the offertory collection is too small for that. A fixed some or a sum determined by circumstances (e.g. the distance the minister has traveled) may be given. This can be taken from this collection. In asking for this ministers are required out Christian charity not to make life so difficult for the Christian community.

The second type is the collection made at Mass or during the funeral service where a funeral Mass is made. Like any other money collected at this time during Mass or the service, this money belongs to the Church. The Church makes expenses on the hosts and wine, on transport of the minister and on any other expenses to do with the liturgy. Each diocese may have particular regulations as to how the offertory collection is distributed. A catechist or sub-parish may receive a certain percentage. Another percentage goes to the diocese and still another goes to the diocese under the title of “stole fees”.

Thirdly, there is also money that is offered specifically as Mass intentions. In general the Mass stipend goes to the priest who offers the corresponding intention for the deceased. But a diocesan bishop together with his pastoral team, has the right to make amendments to that. Part of the Mass stipends may be retained by the parish for instance.

There may be a specific stole fee for Church funerals fixed by the local Church. According to Canon Law “unless the law prescribes otherwise, it is for the provincial Bishops’ meeting to... determine



the offerings on the occasion of the administration of the sacraments and sacramentals.”<sup>33</sup>

### The Concluding Rite

#### The Final Commendation

“If the Funeral Mass is directly joined to the burial rite, once the prayer after Communion has been said and omitting the concluding rite, the rite of final commendation or farewell takes place. This rite is celebrated only if the body is present.”<sup>34</sup> It is not to be understood as a purification of the dead - which is effected rather by the Eucharistic sacrifice - but as the last farewell with which the Christian community honours one of its members before the body is buried. Although in death there is a certain separation, Christians, who are members of Christ and are one in him, can never be really separated by death.

The priest introduces this rite with an invitation to pray: then follow a period of silence, the sprinkling with holy water, the incensation, and the song of farewell. The text and melody of the latter should be such that it may be sung by all present and be experienced as the climax of this entire rite.

The sprinkling with holy water, which calls the person’s entrance into eternal life through baptism, and the incensation, which honour the body of the deceased as a temple of the Holy Spirit, may also be considered signs of farewell. The rite of final commendation and farewell is to be held only in the funeral celebration itself, that is, with the body present.

### THE BURIAL CEREMONY

#### THE LAST FUNERAL RITES

### ***Offices and Ministries towards the Dead***

In funeral celebrations all who belong to the people of God should keep in mind their office and ministry: the parents or relatives, those

---

<sup>33</sup> Canon 1257.

<sup>34</sup> *General Instruction 2002*, no. 384.

who take care of funerals, the Christian community as a whole, and finally the priest.

#### ORDAINED MINISTERS

As teacher of the faith and minister of consolation the priest presides over the liturgical services and celebrates the Eucharist. Priests and all others should remember that, when they commend the dead to God in the funeral liturgy, it is their duty to strengthen the hope of those present and to foster their faith in the paschal mystery and the resurrection of the dead. In this way the compassionate kindness of Mother Church and the consolation of the faith may lighten the burden of believers without offending those who mourn. Their homilies on these occasions should neither be an opportunity to enumerate the mistakes the deceased had nor on the other hand should they a litany of virtues of the deceased which in fact they never really had.

In preparing and arranging funeral celebrations priests should consider the deceased and the circumstance of his life and death and be concerned also for the sorrow of the relatives and their Christian needs. Priests should be especially aware of persons, Catholic or non-Catholic, who seldom or never participated in the Eucharist or who seem to have lost their faith, but who assist at liturgical celebrations and hear the Gospel on the occasion of funerals. Priests must remember that they are ministers of Christ's Gospel to all. The funeral rites, except the Mass, may be celebrated by a deacon.

Even though any priest may carry out a funeral, normally the funeral Mass is the prerogative of the parish priest and his assistant or those he commissions to act on his behalf. It is not right therefore, that a priest who is a relative or a friend to a family comes to conduct a funeral Mass without the knowledge of the parish priest or his assistant. This is especially the case where it is doubtful whether the deceased can be granted a Christian funeral or not. Usually the parish priest does not have any objection to granting such permission. On the contrary, it is a relief if some other priest can assist the pastoral team. If the circumstances are such that the visiting priest must assume the permission of the resident priests, he should then afterwards inform them that he has conducted the funeral.

## LAY MINISTERS

If pastoral necessity demands, the conference of bishops may, with the permission of the Holy See, permit a lay person to celebrate the service. In the absence of a priest or deacon, it is urged that in the funeral rites according to the first plan the stations in the home of the deceased and at the cemetery be conducted by lay persons; the same holds for vigil services for the dead.

It is frequently the practice that acolytes and lectors, particularly those on pastoral - spiritual year probation are called upon to conduct funerals. They do that which is ascribed to lay ministers above. The typical lay minister for the conducting of funerals in Uganda is the catechist. These should be carefully trained to conduct this ministry properly. Catechists also play an important role in the arrangement of funerals and contacting the parish priests.

## THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

The immediate family including parents, spouses, children, relatives, or even close friends are the most struck with sorrow. They ought to strive in spite of this pain, to be courageous, to act with hope, and to take an active part in the liturgy and if possible also in its preparation. Those who can may be involved in the selection of readings, in the actual reading or singing.

The rest of the Christian community should also try to take part in the funeral celebration. The companionship shown in the period of bereavement is an act of Christian charity. They should try to offer consolation and material support to the bereaved, with appropriate sensitiveness. They too can assist in the arrangement of the liturgy, particularly when conducted in the home of the deceased. Those who can should strive to be present at the vigil and to participate in the vigil prayers. On those occasions it is necessary to build a shed, to bring chairs, food, water, plates, etc.

### *Cremation*

Christian funeral rites are permitted for those who choose to have their bodies cremated unless it is shown that they have acted for reasons contrary to Christian principles. These funeral rites should be celebrated according to the plan in use for the region but in a way

that does not hide the Church's preference for the custom of burying the dead in a grave or tomb, as the Lord himself willed to be buried. In the case of cremation any danger of scandal or confusion should be removed.

The rites ordinarily performed at the cemetery chapel or at the grave or tomb may be used in the crematory building. If there is no other suitable place for the rites, they may be celebrated in the crematory hall itself, provided that the danger of scandal and religious indifferentism is avoided.

### ***Funerals for Children***

The funeral rites of baptised children who die before the age of reason are arranged according to one of the three different plans of funerals described above. What constitutes the difference in contrast to funerals of adults are the texts for the readings<sup>35</sup>, prayers for the deceased and mourners<sup>36</sup>, prayers of the final commendation and the blessing of the grave.<sup>37</sup> The content of these is different from those for funerals of adults.

As for children who die before baptism,<sup>38</sup> again the structure of the funeral liturgy is the same as that of baptised children and adults. The difference here too lies in the content of the readings and prayers selected. These are given in the Order of Christian Funerals nos. 231-237. The preacher at liturgies for funerals of children, whether baptised or otherwise, should adapt his homily accordingly. The stress is on the consolation for the parents and all bereaved in their sorrow of loss and not on the mercy of God for the child who is without personal sin. However, this should not undermine the doctrine of the necessity of baptism for salvation.

---

<sup>35</sup> OCF, 203-223

<sup>36</sup> OCF, 223-226

<sup>37</sup> OCF, 227-230

<sup>38</sup> Good pastoral catechesis can considerably reduce the number of children who die unbaptised, if all the faithful are reminded that in danger of death any of them can baptise, and what it is exactly that they have to do.

## *Time of Celebration*

Among the Masses for the Dead, the Funeral Mass holds first place. It may be celebrated on any day except for Solemnities that are holy days of obligation, Holy Thursday, the Easter Triduum, and the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and Easter, with due regard also for all the other requirements of the norm of the law.<sup>39</sup>

A Mass for the Dead may be celebrated on receiving the news of a death, for the final burial, or the first anniversary, even on days within the Octave of Christmas, on obligatory Memorials, and on weekdays, except for Ash Wednesday or weekdays during Holy Week. Other Masses for the Dead, that is, "daily" Masses, may be celebrated on weekdays in Ordinary Time on which optional memorials occur or when the Office is of the weekday, provided such Masses are actually applied for the dead.<sup>40</sup>

## *Adaptations*

It was observed at the Second Vatican Council that the old rite expressed gloom rather than the paschal mystery. Christ's resurrection and our own future resurrection should be the theme of Christian death and its expression in the rites of the Church.

The Council, acting along these lines, decreed as follows: "Funeral rites should express more clearly the paschal character of Christian death, and should correspond more closely to the circumstances and traditions found in various regions. This also applies to the liturgical colour to be used".<sup>41</sup>

"The rite for the Burial of Infants is to be revised, and a special Mass for the occasion should be provided".<sup>42</sup>

### ADAPTATIONS BY THE CONFERENCE OF BISHOPS

In accordance with article 63b of the Constitution of Sacred Liturgy, the conferences of bishops have the right to prepare a section of their particular rituals, which will correspond to this section of the

---

<sup>39</sup> *General Instruction 2002*, no. 380.

<sup>40</sup> *General Instruction 2002*, no. 381.

<sup>41</sup> SC, 81.

<sup>42</sup> SC, 82.

Roman Ritual but is adapted to the needs of each region. After review by the Apostolic See it may be used in the regions for which it has been prepared.

In making this adaptation, it is for the conferences of bishops:

To define the adaptations, within the limits stated in this section of the Roman Ritual.

To consider carefully and prudently which elements from the traditions and cultures of individual countries may be appropriately admitted and to submit such other adaptations, which they feel to be useful or necessary, to the Apostolic See, by whose consent they may be introduced.

To retain or adapt special elements of existing particular rituals, if any, provided that they can be brought into harmony with the Constitution on the Liturgy and contemporary needs.

To prepare translations of texts which are truly suited to the genius of the various languages and cultures, adding, where appropriate, melodies for singing.

To adapt and supplement the introductory material of the Roman Ritual so that the ministers will fully understand the significance of the rites and celebrate them effectively.

To arrange the material in the liturgical books prepared under the direction of the conferences of bishops so that the order is best suited to pastoral purposes. None of the material contained in this typical edition is to be omitted.

If it seems advisable to add rubrics and texts, they should be distinguished typographically from the rubrics and texts of the Roman Ritual.

In preparing particular rituals for funerals, it is for the conference of bishops:

To arrange the rite according to one or more plans, as indicated above.

To substitute, if preferred, texts from the Common for those which appear in the basic rite.

To add other formulas of the same kind whenever the Roman Ritual provides a choice of texts.

To judge whether lay persons are to be deputed to celebrate the funeral rites.

To decree, if there are pastoral reasons, that the sprinkling with holy water and the incensation may be omitted or another rite substituted.<sup>43</sup>

To determine the liturgical colour for funerals in accordance with popular feeling. The colour should not be offensive to human sorrow but should express Christian hope enlightened by the paschal mystery.

#### ADAPTATIONS AS OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO THE PRIESTS

The priest should consider the various circumstances, and in particular the wishes of the family and the community. He should make free use of the choices afforded in the rite. The rite for each plan is so described that it may be celebrated very simply. On the other hand, a generous selection of texts is given for use according to circumstances. For example:

In general, all the texts are interchangeable and may be chosen, with the help of the community or family, to reflect the individual situation.

Some elements of the rite are not obligatory but may be freely added, for example, the prayer for the mourners at the home of the deceased.

In keeping with liturgical tradition, greater freedom of choice is given in the case of texts for processions.

Whenever a psalm indicated or preferred for liturgical reasons, may offer some pastoral difficulty, another psalm is provided for

---

<sup>43</sup> For instance in the US the use of holy water may not ordinarily be omitted, but it should be explained with reference to Christian baptism. The use of incense may be omitted. Neither holy water nor incense should ordinarily be used more than once during the station in the church.

optional use. In addition, one or other psalm verse which seems pastorally unsuitable may be omitted.

Since the text of the prayers is always given in the singular, masculine form, the gender and number must be adapted.

In the prayers, the lines within parentheses may be omitted. (if an individual prayer or other text is clearly not appropriate to the circumstances of the deceased person, it is the responsibility of the priest to make the necessary adaptation).

The celebration of the funeral liturgy with meaning and dignity and the priest's ministry to the dead presuppose an integral understanding of the Christian mystery and the pastoral office.

Among other things, the priest should:

Visit the sick and the dying, as indicated in the relevant section of the Roman Ritual.

Teach the significance of Christian death.

Show loving concern for the family of the deceased person, support them in the time of sorrow, and as much as possible involve them in the planning of the funeral celebration and the choice of the options made available in the rite.

Integrate the liturgy for the dead with the whole parish liturgical life and the pastoral ministry.

### ***Ecumenical and Pastoral Implications***

#### NON-CATHOLICS WHO ARE GRANTED CATHOLIC FUNERAL RITES

Allusion has already made to the ecumenical implications of death and burial of Christians. Death comes to all, regardless of creed. The time of funerals is an occasion that gathers people of diverse faiths. Those who conduct the liturgy on this occasion should be particularly sensitive to the different spiritual needs of these people. The attendance of a funeral can serve to bring people closer to the faith or to distance them from it, depending on how the liturgy is conducted. The minister should be aware of both those present who do not belong to the Catholic faith and those who have long



abandoned it. In the pastoral situation decision has also to be made on how to treat those deceased members of the Catholic Church who have long ceased practising their faith or who are a public scandal to the community.

In the first place catechumens are equated with the faithful in matters pertaining to funerals rites. Their serious intention to join the Church is the basis for this favourable treatment. The same applies, under certain conditions, to children who died before baptism, if their parents had intended to have them baptised. The burial of these children with an ordinary funeral liturgy is granted only with the specific permission of the local Ordinary, unless the local Ordinary has given general permission. Otherwise their burial is conducted according to the “funeral Mass for a child who died before baptism”, found in the Roman Missal.

A baptised non-Catholic may be given a Catholic funeral if permission is granted in each particular case, provided the minister of the deceased is unavailable. However such a funeral cannot be conducted if it is against the wish of the deceased.<sup>44</sup> If a non-Catholic had been practising his or her religion during life, it should be presumed that that individual would have wanted to have the funeral in his or her own Church. Therefore it would be contrary to the wishes of the departed to have it in the Catholic Church. To presume otherwise would be ecumenically insensitive. The permission to have a Catholic burial cannot be given for an unbaptised or for one with invalid baptism.

If a non-Catholic is interred in a Catholic cemetery, his or her minister may conduct the service according to their rite. In the same way if a Catholic is to be interred in a non-Catholic cemetery, the minister, after the liturgy in a Catholic Church may conduct a committal service at the grave. He should bless the grave and then follow the rite of burial of a Catholic.

#### CATHOLICS WHO ARE DENIED FUNERAL RITES

Unless before death there was some indication of repentance, ecclesiastical funeral rites are denied to: a) notorious apostates,

---

<sup>44</sup> Can. 1183.

heretics and schismatics<sup>45</sup>; b) those who have chosen cremation of their bodies for reasons contrary to the Christian faith<sup>46</sup> and c), other manifest sinners for whom ecclesiastical funeral rites cannot be conducted without public scandal to the faithful.<sup>47</sup>

In the case of the latter a sign of repentance would include summoning a priest at the time of death, entering a confessional shortly before death, making an act of perfect contrition, or making some other evident attempt to be reconciled with God and the Church.<sup>48</sup> Any minimal indication of repentance would be reason enough for the Church to act leniently towards the deceased. A minister must not fear that the Christian community does not know of this turn of events and only knows the deceased as he or she has been living, and that therefore a Church funeral will be seen as a scandal. It needn't be. It is the duty of the minister in such a case, to show to the Christian community, by means of his homily and by his choice of readings and prayers, that the deceased showed some sign of repentance, and that God welcomes every sinner that shows repentance. There are abundant texts in scripture to back up that view.

In cases where the minister does not fully know whether or not to grant a Christian funeral it is better to lean on the side of mercy rather than of judgement. This may apply for example in a case where the deceased migrated from the parish where the home was situated and has lived far away, only to be returned at the time of death. If the minister has no sufficient proof that this person may not receive a Christian funeral then he should grant it.

It has happened and can happen again that there is controversy as in which faith a person should be buried if this person has professed

---

<sup>45</sup> Heresy is the obstinate post-baptismal denial of some truth that must be believed by divine and Catholic faith, or the obstinate doubt about the same. Apostasy is the total repudiation of the Christian faith. Schism is the refusal of subjection to the Supreme Pontiff or of communion with the members of the Church subject to him. (Can 751).

<sup>46</sup> The faithful who choose cremation are presumed to have the proper motives and good intentions, unless the contrary is clear. When a doubt persists as to the proper motivations of the person who has chosen cremation, the matter should be referred to the local Ordinary.

<sup>47</sup> Can. 1184 , §1.

<sup>48</sup> Pastoral Companion, 285-286.

more than one religion at different times. For the Catholic the question is which religion the deceased died professing. If a different creed insists on burying a person on the grounds that this person once belonged to it, disregarding the persons convictions at the time of death, then the Catholic might withdraw for the sake of peace. But the deceased will have a requiem Mass celebrated outside the time of burial. This Mass is as efficacious in the eyes of the One for whom time and place do not make a difference.

Ordinarily those who are divorced and remarried have a Church funeral. Indeed, in many localities it would be a greater scandal to the faithful if a deceased divorced and remarried person were to be denied ecclesiastical funeral rites. The continued neglect of Mass and sacraments, even though the neglect of the delinquent Catholic is generally known, is not sufficient cause for the denial of funeral rites.

Because Christian burial is not to lead the faithful away from the Church, but to draw them closer to God, the priest confronted with a case of denial of Church burial should lean to leniency and mercy. The denial of a Christian funeral Mass does not mean that the person cannot be prayed for even in a requiem Mass. The purpose is not to judge the dead but to remove scandal for the Christian community, as well as to teach the living that more important is reconciliation with God while we still live, and not to wait to be prayed for after death. In fact such people who are denied a Christian funeral may indeed have greater need of our prayers.

Particular mention needs to be made with regard to deceased polygamists in African cultures and other cultures where it was practiced. Before Christianity, (in some countries hardly a century ago) polygamy was rampantly practiced. It was accepted as part of the culture even though it is true that no woman normally and naturally wants to have another brought in so that they may share the same husband. Polygamy, even when it was accepted was offensive to women and quite often oppressive to children born in it. All the same it was held in esteem in a male-dominated society, so much so, that often it was a symbol of wealth, even of a blessing by the gods. The more women a man had the higher he stood in the eyes of society. Chiefs and other rulers rarely led a monogamous life. Kings usually had the greatest number of wives.

When Christianity came polygamy had to give way in the face of the biblical teaching on monogamy. The fact is, however, that in Africa polygamy is still widely practiced even among those that have been baptised, and sometimes even married in Church. Some of them may even be for the rest very active in their Christian communities. Usually they are denied Eucharistic communion. The question is whether they should also be denied Christian burial. On the one hand to grant Christian burial to them might erode the Church's insistence on monogamy and encourage others who are in polygamous marriage. On the other hand death does not seem to be the appropriate moment to punish the deceased. These people have not lived the Christian faith fully, but it is difficult to convince the Christian community whose culture tolerated polygamy that these are to be placed in the category of notorious and obstinate sinners. This is perhaps one of those cases where the Ordinary or even an episcopal conference must make a decision for the good of the local Christian community.

#### BURIAL OF SUICIDE CASES

Special mention needs to be made with regard to the funerals of suicide cases. Persons committing suicide should not as a rule be deprived of full burial rites in the Church. However, in deciding whether or not to give Church funerals for such cases, one needs to carefully understand how a particular culture dealt with the funerals in this situation.

It is not exaggerated to say that suicide is considered a great abomination in most cultures. A survey of a cross-section of Ugandan cultures<sup>49</sup> reveals that suicide was considered a great evil, and that the bodies of those who took their lives were treated with the most severe measures, also calculated to serve as deterrent. For instance in the case of one who had committed suicide by hanging, a grave - more appropriately termed: a hole - was dug directly under the body, unless the place was such that burial could not take place

---

<sup>49</sup> This was made through a research paper made by Third year Theology Students at St. Paul National Seminary. This being a national seminary, the students come from practically all the major cultures and language groups of the country. Uganda boasts of 33 different languages, even though some of them are so close to each other that they would better be referred to as dialects rather than languages. Each of these have slight ramifications of culture.

there such as in a house or on the property of a neighbour. A person would then cut the rope or whatever was used for the hanging, so that the body would fall in the grave below it. Some cultures would bury the person together with his or her personal possessions. There would be no effort made to arrange the body in any decent way for burial. On the contrary in many of the cultures the body would have to be lashed with the stroke of the cane before burial as a sign of punishment for the act. During the and after the funeral there was no official gathering for mourning. There would be no second funeral rites or an heir appointed for the deceased. After the funeral close family members drank certain herbs believed to prevent them from being haunted by a suicide spirit, and to prevent recurrence of the evil act. No child would be named after the suicide case for a certain number of generations in the family. In spite of all these measures suicide laid a heavy stigma on the family, such that members of such a family found it difficult to find marriage partners. For that reason it was frequent for close family members to hide the facts about a suicide case, if this possible, and to make it appear death by some other natural causes.

The Church in such a case would find itself in a dilemma. On the one hand there is no absolute way of determining the reasons and state of mind of the person who commits suicide, and whether or not that person does not repent at the very last moment. Moreover, there is also need to put into particular consideration the grieving family for the multiple pain of losing a beloved, of wondering what had led such a person to despair, and of incurring the sense of undeserved shame with which society regards them. On the other hand there is need to pay attention to customary practices which brought out the truth that despair is a most grievous thing and it should be prevented with all the possible means available. Generally suicide cases are not given a Church funeral. However, individual cases must be dealt with individually. Permission of the Ordinary might have to be sought in many of the cases.

## WORSHIP OF THE EUCHARIST OUTSIDE MASS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <i>Introduction</i> .....  | 55 |
| <i>Relationship between Eucharistic worship outside Mass and the Eucharistic Celebration</i> ..... | 56 |
| <i>The Purpose of Eucharistic Reservation</i> .....  | 57 |
| <i>The Place of Eucharistic Reservation</i> .....  | 57 |
| <i>Forms of Worship of the Holy Eucharist</i> .....  | 58 |
| Exposition of the Holy Eucharist .....   | 58 |
| Relationship between Exposition and Mass .....   | 58 |
| Regulations for Exposition .....   | 59 |
| Lengthy Exposition .....   | 59 |
| Brief Periods of Exposition .....  | 60 |
| Adoration in Religious Communities .....   | 60 |
| The Minister of Exposition .....   | 60 |
| Rite of Eucharistic Exposition and Benediction .....   | 61 |
| Eucharistic Processions.....   | 62 |
| Corpus Christi .....   | 63 |
| Eucharistic Congresses .....   | 67 |

### Bibliographical References

*The Roman Ritual: Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass.* (English translation by ICEL). New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co. 1976.

S.C.R. “Eucharisticum mysterium, 25 May 1967.” (Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery).” In *Vatican Council II: Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. New Revised Edition. ed. Austin Flannery. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992.

S.C.D.W. “Eucharistiae sacramentum, 21 June 1973”, (On Holy Communion and the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery Outside of Mass).” In *Vatican Council II: Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. New Revised Edition. ed. Austin Flannery. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992. Chapter III, nos. 49-67.

“Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass.” In International Commission on English in the Liturgy. *Documents on the Liturgy*

1963-1979: *Conciliar, Papal and Curial Texts*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1982. (DOL 277-279) pp. 689ff.

Martimort A.G. "Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass", in A.G. Martimort (ed.), *The Church at Prayer*, vol. II. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1986. Pp. 233-253.

"Eucharistic Adoration", in *Ceremonies of the Modern Roman Rite*, 245-263.

"Eucharistic Worship Outside Mass", in Peter E. Finks, *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*. Pp. 459-462.

"Adoration, Theology of", in Peter E. Finks, *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*. Pp. 25-28.

## ***Introduction***

Reservation of and devotion to the Holy Eucharist is one of the controversial areas in Christian ecumenism. For one thing it is non-biblical. The Lord instituted the sacrament to feed his people not for their adoration. Rather it is a development in the course of the history of the Church. Many look at it as a magical belief in the presence of God, a localisation of God. Some who may accept the reservation of the Eucharist might object to its exposition for devotional purposes. They question what difference it makes whether the Lord is exposed or is behind the veil. For these and other reasons there is need on the part of the Church to defend this devotion.

On the other hand Eucharistic adoration and devotion has staunch supporters among the faithful. It is supported by numerous apparitions and messages from these apparitions. Many mystics have been devoted to Eucharistic adoration. Many popular devotions are related to it. There is even sometimes the tendency to move to the inauthentic, the magical: separating the Eucharist as a sacrament from its reservation; considering contemplation of the Lord more

important than communion, or turning the Eucharist into a private devotion. For these and other reasons there is need on the part of the Church to direct this devotional practice.

### ***Relationship between Eucharistic worship outside Mass and the Eucharistic Celebration***<sup>50</sup>

The celebration of the Eucharist is the centre of the entire Christian life, both for the Church universal and for the local congregations of the Church. “The other sacraments, all the ministries of the Church, and the works of the apostolate are united with the Eucharist and are directed toward it. For the holy Eucharist contains the entire spiritual treasure of the Church, that is, Christ himself, our Passover and living bread. Through his flesh, made living and life-giving by the Holy Spirit, he offers life to all, who are thus invited and led to offer themselves, their work, and all creation together with him.”<sup>51</sup>

“The celebration of the Eucharist in the sacrifice of the Mass”, moreover, “is truly the origin and the goal of the worship which is shown to the Eucharist outside Mass.”<sup>52</sup> Christ the Lord “is offered in the sacrifice of the Mass when he becomes present sacramentally as the spiritual food of the faithful under the appearance of bread and wine”. And, “once the sacrifice is offered and while the Eucharist is reserved in churches and oratories, he is truly Emmanuel, ‘God with us’. He is in our midst day and night; full of grace and truth, he dwells among us.”<sup>53</sup>

No one therefore may doubt “that all the faithful show this holy sacrament the veneration and adoration which is due to God himself, as has always been customary in the Catholic Church. nor is the sacrament to be less the object of adoration because it was instituted by Christ the Lord to be received as food.”<sup>54</sup>

In order to direct and to encourage devotion to the sacrament of the Eucharist correctly, the Eucharistic mystery must be considered in all its fullness, both in the celebration of Mass and in the worship of

---

<sup>50</sup> GIRM 276-277; CB 49; EACW 78-80

<sup>51</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5.

<sup>52</sup> *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, 3e.

<sup>53</sup> *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, 36.

<sup>54</sup> *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, 3f.



the sacrament which is reserved after Mass to extend the grace of the sacrifice.<sup>55</sup>

### ***The Purpose of Eucharistic Reservation***

The primary and original reason for reservation of the Eucharist outside Mass is the administration of viaticum. The secondary reasons are the giving of communion and the adoration of our Lord who is present in the sacrament. The reservation of the sacrament for the sick led to the praiseworthy practice of adoring this heavenly food in the churches. This cult of adoration rests upon an authentic and solid basis, especially because faith in the real presence of the Lord leads naturally to external, public expression of that faith.

In the celebration of Mass the chief ways in which Christ is present in his Church gradually become clear. First he is present in the very assembly of the faithful, gathered together in his name; next he is present in his word, when the Scriptures are read in the church and explained; then in the person of the minister; finally and above all, in the Eucharistic sacrament. In a way that is completely unique, the whole and entire Christ, God and man, is substantially present in the sacrament.

The consecrated hosts are to be frequently renewed and reserved in a ciborium or other vessel, in a number sufficient for the communion of the sick and others outside Mass.<sup>56</sup> Pastors should see that churches and public oratories where, according to law, the holy Eucharist is reserved, are open every day at least for some hours, at a convenient time, so that the faithful may easily pray in the presence of the blessed Sacrament.

### ***The Place of Eucharistic Reservation***

The place for the reservation of the Eucharist should be truly pre-eminent. It is highly recommended that the place be suitable also for private adoration and prayer so that the faithful may easily, fruitfully, and constantly honour the Lord, present in the sacrament, through personal worship. This will be achieved more easily if the chapel is separate from the body of the church, especially in churches where

---

<sup>55</sup> *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, 3g.

<sup>56</sup> GIRM, 285, 292.

marriages and funerals are celebrated frequently and churches which are much visited by pilgrims or because of their artistic and historical treasures.

The holy Eucharist is to be reserved in a solid tabernacle. It must be opaque and resistant to breaking. Ordinarily there should be only one tabernacle in a church; this may be placed on an altar or, at the discretion of the local Ordinary, in some other noble and properly ornamented part of the church other than an altar.<sup>57</sup> The key to the tabernacle where the Eucharist is reserved must be kept most carefully by the priest in charge of the church or oratory or by a special minister who has received the faculty to give communion. The presence of the Eucharist in the tabernacle is to be shown by a veil or in another suitable way determined by the competent authority. According to traditional usage, an oil lamp or lamp with a wax candle is to burn constantly near the tabernacle as a sign of the honour which is shown to the Lord.<sup>58</sup>

### ***Forms of Worship of the Holy Eucharist***

The Roman Ritual on Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass mentions three forms of worship of the Eucharist outside Mass, namely: exposition of the Holy Eucharist, Eucharistic processions and Eucharistic congresses.<sup>59</sup>

#### EXPOSITION OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST

##### Relationship between Exposition and Mass

Exposition of the holy Eucharist, either in the ciborium or in the monstrance, is intended to acknowledge Christ's marvellous presence in the sacrament. Exposition invites us to the spiritual union with him that culminates in sacramental communion. Thus it fosters very well the worship which is due to Christ in spirit and in truth. This kind of exposition must clearly express the cult of the

---

<sup>57</sup> *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, 52-53.

<sup>58</sup> *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, 57.

<sup>59</sup> This rite also gives two other topics, namely: Holy Communion Outside Mass, and Administration of Communion and Viaticum to the Sick. However, since these topics have been dealt with in the Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rite of Anointing and Viaticum, they are not repeated here.

Blessed Sacrament in relationship to the Mass. The plan of the exposition should carefully avoid anything which might somehow obscure the principal desire of Christ in instituting the Eucharist, namely, to be with us as food, medicine, and comfort.

During the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, the celebration of Mass is prohibited in the body of the church. the celebration of the Eucharistic mystery includes in a more perfect way the internal communion to which exposition seeks to lead the faithful. If exposition of the Blessed Sacrament is extended for an entire day or over several days, it is to be interrupted during the celebration of Mass. Mass may be celebrated in a chapel distinct from the area of exposition if at least some members of the faithful remain in adoration.

#### Regulations for Exposition

A single genuflection is made in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, whether reserved in the tabernacle or exposed for public adoration. For exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance, four to six candles are lighted, as at Mass, and incense is used. For exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the ciborium, at least two candles should be lighted, and incense may be used.

#### Lengthy Exposition

In churches where the Eucharist is regularly reserved, it is recommended that solemn exposition of the Blessed Sacrament for an extended period of time should take place once a year, even though this period is not strictly continuous. In this way the local community may reflect more profoundly upon this mystery and adore Christ in the sacrament. This kind of exposition, however, may take place, with the consent of the local Ordinary, only if suitable numbers of the faithful are expected to be present.

For a grave and general necessity the local Ordinary may direct that a more extended period of supplication before the Blessed Sacrament exposed take place in churches where the faithful assemble in large numbers.

If a period of uninterrupted exposition is not possible, because of too few worshipers, the Blessed Sacrament may be replaced in the

tabernacle during periods which have been scheduled and announced beforehand. This reposition may not take place more often than twice during the day, for example, about noon and at night.

The following form of simple reposition may be observed: the priest or deacon, vested in an alb, or a surplice over a cassock, and a stole, replaces the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle after a brief period of adoration and a prayer said with those present. The exposition of the Blessed Sacrament may take place in the same manner at the scheduled time.

### Brief Periods of Exposition

Shorter expositions of the Eucharist are to be arranged in such a way that the blessing with the Eucharist is preceded by a suitable period for readings of the word of God, songs, prayers, and sufficient time for silent prayer. Exposition which is held exclusively for the giving of benediction is prohibited.

### Adoration in Religious Communities

According to the constitutions and regulations of their institute, some religious communities and other groups have the practice of perpetual Eucharistic adoration or adoration over extended periods of time. It is strongly recommended that they pattern this holy practice in harmony with the spirit of the liturgy. thus, when the whole community takes part in adoration before Christ the Lord, readings, songs, and religious silence may foster effectively the spiritual life of the community. this will promote among the members of the religious house the spirit of unity and brotherhood which the Eucharist signifies and effects, and the cult of the sacrament may express a noble form of worship.

The form of adoration in which one or two members of the community take turns before the Blessed Sacrament is also to be maintained and is highly commended. In accordance with the life of the institute, as approved by the Church, the worshipers adore Christ the Lord in the sacrament and pray to him in the name of the whole community and of the Church.

### The Minister of Exposition

The ordinary minister for exposition of the Eucharist is a priest or deacon. At the end of the period of adoration, before the reposition, he blesses the people with the sacrament. In the absence of a priest or deacon or if they are lawfully impeded, the following persons may publicly expose and later repose the holy Eucharist for the adoration of the faithful: a) an acolyte or special minister of communion; b) a member of a religious communion or of a lay association of men or women which is devoted to Eucharistic adoration, upon appointment by the local Ordinary. Such ministers mentioned in “b” may open the tabernacle and also, if suitable, place the ciborium on the altar or place the host in the monstrance. At the end of the period of adoration, they replace the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle. It is not lawful, however, for them to give the blessing with the sacrament.

The minister, if he is a priest or deacon, should vest in an alb, or a surplice over a cassock, and a stole. Other ministers should wear either the liturgical vestments which are used in the region or the vesture which is suitable for this ministry and which has been approved by the Ordinary. The priest or deacon should wear a white cope and humeral veil to give the blessing at the end adoration, when the exposition takes place with the monstrance; in the case of exposition in the ciborium, the humeral veil should be worn.

#### Rite of Eucharistic Exposition and Benediction

After the people have assembled, a song may be sung while the minister comes to the altar. If the holy Eucharist is not reserved at the altar where the exposition is to take place, the minister puts on a humeral veil and brings the sacrament from the place of reservation; he is accompanied by servers or by the faithful with lighted candles.

The ciborium or monstrance should be placed upon the table of the altar which is covered with a cloth. If exposition with the monstrance is to extend over a long period, a throne in an elevated position may be used, but this should not be too lofty or distant. After exposition, if the monstrance is used, the minister incenses the sacrament. If the adoration is to be lengthy, he may then withdraw.

In the case of more solemn and lengthy exposition, the host should be consecrated in the Mass which immediately precedes the

exposition and after communion should be placed in the monstrance upon the altar. The Mass ends with the prayer after communion, and the concluding rites are omitted. Before the priest leaves, he may place the Blessed Sacrament on the throne and incense it.

During the exposition there should be prayers, songs, and readings to direct the attention of the faithful to the worship of Christ the Lord. To encourage a prayerful spirit, there should be readings from scripture with a homily or brief exhortations to develop a better understanding of the Eucharistic mystery. It is also desirable for the people to respond to the word of God by singing and to spend some periods of time in religious silence.

Part of the Liturgy of Hours, especially the principal hours, may be celebrated before the Blessed Sacrament when there is a lengthy period of exposition. This liturgy extends the praise and thanksgiving offered to God in the Eucharistic celebration to the several hours of the day; it directs the prayers of the Church to Christ and through him to the Father in the name of the whole world.

Toward the end of the exposition the priest or deacon goes to the altar, genuflects, and kneels. Then a hymn or other Eucharistic song is sung. Meanwhile the minister, while kneeling, incenses the sacrament if the exposition has taken place with the monstrance. Afterwards the minister rises and says a prayer from the rite. After this prayer the priest or deacon puts on the humeral veil, genuflects, and takes the monstrance or ciborium. He makes the sign of the cross over the people with the monstrance or ciborium, in silence. After the blessing the priest or deacon who gave the blessing, or another priest or deacon, replaces the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle and genuflects. Meanwhile the people may sing or say an acclamation, and the minister then leaves.

#### EUCCHARISTIC PROCESSIONS<sup>60</sup>

When the Eucharist is carried through streets, roads or villages in a solemn procession with singing, the Christian people give public witness of faith and devotion toward the sacrament. It is for the

---

<sup>60</sup> *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass*, nos. 101-104.

local Ordinary, however, to judge whether this is opportune in today's circumstances, and to determine the time, place, and order of such processions, so that they may be conducted with dignity and without loss of reverence to the sacrament. If the Eucharistic procession cannot be held on the feast of Corpus Christi, it is fitting to hold some kind of public celebration for the entire city in the cathedral church or other appropriate places. It is fitting that a Eucharistic procession begin after the Mass in which the host to be carried in the procession has been consecrated. A procession may also take place, however, at the end of a lengthy period of public adoration.

### Corpus Christi<sup>61</sup>

One of those occasions that can put an inexperienced priest into panic for want of what to do is the feast of the Body and Blood of Our Lord. Not only does it come once a year, but also in some areas in is no longer celebrated regularly. Moreover, many pocket missals and Ordos do not include the required rubrics for the feast. It is therefore fitting that a few paragraphs be dedicated here, not only on the theological meaning but also the ritual celebration of the feast.

The institution of the Eucharist has as a special memorial the Mass of the Lord's Supper, when Christ the Lord shared a meal with his disciples and gave them the sacrament of his body and blood to be celebrated in the Church. the solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi) further proposes the *cultus* of the Blessed Sacrament to the faithful so that they may celebrate the wonderful works of God, signified by the sacrament and accomplished by the paschal mystery of Christ. This solemnity is also intended to teach the faithful how to share in the Eucharistic sacrifice and to have it more profoundly influence their life, to revere the presence of Christ the Lord in this sacrament and to offer the thanks due for God's gifts.<sup>62</sup>

In its devotion the Church has handed down as a distinctive feature of the celebration of this solemnity a procession in which the Eucharist is carried solemnly and with singing through the streets,

---

<sup>61</sup> CB, 385-394. (the notes here are adapted as to apply not only to a bishop but to any presider).

<sup>62</sup> GIRM, 3; CB, 385.

and the Christian people give public witness to their belief in the sacrament of the Eucharist and to their devotion.

The annual procession on the feast of Corpus Christi, or on an appropriate day near this feast, has a special importance and meaning for the pastoral life of the parish or city. It is therefore desirable to continue this procession, in accordance with the law, when today's circumstances permit and when it can truly be a sign of common faith and adoration.



The following preparations are made:

In the sanctuary

{ On the paten a host to be consecrated for the procession

{ Monstrance

Humeral veil

Second censer and incense boat

In a convenient place

{ Cope, white or some other festive colour

{ Torches and candles

Canopy

After communion of the faithful, the monstrance is placed on the altar, then the consecrated host is reverently placed in it. The main celebrant and concelebrants or assisting deacons genuflect and return to the chair where the main celebrant says the prayer after communion. After the prayer, the concluding rites are omitted and the procession takes place. The presider wears a chasuble as at Mass or a white cope. He then places incense in the censer, kneels before the altar and incenses the Blessed Sacrament. He then receives the humeral veil and goes up to the altar, genuflects, and takes the monstrance and holds it with hands covered by the two ends of the veil.

The procession is then formed in this order: first the cross-bearer, accompanied by acolytes carrying candlesticks with lighted candles; next the clergy; deacons of the Mass, concelebrants, two censer bearers carrying censers with burning incense; the presider carrying the Blessed Sacrament; a little behind him the ministers who assist with the book. All carry candles where possible, and torchbearers where possible escort the Blessed Sacrament. Whether or not a

canopy (baldachin) is held over the head of the presider as he carries the Blessed Sacrament depends on local custom.

The procession should be arranged in accordance to local custom concerning the decoration of the streets or roads and the order to be followed by the faithful who take part. In the course of the procession, there may be stations where Eucharistic benediction is given, if there is such a custom and some pastoral advantage recommends it. Songs and prayers should be planned with the purpose of expressing the faith of the participants and keeping their attention centred on the Lord alone.

It is fitting that the procession goes from one church to another. But, when local circumstances require, the procession may return to the church where it began. At the end of the procession, Eucharistic benediction is given in the church where the procession ends or in some other suitable place. The ministers on entering the sanctuary go directly to their places. When the presider has gone up to the altar, he places the monstrance on the altar. Then he genuflects and, laying aside the humeral veil, kneels before the altar.

After incense has been placed in the censer and blessed, the presider takes the censer from the server, bows with the flanking servers assisting him, and incenses the Blessed Sacrament, swinging the censer back and forth three times three. After bowing once more to the Blessed Sacrament, the presider returns the censer to the server. During the incensation the *Tantum ergo* or some other Eucharistic hymn is sung.

Then the presider rises and says, *Let us pray*. A short pause for silent prayer follows. He then continues with the prayer *Lord Jesus Christ, you gave us the Eucharist* or some other prayer for *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist outside Mass*.

After the prayer the presider receives the humeral veil, goes up to the altar and genuflects. Then he takes the monstrance, holds it elevated in both hands, which are covered with the humeral veil, and, facing the people, makes the sign of the cross in silence.

After the blessing, he places the monstrance on the altar. He genuflects, and then takes the Blessed Sacrament to the tabernacle. After the blessing, the people may sing an acclamation. The procession returns to the vesting room or sacristy in the usual way.

## EUCCHARISTIC CONGRESSES

Eucharistic congresses have been introduced into the life of the Church in recent years as a special manifestation of Eucharistic worship. They should be considered as a kind of station to which a particular community invites an entire local church or to which an individual local Church invites other Churches of a single region or nation or even of the entire world. The purpose is that together the members of the Church join in the deepest profession of some aspect of the Eucharistic mystery and express their worship publicly in the bond of charity and unity. Such congresses should be a genuine sign of faith and charity by reason of the total participation of the local Church and the association with it of the other Churches.

Both the local Church and other Churches should undertake studies beforehand concerning the place, theme, and program of the congress. These studies will lead to the consideration of genuine needs and will foster the progress of theological studies and the good of the local Church. Specialists in theological, biblical, liturgical, pastoral and humane studies should help in this research.

In the preparation for a Eucharistic congress, primary consideration should be given to the following: a) a thorough catechesis concerning the Eucharist, especially as the mystery of Christ living and working in the Church, accommodated to the capacity of different groups; b) more active participation in the liturgy in order to encourage a religious hearing of the word of God and the spirit of brotherhood and community; c) research and promotion of social undertakings for human development and the proper distribution of property, including temporal property, following the example of the primitive Christian community.<sup>63</sup> Thus the ferment of the Gospel, as a force in the growth of contemporary society and as the pledge of the future kingdom, may be diffused in some measure at the Eucharistic table.

The celebration of the congress should follow these criteria: a) the celebration of the Eucharist should be the true centre and high point of the congress to which all the efforts and the various devotional services should be directed; b) celebrations of the word of God,

---

<sup>63</sup> See Acts 4: 32.

catechetical meetings, and public conferences should be planned to investigate thoroughly the theme of the congress and to propose clearly the practical aspects to be carried out; c) there should be an opportunity for common prayers and extended adoration in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament exposed at designated Churches which are especially suited to this form of piety; d) the regulations concerning Eucharistic processions should be observed for the procession in which the Blessed Sacrament is carried through the streets of the city with common hymns and prayers, taking into account local, social, and religious conditions.

## BLESSINGS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <i>The Theology of Blessings</i> .....                                     | 71 |
| The Father.....  | 71 |
| The Son.....   | 72 |
| The Holy Spirit.....   | 73 |
| Human Beings.....  | 73 |
| Other Creatures.....   | 75 |
| <i>Blessings in the Life of the Church</i> .....                           | 76 |
| Blessings as Sacramentals, in Relation to Sacraments.....                  | 77 |
| Recipients of Blessings.....   | 78 |
| When are Blessings Celebrated?.....  | 78 |
| Proper Disposition for Reception of a Blessing.....                        | 79 |
| Blessing and the World of Today.....                                       | 80 |
| <i>Offices and Ministries</i> .....  | 81 |
| The Whole Church.....  | 81 |
| Bishops.....   | 81 |
| Priests.....   | 82 |
| Deacons.....   | 82 |
| Acolytes and Readers.....  | 83 |
| Other lay persons.....   | 84 |
| <i>Celebration of a Blessing</i> .....                                     | 85 |
| Typical Structure.....   | 85 |
| Signs to be used.....  | 86 |
| Responsibilities of the Minister in preparing and planning a Blessing..... | 87 |
| Vestments.....   | 87 |
| <i>Adaptations by the Conferences of Bishops</i> .....                     | 88 |
| <i>Accommodating a blessing by the minister</i> .....                      | 89 |
| <i>Conclusion</i> .....  | 90 |

### Bibliographical References

International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *The Roman Ritual: Book of Blessings*, New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1989.

Congregation for Divine Worship, "Book of Blessings (1989)", in *The Liturgy Documents: A Parish Resource, vol. II.* ed. Lysik A. David, Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1999. Pp. 346-362.

Jounel, P. "Blessings", in A.G. Martimort (ed.), *The Church at Prayer*, vol. III. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1986. Pp. 263-280.

Evenon J., "Blessings and Popular Religion", in A.G. Martimort (ed.), *The Church at Prayer*, vol. III. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1986. Pp. 280-284.

"God Blesses His Creatures with His Presence" in Joseph Bragiotti & others eds., *We Pray and Sing to the Lord*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1991. Pp. 195-221.

"Blessings", in John H. Huels, *The Pastoral Companion: a Canon Law Guidebook for Catholic Ministry*. Chicago, The Franciscan Herald Press, 1982, pp. 265-268.

The saying that those who have will even receive more is particularly true of blessings. Kind people are quite often beneficiaries of many unexpected, spontaneous blessings from those to whom they impart their acts of kindness. An old woman assisted on the road, a beggar who receives more coins than usual, a distant and lonely relative whom you surprise with a visit and some unexpected gift; all these may break into spontaneous blessings towards you for your act of kindness. Such was the spontaneous blessing of Mary by her cousin Elisabeth when the former visited her at a moment of need.

Often one brushes off these blessings in a kind of embarrassed modesty. But these are not empty words. They spring from the depth of the heart, and God who is both more concerned with the spiritual and at the same time identifies with the needy cannot ignore these spontaneous prayers. In fact he has committed himself with a promise: "whatever you do to the least of these my brothers you do it unto me." This includes in proportionate measure, the blessings that are not pronounced. A favour to a child to whom one has no special obligation and who is too small to say thank you can be a source of blessing. Even the help to some creature for no other reason other than benefiting it can be a source of blessing. A fly trapped behind a windowpane will never say thank you to one who opens the window to set it free.

There are other blessings to which we are more familiar, and which in ordinary terms bear the name “blessing”. On the day of a seminarian’s ordination to diaconate, one of the new roles he will very soon have to assume is that of blessing. People go on their knees and ask him for a blessing. They present their rosaries or some other sacred objects for blessing. They present their children to him for blessing. Not being used to this he will feel almost embarrassed, particularly in public, to have to perform the gesture of blessing. The very gesture of blessing unless practised well before will feel unfamiliar and artificial. At times these requests will also evoke a sense of humility. One asks oneself: Who am I to be asked for a blessing by these people who probably have greater faith than I do? On the day of his priestly ordination the request for blessing will multiply. It is customary for some bishops to kneel down and ask for a blessing from a new priest immediately after ordaining them.

As the years go by some priests may find it a nuisance to be asked to bless. They may consider simplistic the faith of those who ask for blessings on various household objects ranging from cars to seeds for planting or garden tools. Even non-Catholics may now and then ask for a blessing, and a pastor may wonder whether to accede to such requests and if so, how to frame such blessings. Some Christians will not be content if a blessing is not accompanied by a little touch on the head of the one blessed. Blessings are very important in the life of faith. They have deep roots in the history of salvation.

## *The Theology of Blessings*

### THE FATHER

The first thing to note is that God is the source of all blessings. The Father is described as the source of blessings in the Missal, in the third solemn blessing of New Year’s Day.<sup>64</sup> God is the source of all blessings because he above all is blessed forever.<sup>65</sup> He who is all good has made all things good, so that he might fill his creatures

---

<sup>64</sup> “Every good gift comes from the Father of light. May he grant you his grace and every blessing, and keep you safe throughout the coming year...”

<sup>65</sup> “To [the Israelites] belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.” (Romans 9:5)

with blessings.<sup>66</sup> After he had created all kinds of creatures he blessed them and said: “be fruitful, multiply, and fill the waters of the seas; and let the birds multiply upon the earth.”<sup>67</sup> But above all he blessed the man and woman whom he had created “God blessed them, saying to them, ‘Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all living animals on the earth.’<sup>68</sup> Even after the Fall of mankind, and in spite of it, he has continued his blessings as a sign of his merciful love.

But when the fullness of time arrived, the Father sent his own Son and through him, who took our flesh, gave us a new gift in every spiritual blessing.<sup>69</sup> The ancient curse upon us was thus changed into a blessing: when “the glorious Sun of Justice, Christ our God, appeared, he freed us from the age-old curse and filled us with holiness.”<sup>70</sup>

## THE SON

Christ, the Father’s supreme blessing upon us, is portrayed in the gospel as blessing those he encountered, especially the children<sup>71</sup>, and as offering to his Father prayers of blessing.<sup>72</sup> Glorified by the

---

<sup>66</sup> See Eucharistic Prayer Four, Preface: “Through all eternity you live in unapproachable light. *Source of life and goodness*, you have created all things, *to fill your creatures with every blessing* and lead all men to the joyful vision of your light.”

<sup>67</sup> Genesis 1:22.

<sup>68</sup> Genesis 1:28.

<sup>69</sup> Galatians 4:4: “when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law...”; Ephesians 1:3: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...”

<sup>70</sup> *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Birthday of Mary, 8 September, antiphon for the Cantic of Zechariah.

<sup>71</sup> Act 3:26 “When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you, to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.” Mark 10:16 “And he took [children] up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. Luke 24:50-51 Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.”

<sup>72</sup> Matthew 14:19 “Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.” See also Mark 6: 41; 14: 22; Luke 9: 16; 24: 30; John 6: 11.



Father, after his ascension Christ sent the gift of his Spirit upon the brothers and sisters he had gained at the cost of his blood. He had often told his disciples that unless he went they could not receive the promised gift. And by this going he meant his own death.

### THE HOLY SPIRIT

In the same way as the Son is the supreme gift of the Father to mankind, so too the Holy Spirit is the supreme blessing of the Father and the Son to mankind. The Holy Spirit completes Christ's work, leading to their true and lasting destiny those for whom Christ died. The power of the Spirit would enable Christ's disciples to offer the Father always and everywhere praise, adoration and thanksgiving and, through the works of charity, to be numbered among the blessed in the Father's Kingdom.

In Christ the blessing of God upon Abraham<sup>73</sup> reached its complete fulfilment. Through the Spirit sent by Christ, those who are called to a new life, "showered with every blessing," become children by adoption and so as members of Christ's body spread the fruits of the same Spirit in order to bring God's healing blessings to the world. The Holy Spirit in turn indwells the hearts of the faithful. He imparts his sevenfold gifts<sup>74</sup> as well as his help.

### HUMAN BEINGS

Having seen that God is the source of all blessings, the next thing to note is that mankind must co-operate in order to render God's gifts effective. In anticipation of Christ's coming as Saviour, the Father had reaffirmed his original covenant of love towards us by the outpouring of many gifts. Thus he prepared a chosen people to welcome the Redeemer and he intervened to make them ever more

---

<sup>73</sup> Genesis 12: 3: "I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

<sup>74</sup> The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord. They belong in their fullness to Christ, Son of David. (cf Is 11: 1-2: "A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.") They complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them. They make the faithful docile in readily obeying divine inspirations.

worthy of the covenant. By walking in the path of righteousness, they had the power to honour God with their lips and with their hearts and thus to become before the world a sign and sacrament of divine blessings.

Certain people stand out particularly in the history of salvation both as recipients of God's blessings and as agents of God's blessings to others. These include the patriarchs,<sup>75</sup> kings, priests and Levites<sup>76</sup> and parents.<sup>77</sup> By allowing them to offer blessings in praise of his name and to invoke his name, other persons or the works of creation were showered with divine blessings. Thus human beings have a double role in blessings: they bless God by praise, thanksgiving, reverent worship and faithful service. They bless others and other things by invoking God's help upon them.

Whether God blessed the people himself or through the ministry of those who acted in his name, his blessing was always a promise of divine help, a proclamation of his favour, a reassurance of his faithfulness to the covenant he had made with his people. When, in turn, human beings uttered blessings to God, they were offering praise, adoration, invocation, thanksgiving, to the one whose goodness and mercy they were proclaiming. When human beings bless God, they in a way render themselves recipients of God's self-communication for their good. Paul summarises well the reciprocal

---

<sup>75</sup> Genesis 14: 19-20 [Melchisedech] blessed [Abraham] and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" Genesis 27: 27-29: [Isaac] came near and kissed [his son Jacob]; and he smelled the smell of his garments, and blessed him, and said, "Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed. May God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you!"

<sup>76</sup> "Deuteronomy 21: 5 "Then the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come forward, for the LORD your God has chosen them to minister to him and to pronounce blessings in the name of the LORD, and by their decision all cases of dispute and assault shall be settled." 2Chronicles, 30: 27 "Then the priests and the Levites stood up and blessed the people, and their voice was heard; their prayer came to his holy dwelling in heaven."

<sup>77</sup> Sirach 3: 9-11 "For a father's blessing strengthens the houses of the children, but a mother's curse uproots their foundations. Do not glorify yourself by dishonoring your father, for your father's dishonor is no glory to you. The glory of one's father is one's own glory, and it is a disgrace for children not to respect their mother..."

meaning of blessing in reference both to God's blessings of us and our blessing of him when he says: "Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ. Before the world was made, he chose us, chose us in Christ, to be holy and spotless, and to live through love in his presence, determining that we should be come his adopted sons, through Jesus Christ for his own kind purposes, to make us praise the glory of his grace..."<sup>78</sup>

#### OTHER CREATURES

It may sound strange at first to think that other creatures without intelligence and will can also be said to have a role in blessings. In the Lauds of Sunday Week I and III of the Psalter, we recite or sing that long canticle of Daniel 3: 57-88. Many may never have stopped to reflect on the meaning of what they pray: how do showers and rain, lightning and clouds, rivers and seas, bless the Lord, for instance?

But Scripture attests that all the beings God has created and keeps in existence by his gracious goodness declare themselves to be blessings from him and should move us to bless him in return. Creatures not endowed with reason bless God by fulfilling the purpose for which they were created. If the sun by shining gives life to the living things on earth, gives warmth and light, it blesses God in that way. A natural scientist and believer can show that every little creature has some good purpose for which it was created. Psalm 104 (103) is a hymn of praise for the orderliness of God in his creatures. This is above all true after the Word made flesh came to make all things holy by the mystery of his incarnation.

Through these creatures God blesses mankind for instance by their provision of nourishment to him. They exercise his mind of inventive skill, they provide joy and entertainment, and even those that pose a problem and bring suffering in the fallen condition of humanity, when confronted with faith and courage, assist human beings towards their true and lasting destiny. For all things work for the good of those who love God.

---

<sup>78</sup> Ephesians 1:3-6.

In turn people invoke a blessing upon other creatures including inanimate things. Such blessings are invoked so that these things or animals may serve the good purpose for which God has given them to human beings. We also pray for the grace to use such things well, with thankfulness, moderation and charity towards others. This principle is a useful guide in formulating of prayers of blessings, particularly for those things for which a blessing is not provided in the Book of Blessings. It is a useful catechesis for those who ask for the blessing.

### ***Blessings in the Life of the Church***

During the celebration of the Eucharist in parish communities the Church wisely places announcements and sometimes speeches between the prayer after communion and the final blessing. While the thanksgiving prayer which is also referred to as the concluding prayer ends the Eucharistic liturgy and the final blessing serves as the dismissal people usually wait to receive that blessing even if many would not mind not hearing the announcements. The reception of that blessing is important enough to them to deter them from sauntering out of the church before the official dismissal. However, it is important to bear in mind that the whole Mass is a blessing, and not just the final formula.

Taught by the Saviour's own command, the Church shares the cup of blessing,<sup>79</sup> as it gives thanks for the inexpressible gift received first in Christ's paschal mystery and then brought to us in the Eucharist. From the grace and power received in the Eucharist the Church itself becomes a blessing existing in the world. The Church as the universal sacrament of salvation<sup>80</sup> continues the work of sanctifying and in the Holy Spirit joins Christ its head in giving glory to the Father.

As the Church, through the working of the Holy Spirit, fulfils its many-sided ministry of sanctifying, it has accordingly established many forms of blessings. Through them it calls us to praise God, encourages us to implore his protection, exhorts us to seek his

---

<sup>79</sup> "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?" (1Cor 10: 16).

<sup>80</sup> Lumen Gentium, 48.

mercy by our holiness of life, and provides us with ways of praying that God will grant the favours we ask.

#### BLESSINGS AS SACRAMENTALS, IN RELATION TO SACRAMENTS

The blessings instituted by the Church are included among those signs perceptible to the senses by which human sanctification in Christ and the glorification of God are “signified and brought about in ways proper to each of these signs.”<sup>81</sup> Human sanctification and God’s glorification are the ends towards which all the Church’s other activities are directed.<sup>82</sup>

Like the sacraments, blessings should normally be celebrated in the context of the word of God. Frequently in a parish environment a busy priest falls victim of the temptation to impart blessings of objects and people presented to him with a mere sign of the cross on them. Now and then he may accompany the sign of the cross with a little touch of the object or person blessed. Usually the people are satisfied since they believe, and rightly so, that the ordained minister has divine power invested in him. Sometimes the busy parish priest will do the same also in the case of water to be blessed. Such blessing does not edify the people. It may even lead them to consider the minister as a kind of magician ministering the divine magic.

But blessings are signs that have God’s word as their basis and that are celebrated from motives of faith. They are therefore meant to declare and to manifest the newness of life in Christ that has its origin and growth in the sacraments of the New Covenant established by the Lord. In addition, since they have been established as a kind of imitation of the sacraments, blessings are signs above all of spiritual effects that are achieved through the Church’s intercession.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> SC, 7.

<sup>82</sup> SC 7, 10.

<sup>83</sup> “Holy Mother Church has...instituted sacramentals. These are sacred signs which bear a resemblance to sacraments. They signify effects, particularly of a spiritual nature, which are obtained through the Church’s intercession. By them men are disposed to receive the chief effects of the sacraments, and various occasions in life are rendered holy.” SC, 60.

Because of these considerations, the Church has a profound concern that the celebration of blessings should truly contribute to God's praise and glory and should serve to better God's people. In order that this intent of the Church might stand out more clearly, blessings formularies have, from age-old tradition, centred above all on glorifying God for his gifts, on imploring favours from him and on restraining the power of evil in this world.

#### RECIPIENTS OF BLESSINGS

The Church gives glory to God in all things and is particularly intent on showing forth his glory to those who have been or will be reborn through his grace. For them and with them therefore the Church in celebrating its blessings praises the Lord and implores divine grace at important moments in the life of its members. At times the Church also invokes blessings on objects and places connected with human occupations or activities and those related to the liturgy or to piety and popular devotions. But such blessings are invoked always with a view to the people who use the objects to be blessed and frequent the places to be blessed. God has given into our use and care the good things he has created, and we are also the recipients of his own wisdom. Thus the celebration of blessings becomes the means for us to profess that as we make use of what God has created we wish to find him and to love and serve him with all fidelity.

#### WHEN ARE BLESSINGS CELEBRATED?

Through the guidance of faith, the assurance of hope and the inspiration of charity the faithful receive the wisdom to discern the reflections of God's goodness not only in the elements of creation but also in the events of human life. They see all of these as signs of that fatherly providence by which God guides and governs all things. At all times and in every situation, then, the faithful have an occasion for praising God through Christ in the Holy Spirit, for calling on divine help, and for giving thanks in all things, provided there is nothing that conflicts with the letter and spirit of the Gospel. Therefore every celebration of a blessing must be weighed beforehand with pastoral prudence, particularly if there is any danger of shocking the faithful or other persons.

This pastoral evaluation of the blessings of creation is in keeping with another text of Vatican Council II: “Thus, for well-disposed members of the faithful, the effect of the liturgy of the sacraments and the sacramentals is that almost every event in their lives is made holy by divine grace that flows from the paschal mystery of Christ’s passion, death and resurrection, the fount from which all the sacraments and sacramentals draw their power. The liturgy means also that there is hardly any proper use of material things that cannot thus be directed toward human sanctification and the praise of God.”<sup>84</sup> The celebration of a blessing, then, prepares us to receive the chief effects of the sacraments and makes holy the various situations of human life.

#### PROPER DISPOSITION FOR RECEPTION OF A BLESSING

“But in order that the liturgy may possess its full effectiveness, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions.”<sup>85</sup> The same applies to blessings. When through the Church we ask for God’s blessing, we should intensify our personal dispositions through faith, for which all things are possible;<sup>86</sup> we should place our assurance in the hope that does not disappoint;<sup>87</sup> above all we should be inspired by the love that impels us to keep God’s commandments.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> “Thus, for well-disposed members of the faithful the liturgy of the sacraments and sacramentals sanctifies almost every event of their lives with the divine grace which flows from the paschal mystery of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ. From this source all sacraments and sacramentals draw their power. There is scarcely any proper use of material things which cannot thus be directed toward the sanctification of men and the praise of God.” SC, 61.

<sup>85</sup> SC, 11.

<sup>86</sup> Mark 9: 23 Jesus said to [the father of the possessed child], “If you are able! -- All things can be done for the one who believes.”

<sup>87</sup> Romans 5:5 “...and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”

<sup>88</sup> John 14: 21 “They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

Apart from faith, hope and charity, one who asks for God's blessing must also be seeking what is pleasing to God.<sup>89</sup> To seek what is contrary would not only be to expect a negative answer from God, it would also be offensive to him. One intending to do harm to another would offend God by asking God's blessing for the success of his evil mission. In the same line the person who does what is pleasing to God is more likely to obtain his favours. "Who has the right to climb the mountain of Yahweh, who the right to stand in his holy place? He whose hands are clean, whose heart is pure, whose soul does not pay homage to worthless things and who never swears to a lie. The blessing of Yahweh is his, and vindication from God his saviour."<sup>90</sup>

### BLESSING AND THE WORLD OF TODAY

There was a time in the pre-technological world when practically every aspect of life had an appropriate blessing. In the light of many scientific explanations and solutions many of the blessings are considered irrelevant. In fact the present Ritual for blessings has pruned off many of the blessings that were found in the ritual that preceded it. Rather than considering the world of technology as a threat to the belief in the faith in blessings, one ought to consider it as a healthy pruning of cheap credulity and tendency to superstition.

At the same time the enlightened believer knows that every technological advance is ultimately a gift of God: of creative intelligence to man as well as of the world and its laws which supplies the raw material for scientific discovery. When at the Presentation of Gifts the priest blesses God saying "blessed are you Lord God of all creation, through your goodness we have this bread to offer which earth has given and human hands have made... we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands..." he expresses a prayer that could be adapted and used with every marvellous invention of science and technology.

---

<sup>89</sup> Romans 12:2 "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God -- what is good and acceptable and perfect." Ephesians 5: 17 "So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." Matthew 12: 50 "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

<sup>90</sup> Psalm 24:4-5.



## *Offices and Ministries*

### THE WHOLE CHURCH

Blessings are part of the liturgy of the Church. Therefore their communal celebration is in some cases obligatory but in all cases more in accord with the character of liturgical prayer. As the Church's prayer places truth before the minds of the faithful, those who are present are led to join themselves with heart and voice to the voice of the Church.

For the more important blessings that concern the local Church, it is fitting that the diocesan or parish community assemble, with the bishop or pastor (parish priest) presiding, to celebrate the blessing. Even in the case of other blessings, the presence of an assembly of the faithful is preferable, since what is done on behalf of any group within the community redounds in some way to the good of the entire community.

Whenever there is no assembly of the faithful for the celebration, the person who wishes to bless God's name or to ask God's favour and the minister who presides should still keep in mind that they represent the Church in celebration. In this way from their shared prayer and petition a blessing results that although a human being pronounces it, does not have a merely human source. The celebration of things or places according to custom should not take place without the participation of at least some of the faithful.

The ministry of blessing involves a particular exercise of the priesthood of Christ and, in keeping with the place and office within the people of God belonging to each person, the exercise of this ministry is determined in the following manner:

### BISHOPS

It belongs to the ministry of the bishop to preside at celebrations that involve the entire diocesan community and that are carried out with special solemnity and with a large attendance of the faithful. The bishop, accordingly, may reserve certain celebrations to himself, particularly those celebrated with special solemnity.<sup>91</sup>

---

<sup>91</sup> SC, 79.

## PRIESTS

It belongs to the ministry of a priest, in keeping with the nature of his service to the people of God, to preside at those blessings especially that involve the community he is appointed to serve. Priests therefore may preside at the celebration of all the blessings in the Book of Blessings, unless a bishop is present as presider, or unless the bishop has reserved these some of these blessings to himself. The blessings that may be reserved include the blessing of bells for use in the church or an oratory; the blessing of a new church or public oratory; the blessing of a new cemetery, papal blessings, and the blessing and erection of the Stations of the Cross.<sup>92</sup> Besides conducting these blessings, a priest or pastor also ought to make people aware of the need to sanctify the different aspects of life. He should make a concerted effort to catechise them on the meaning of blessings.

## DEACONS

It belongs to the ministry of a deacon to preside at those blessings that are so indicated in place in the Book of Blessings.<sup>93</sup> As the minister of the altar, of the word and of charity, the deacon is the assistant of the bishop and the college of presbyters. But whenever a priest is present, it is more fitting that the office of presiding be assigned to him and that the deacon assist by carrying out those functions proper to the diaconate. This includes the reading of the gospel and the making of liturgical announcement.

The following are the blessings a deacon can impart. The blessing with the Holy Eucharist at benediction<sup>94</sup>: The annual blessing of families in their homes.<sup>95</sup> The blessing of families.<sup>96</sup> The blessing of spouses.<sup>97</sup> The blessing of children.<sup>98</sup> The blessing of engaged

---

<sup>92</sup> *Inter oecumenici*, 77.

<sup>93</sup> See also Can 1169, §3: "A deacon can impart only those blessings which are expressly permitted him by law."

<sup>94</sup> Can. 943.

<sup>95</sup> BB, 68-89

<sup>96</sup> BB, 42-61.

<sup>97</sup> BB 115-134.

<sup>98</sup> BB, 135-194.

couples.<sup>99</sup> The blessing of a woman before or after giving birth.<sup>100</sup> The blessing of an old person who is housebound<sup>101</sup>. The blessing of sick persons.<sup>102</sup> The blessing of those deputed for catechesis.<sup>103</sup> Of a group gathered for catechesis or prayer.<sup>104</sup> The blessing of an association which provides help for public needs.<sup>105</sup> The blessing of pilgrims.<sup>106</sup> The blessing of those going on a trip.<sup>107</sup> The blessing of the site for a new building.<sup>108</sup> The blessing of a new home.<sup>109</sup> The blessing of a new religious house<sup>110</sup>. The blessing of other buildings as given.<sup>111</sup> The blessing of things, places, animals, harvests.<sup>112</sup> The blessing before and after meals as given in the rite. The blessing of holy water outside Mass.<sup>113</sup> Of objects of devotion: rosaries, medals crosses.<sup>114</sup> The blessing of thanksgiving for favours received.<sup>115</sup> Blessing for various circumstances.

#### ACOLYTES AND READERS

An acolyte or reader who by formal institution has this special office in the Church is rightly preferred over another layperson as the minister designated at the discretion of the local Ordinary to impart certain blessings. When acolytes bless however, they do not make the sign of the cross over things blessed. Rather they lead the prayers simply invoking God's blessings. For instance it is usual for

---

<sup>99</sup> BB, 195-214.

<sup>100</sup> BB, 215-257.

<sup>101</sup> BB, 258-276. See also 283-289.

<sup>102</sup> BB, 290-320.

<sup>103</sup> BB 361-372.

<sup>104</sup> BB, 378-387.

<sup>105</sup> BB, 388-403.

<sup>106</sup> BB, 404-430.

<sup>107</sup> BB, 431-452.

<sup>108</sup> BB, 456-473.

<sup>109</sup> BB, 474-491.

<sup>110</sup> BB, 515-537. (This is the case when the deacon is the superior of the house and the Ordinary cannot be there).

<sup>111</sup> BB, 538-650.

<sup>112</sup> BB, 651-827.

<sup>113</sup> BB, 1085-1096.

<sup>114</sup> BB 1137-1207.

<sup>115</sup> BB 1225-1271.

them to use the formula: “may the Lord bless us, may he keep us from evil...”

#### OTHER LAY PERSONS

Other laymen and laywomen, in virtue of the universal priesthood, a dignity they possess because of their baptism and confirmation, may celebrate certain blessings, as indicated in the respective orders of blessings, 116 by use of the rites and formularies designated for a lay minister. Such laypersons exercise this ministry in virtue of their office (for example, parents on behalf of their children) or by reason of some special liturgical ministry or in fulfilment of a particular charge in the Church, as is the case in many places with religious or catechists appointed by decision of the local Ordinary, after ascertaining their proper pastoral formation and prudence in the apostolate. But whenever a priest or a deacon is present, the office of presiding should be left to him.

The participation of the faithful is more active in proportion to the effectiveness of their instruction on the importance of blessings. During the celebration of a blessing and in preaching and catechesis beforehand, priests and ministers should therefore explain to the faithful the meaning and power of blessings. There is a further advantage in teaching the people of God the proper meaning of the rites and prayers employed by the Church in imparting blessings: this will forestall the intrusion into the celebration of anything that might replace genuine faith with superstition and/or a shallow credulity.

Some of the blessings that can be carried out by lay faithful include the blessing of a family,<sup>117</sup> the blessing of spouses,<sup>118</sup> the blessing of children,<sup>119</sup> the blessing by one of the parents of an engaged couple,<sup>120</sup> the blessing of a woman before or after giving birth,<sup>121</sup> the

---

<sup>116</sup> Can. 1168: “the minister of the sacramentals is a cleric who has the requisite power. In accordance with the liturgical books and subject to the judgement of the local Ordinary, certain sacramentals can also be administered by lay people who possess the appropriate qualities.”

<sup>117</sup> BB, 42-61

<sup>118</sup> BB 115-134

<sup>119</sup> BB, 135-194

<sup>120</sup> BB 195-214

<sup>121</sup> BB, 215-257

blessing of a group gathered for catechesis or prayer,<sup>122</sup> the blessing of a new home,<sup>123</sup> the blessing of a new religious house by the superior in the absence of the bishop,<sup>124</sup> the blessing of things, places, animals, harvest, etc.<sup>125</sup> the blessing before and after meals, and the blessing of thanksgiving for favours and for various circumstances.<sup>126</sup>

## *Celebration of a Blessing*

### TYPICAL STRUCTURE

The typical celebration of a blessing consists of two parts: first, the proclamation of the word of God, and second, the praise of God's goodness and the petition for his help. In addition there are usually rites for the beginning and conclusion that are proper to each celebration.

The purpose of the first part of the celebration is to ensure that the blessing is a genuine sacred sign, deriving its meaning and effectiveness from God's word that is proclaimed.<sup>127</sup> Thus the proclamation of God's word is the central point of the first part and the word proclaimed should provide a basis for the introductory comments and the brief instruction on the readings, as well as for any exhortation or homily that may be given, as occasion suggests. Particularly when there are several readings, an intervening psalm or song or an interval of prayerful silence may be included, in order to intensify the faith of those taking part in the celebration.

The purpose of the second part of the celebration is that through its rites and prayers the community will praise God and, through Christ in the Holy Spirit, implore divine help. The central point of this part, then, is the blessing formulary itself, that is, the prayer of the Church along with the accompanying proper outward sign. But intercessions may also be added as a way of fostering the prayerful petition of

---

<sup>122</sup> BB, 378-387

<sup>123</sup> BB, 431-452

<sup>124</sup> BB, 515-537

<sup>125</sup> BB 651-827

<sup>126</sup> BB, 1225-1271

<sup>127</sup> GILM, 3-9.

those present; the intercessions usually precede, but also may follow the prayer of blessing.

In the adaptation of celebrations a careful distinction must be made between matters of less importance and those principal elements of the celebrations that are provided in the Book of Blessings, namely, the proclamation of the word of God and the Church's prayer of blessing. These may never be omitted even when the shorter form of a rite is used.

#### SIGNS TO BE USED

The purpose of the outward signs frequently accompanying prayer is above all to bring to mind God's saving acts, to express a relationship between the present celebration and the Church's sacraments, and in this way to nurture the faith of those present and move them to take part in the rite attentively.<sup>128</sup>

The outward signs or gestures that are especially employed are: the outstretching, raising, or joining of hands, the laying on of hands, the sign of the cross, sprinkling with holy water and incensation: a) because the blessing formula is before all else an *oratio*, the minister stretches out his hands, joins them, or raises them during it, according to the rubrics in each order of blessing; b) the laying on of hands holds a special place among gestures of blessing. Christ often used this sign of blessing, spoke of it to his disciples, saying: "They will lay hands on the sick and these will recover",<sup>129</sup> and continues to use it in and through the Church; c) In keeping with an ancient tradition, the tracing of the sign of the cross also often accompanies a blessing; d) some of the orders of blessing provide for sprinkling with holy water, and in these cases ministers should urge the faithful to recall the paschal mystery and renew their baptismal faith; e) some orders of blessing provide for incensation, which is a sign of veneration and honour and, in some uses, a symbol of the Church's prayer.

The outward signs of blessing, and particularly the sign of the cross, are in themselves forms of preaching the gospel and of expressing faith. But to ensure active participation in the celebration and to

---

<sup>128</sup> SC 59-60.

<sup>129</sup> Mark 16: 18.

guard against any danger of superstition, it is ordinarily not permissible to impart the blessing of any article or place merely through a sign of blessing and without either the word of God or any sort of prayer being spoken.

#### RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MINISTER IN PREPARING AND PLANNING A BLESSING

The minister should keep in mind that blessings are intended, first of all, for the faithful. But they may also be celebrated for catechumens and, in view of the provision of can. 1170<sup>130</sup>, for non-Catholics, unless there is a contrary prohibition of the Church. Whenever the celebration of a blessing is shared with Christians with whom we do not have full communion, the provisions laid down by the local Ordinary are to be respected.

With a view to the particular circumstances and taking into account the wishes of the faithful, the celebrant or minister is to make full use of the options authorised in the various rites, but also is to maintain the structure of the celebration and is not to mix up the order of the principal parts. In planning a communal celebration care must be taken to ensure that all, both ministers and faithful, exercise their proper functions and carry them out devoutly and with proper decorum and order. Due attention must also be paid to the character proper to the liturgical season, in order that the minister's introductory comments and the people's prayers and intercessions will be linked with the annual cycle of the mysteries of Christ.

#### VESTMENTS

A bishop when presiding at major celebrations wears the vestments prescribed in the Ceremonial of Bishops. A priest or deacon when presiding at blessings celebrated communally, especially those that are celebrated in church or with special solemnity, is to wear an alb with stole. A surplice may replace the alb when a cassock is worn; a cope may be worn for more solemn celebrations. Vestments are to be either white or of a colour corresponding to the liturgical season or feast. A formally instituted minister when presiding at blessings

---

<sup>130</sup> This canon states that: "While blessings are to be imparted primarily to Catholics, they may be given also to catechumens and, unless there is a prohibition by the Church, even to non-Catholics."

celebrated communally is to wear the vesture prescribed for liturgical celebrations by the conference of bishops or by the local Ordinary.

### ***Adaptations by the Conferences of Bishops***

In virtue of the Constitution on the Liturgy,<sup>131</sup> each conference of bishops has the right to prepare a particular ritual, corresponding to the present title of the Roman Ritual, adapted to the needs of the respective region. Once the decisions of the conference have been reviewed by the Apostolic See, the ritual prepared by the conference is to be used in the region concerned. In this matter the conference of bishops has the following responsibilities: a) to decide on new adaptations following established principles and retaining the proper structure of the rite; b) to weigh carefully and prudently what elements from the traditions and culture of individual peoples may be appropriately admitted into divine worship, then to propose further adaptations that the conference considers to be necessary or helpful; c) to retain any blessings of the old ritual if compatible with the present principles; d) to add different texts of the same kind to the various orders of blessing whenever the Book of Blessings gives a choice between several alternative texts; e) not only to translate in their entirety but also, where necessary, to expand the Introductions in the Book of Blessings, so that the ministers will fully understand the meaning of the rites and carry them out effectively and the faithful will take part more consciously and actively; f) to supply any elements that they deem missing in the present ritual such as songs, or other readings; g) to prepare translations of the texts that are adapted to the idiom of the different languages and to the genius of the diverse cultures; h) to arrange the contents of editions of a book of blessings in format that will be as convenient as possible for pastoral use; to publish sections of the book separately, but with the major introductions always included.

From the point of view of Inculturation number b) above has particular significance. In many traditional cultures and religions it is common belief that people can invoke evil powers upon others. People attribute their misfortune to the evil working of their enemies. Often people even do physical harm to others because of the alleged harm these are said to have caused them. People have

---

<sup>131</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 63b.



been put to death for allegedly being the cause of the lack of rain or for ‘bringing about’ some natural disaster on the community. Whether what people believe is correct or not is not the point of discussion here. What is, is the fact that their conviction prepares the ground for an understanding and appreciation of Christian blessings. If evil powers can be invoked to bring about harm, the powers of goodness can be invoked to bring about good as well. And since the God we believe in is far greater than the powers of evil, then his power to bring about good surpasses the power of the Evil one in a corresponding degree. God is more willing to grant favours to those ready to sacrifice their sinful ways and to live an upright life. But this sacrifice of love which leads in itself to our greater good should not be so painful to give if we recall that the Evil one also requires great sacrifices for great ‘favours’; among certain peoples sacrifices as great as offering other human beings.

### *Accommodating a blessing by the minister*

The Book of Blessings has a rich variety of blessings. It is possible for one to use a blessing for an occasion even if slightly different from the one foreseen. However, it is possible for one not to find the exact blessing one needs for the occasion at hand. Under those circumstances it may be necessary to accommodate one of those given. This he does by modifying the prayers while retaining the basic structure.

Below is an example of an accommodated blessing. The occasion was the blessing of a seminary dormitory by a Papal Nuncio. In the Book of Blessings the closest possible choices proved inadequate. They were the Blessing of a Seminary, Blessing of a New Home and Blessing of a Place for Prayer. None of the three was totally commensurate to the occasion, yet each had elements that could be borrowed. In the sample given below note the accommodations: 1) the opening invitation is turned to “peace be with you” as befits a bishop; 2) the readings are omitted since the blessing was to be conducted immediately after Mass which Mass had its proper readings; 3) the final blessing was made solemn since it concluded both the Eucharistic celebration and the rite of blessing of the new building; 4) a few elements had to be composed which was easier than modifying what was given; 5) there being two deacons serving

at this blessing, their functions were specified in the rubrics; 6) the general structure, apart from the readings, followed that of other blessings; 7) note also the liturgical format of the blessings: the rubrics were put in light inconspicuous cursive, red if possible; the words of the presider are in bold print, with a bigger font; the parts for the deacon that were meant to be read were in smaller, lighter font, the whole blessing was to fit just on two pages, so that there is no need of turning pages if they are placed in a folder. Again the prayers are written in sense lines.

### ***Conclusion***

What does all this tell us about our attitude towards blessings? In the first place we need to learn to value them. Ask for them whenever we have the opportunity. Strive to bring God's blessing upon all aspects of our life. We need also to understand that God in his goodness and wisdom answers our prayers in the best way that ensures our ultimate good and the good of others which may sometimes be contrary to our expectation. Thirdly it is important for us to 'count our blessings' as the saying goes: to acknowledge God's goodness to us in the manifold ways and to render him thanks for that goodness. It is a blessing in itself to be able to wonder, and marvel at the goodness of God that manifests itself sometimes in the simplest things. Our attitude and way of life also disposes us to receive more of God's goodness and blessings. We can render ourselves more or less worthy of his blessings.

At the same time we ourselves in our little way can learn to act towards others the way God acts towards us. It has always pleased him to impart his goodness to his creatures through other fellow creatures. That way the love that characterises his nature is imparted and defused through his creation. Every person has the capacity to be a source of joy, of kindness, of consolation, of help, of comfort, of relief, of happiness and of goodness to others, if he or she choose to, thus becoming both a channel and a proof of God's goodness. It is not uncommon for a person who has done an unexpected favour to another person to hear that person exclaim that God is good.

As for those who in a special way have been called to impart liturgical blessings to others, they can carry out that task in a manner that edifies others, that depicts faith, hope and charity and that

shows that reverence in the holy things depicted in the manner that they conduct the liturgy: their attention and effort in preparing it, and in the way they pronounce the words and make use of the sacred signs.

## Blessing of the New Seminary dormitory

### INTRODUCTORY RITE

*Immediately after the concluding prayer, and before the final blessing, the procession will proceed from the chapel to the new dormitory. The congregation which goes ahead, gives way for the Concelebrants, deacons, MC and Main Celebrant. These proceed in procession to the porch of the new building. Then the Main Celebrant, facing the people, addresses them in these or similar words:*

**Peace be with you,**

*R.* And also with you.

**When Christ took flesh through the Blessed Virgin Mary, he made his home with us. Let us pray now that he will enter this home and bless it with his presence. A seminary dormitory is not just a house in which a group lives, but a community within a community. This community prays together in team Masses. It also works together in organising the liturgy and other activities beneficial to the members and to the entire seminary. It is a community of mutual respect and assistance, heralding communal living in the pastoral life. May the Lord who gathered his twelve apostles from various walks of life, and formed them into a brotherhood that lived together harmoniously, also form you into a united community.**

### INTERCESSIONS

*Since the blessing follows immediately after Mass in which the Liturgy of the Word has just been celebrated, it is advisable to leave out the readings in the rite of blessing. After a brief pause the Main Celebrant begins the intercessions saying:*

**The Son of God, Lord of heaven and earth, made his home among us. With thankfulness let us call upon him.**

*One of the deacons takes the intercessions, first telling the people the response:*

**R.** Stay with us Lord

Lord Jesus, you gathered you apostles from various walks of life and formed them into a brotherhood that harmoniously lived together, also form those who will live in this dormitory into a united community. **R.**

You promised to help all those who assist your messengers, bless the many people who have contributed financially to the building of this dormitory, reward their generosity and make their work prosper. **R.**

You said that where two or three are gathered in your name there you are in their midst, make all those who will live in this house a community bound together by prayer, brotherly charity, and mutual service. **R.**

You blessed and elevated manual labour by assuming the work of a carpenter, bless those who have laboured tirelessly in the sun to construct this edifice, bless them and give them peace and tranquillity in their own homes. **R.**

Bless the entire seminary community, so privileged to be the beneficiary of so much generosity, may these benefits help them to render worthy service to you and to the whole Church. **R.**

PRAYER OF BLESSING

*The Main celebrant adjoins the intercessions with the prayer of blessing. With hands outstretched he says:*

**Lord**

**be close to your servants**

**who move into this dormitory**

**and ask for your blessing.**

**be their shelter when they rest,**

**their companion when they are away  
their guide when they work  
and their inspiration when they pray.**

**And at last receive us all into the dwelling place  
you have prepared  
in your Father's house, where you live for ever  
and ever. R. Amen.**

#### SPRINKLING WITH WATER

*Then the Main Celebrant sprinkles those present and the new dormitory with holy water. He may go through the corridors, sprinkling the open rooms. In the meantime the choir sings an appropriate hymn. When he is back he concludes with the following blessing.*

#### FINAL BLESSING

**The Lord be with you**

*R. And also be with you*

*The deacon says:*

Bow your heads and pray for God's blessing

*Then the Main Celebrant, with hands stretched over the congregation says:*

**The Lord has given you knowledge of the faith  
Through the labours and preaching of Saint Paul.  
May his example inspire you to lead others to  
Christ  
By the manner of your life.**

*R. Amen*

**May he teach you discipline in work**

**And moderation in rest**

**So that you may put all your faculties to his service.**

*R. Amen*

**Through the example and intercession of St Paul**

**May you learn to work for the good of others**

*R. Amen*

**May almighty God bless you,**

**the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.**

*R. Amen*

*Then the deacon says:*

Let us go in the peace of Christ

*R. Thanks be to God*

## DEDICATIONS OF A CHURCH

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <i>Nature and Dignity of Churches</i> .....                                | 97  |
| <i>Titular of a Church and the Relics of the Saints to be placed in it</i> | 98  |
| <i>Celebration of the Dedication</i> .....                                 | 98  |
| Minister of the Rite .....   | 98  |
| Choice of Day .....  | 99  |
| Mass of the Dedication .....   | 99  |
| Office of the Dedication.....  | 99  |
| Parts of the Rite.....   | 100 |
| Entrance into the Church.....  | 100 |
| Liturgy of the Word .....  | 100 |
| Prayer of Dedication and Anointing of the Church & Altar .....             | 100 |
| Celebration of the Eucharist.....  | 102 |
| <i>Adaptations of the Rite</i> .....                                       | 103 |
| Adaptations within the Competence of the Conference of Bishops ...         | 103 |
| Adaptations within the Competence of the Ministers.....                    | 103 |
| <i>Pastoral Preparations</i> .....   | 103 |
| <i>Requisites for the Dedication of a Church</i> .....                     | 104 |
| <i>Anniversary of the Dedication</i> .....                                 | 105 |

### Bibliographical References

Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship (Excerpts),  
"Dedication of a Church and an Altar (1989)", in *The Liturgy Documents: A Parish Resource, vol. II*. ed. Lysik A. David, Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1999. Pp. 316-343.

"Dedication of a Church and an Altar", in *The Rites of the Catholic Church...* vol. II (English Trans. By ICEL). New York: Pueblo Publishing House, 1980. Pp. 185-286.

Jounel, P. "The Dedication of a Church", in A.G. Martimort (ed.), *The Church at Prayer*, vol. I. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1986. Pp. 215-225.

"Dedication of a Church", in *Ceremonial of Bishops*, p. 234ff.



## *Nature and Dignity of Churches*

Through his death and resurrection, Christ became the true and perfect temple<sup>132</sup> of the New Covenant and gathered together a people to be his own. This holy people, made one as the Father, Son, and Holy spirit are one, is the Church, that is, the temple of God build of living stones, where the Father is worshiped in spirit and in truth.<sup>133</sup> Rightly, then, from early times “church” has also been the name given to the building in which the Christian community gathers to hear the word of God, to pray together, to receive the sacraments, and to celebrate the Eucharist.

Because the church is a visible building, it stands as a special sign of the pilgrim Church on earth and reflects the Church dwelling in heaven. When a church is erected as a building destined solely and permanently for assembling the people of God and for carrying out sacred functions, it is fitting that it be dedicated to God with a solemn rite, in accordance with the ancient custom of the Church.

The very nature of a church demands that it be suited to sacred celebrations, dignified, evincing a noble beauty, not mere costly display, and it should stand as a sign and symbol of heavenly realities. “The general plan of the sacred edifice should be such that in some way it conveys the image of the gathered assembly. It should also allow the participants to take the place most appropriate to them and assist all to carry out their individual functions properly.” Moreover, in what concerns the sanctuary, the altar, the chair, the lectern, and the place for the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament, the norms of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal are to be followed.<sup>134</sup> Also, the norms must be observed that

---

<sup>132</sup> See Jn. 2:21

<sup>133</sup> Jn 4:23.

<sup>134</sup> See GIRM nos. 253, 257, 258, 259-267, 271, 276-277. See also Roman Ritual, *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist outside Mass*. Nos. 6 and 9-11.

concern things and places destined for the celebration of other sacraments, especially baptism and penance.<sup>135</sup>

### ***Titular of a Church and the Relics of the Saints to be placed in it***

Every church to be dedicated must have a titular. This may be: the Blessed Trinity; our Lord Jesus Christ invoked according to a mystery of his life or a title already accepted in the liturgy; the Holy Spirit; the Blessed Virgin Mary, likewise invoked according to some appellation already accepted in the liturgy; one of the angels; or, finally, a saint inscribed in the Roman Martyrology or in a duly approved Appendix. A blessed may not be the titular without an indult of the Apostolic See. A church should have one titular only, unless it is a question of saints who are listed together in the Calendar.

The tradition in the Roman liturgy of placing relics of martyrs or other saints beneath the altar should be preserved, if possible.<sup>136</sup> But the following should be noted: a) Such a relic should be of size sufficient for them to be recognised as parts of human bodies. Hence excessively small relics of one or more saints must not be placed beneath the altar; b) the greatest care must be taken to determine whether the relics in question are authentic. It is better for an altar to be dedicated without relics than to have relics of doubtful authenticity placed beneath it; c) a reliquary must not be placed upon the altar or set into the table of the altar; it must be placed beneath the table of the altar, as the design of the altar permits.

### ***Celebration of the Dedication***

#### MINISTER OF THE RITE

Since the bishop has been entrusted with the care of the particular Church, it is his responsibility to dedicate to God new churches built in his diocese. If he cannot himself preside at the rite, he shall entrust this function to another bishop, especially too one who is his

---

<sup>135</sup> See *Rite of Baptism for Children* no. 25, *Rite of Penance* no. 12.

<sup>136</sup> Concerning relics of martyrs see also SC 8, 111; GIRM 266, DedCh 2.5, 2.14, 2.24; 4.5, 5-10, 4-11, 4-20, 4-29.

associate and assistant in the pastoral care of the community for which the church has been built or, in altogether special circumstances, to a priest, to whom he shall give a special mandate.

#### CHOICE OF DAY

A day should be chosen for the dedication of the new church when the people can be present in large numbers, especially a Sunday. since the theme of the dedication pervades this entire rite, the dedication of a new church may not take place on days on which it is altogether improper to disregard the mystery then being commemorated: the Easter Triduum, Christmas, Epiphany, Ascension, Pentecost, Ash Wednesday, the weekdays of Holy Week, and All Saints.

#### MASS OF THE DEDICATION

The celebration of the Eucharist is inseparably bound up with the rite of the dedication of a church; when a church is dedicated therefore the liturgical texts of the day are omitted and text proper to the rite are used for both the liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the Eucharist.

It is fitting that the bishop concelebrate the mass with the priests who take part with him in the rite of dedication and those who have been given charge over the parish or the community for which the church has been built.

#### OFFICE OF THE DEDICATION

The day on which a church is dedicated is kept as a solemnity in that church. The office of the dedication of a church is celebrated, beginning with evening prayer I. When the rite of deposing relics takes place, it is highly recommended to keep a vigil at the relics of the martyr or saint that are to be placed beneath the altar; the best way of doing this is to have the office of readings, taken from the respective common or proper. This vigil should be properly adapted to encourage the people's participation, but the requirements of the law are respected.<sup>137</sup>

---

<sup>137</sup> See GILH no. 70.73.

## PARTS OF THE RITE

### Entrance into the Church

The rite of the dedication begins with the entrance into the church; this may take place in one of the three following ways; the one best suited to the circumstances of time and place is to be used: a) *Procession* to the church to be dedicated: all assemble in a nearby church or other suitable place, from which the bishop, the ministers, and the congregation proceed to the church to be dedicated, praying and singing; b) *Solemn entrance*: if the procession cannot take place or seems inopportune, the community gathers at the entrance of the church; c) *Simple entrance*: the congregation assembles in the church itself; the bishop, the concelebrants, and the ministers enter from the sacristy in the usual way.

Two rituals are most significant in the entrance into a new church: a) the handing over of a church: representatives of those who have been involved in the building of the church hand it over to the bishop; b) the sprinkling of the church: the bishop blesses water and with it sprinkles the people, who are the spiritual temple, then the walls of the church, and finally, the altar.

### Liturgy of the Word

Three readings are used in the liturgy of the word. The texts are chosen from those in the Lectionary for the Rite of Dedication of a church. The first reading is always, even during the Easter season, the passage of Nehemiah that tell of the people of Jerusalem gathered in the presence of the scribe Ezra to hear the proclamation of the law of God.<sup>138</sup>

After the readings the bishop gives the homily, in which he explains the biblical readings and the meaning of the dedication of a church. The profession of faith is always said. The general intercessions are omitted, since the Litany of the Saints is sung in their place.

### Prayer of Dedication and Anointing of the Church & Altar

---

<sup>138</sup> Nehemiah 8:1-4a, 5-6, 8-10

If it is to take place, the relics of a martyr are deposited after the singing of the Litany of the Saints, to signify that the sacrifice of the members has its source in the sacrifice of the Head.<sup>139</sup> When relics of a martyr are not available, relics of another saint may be deposited in the altar.

The celebration of the Eucharist is the most important and the one necessary for the dedication of a church. Nevertheless, in accordance with the tradition of the Church in both East and West, a special prayer of dedication is also said. This prayer is a sign of the intention to dedicate the church to the Lord for all times and a petition for his blessing.

The rite of anointing, incensing, covering, and lighting the altar express in visible signs several aspects of the invisible work that the Lord accomplishes through the Church in its celebration of the divine mysteries, especially the Eucharist.

The anointing with Chrism makes the altar a symbol of Christ, who, before all others, is and is called “The Anointed One”; for the Father anointed him with the Holy Spirit and constituted him the High Priest so that on the altar of his body he might offer the sacrifice of his life for the salvation of all.

The anointing of the church signifies that it is given over entirely and perpetually to Christian worship. In keeping with liturgical tradition, there are twelve anointings, or, where it is more convenient, four, as a symbol that the church is an image of the holy city of Jerusalem.

Incense is burned on the altar to signify that Christ’s sacrifice, there perpetuated in mystery, ascends to God as an odour of sweetness and also to signify that the people’s prayers rise up pleasing and acceptable, reaching the throne of God.<sup>140</sup> The incensation of the nave of the church indicates that the dedication makes it a house of

---

<sup>139</sup> See RM, Common of Martyrs 8, prayer over the gifts. Ambrose, *Epistular* 22:13: PL 16, 1023: “Let the triumphant victims rest in the place where Christ is victim: he, however, who suffered for all, upon the altar; they, who have been redeemed by his sufferings, beneath the altar.” See Ps. Maximus of Turin, *Sermo* 78: PL 57, 689-690. Rev. 6:9 “I saw underneath the altar the souls of all the people who had been killed on account of the word of God, for witnessing to it.”

<sup>140</sup> See Rv. 8: 3-4

prayer, but the people of God are incensed first, because they are the living temple in which each faithful member is a special altar.<sup>141</sup>

The covering of the altar indicates that the Christian altar is the altar of the Eucharistic sacrifice and the table of the Lord around its priests and people, by one and the same rite but with a difference of function, celebrate the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection and partake of his supper. For this reason the altar is prepared as the table of the sacrificial banquet and adorned as for a feasts. Thus the dressing of the altar clearly signifies that it is the Lord's table at which all God's people joyously meet to be refreshed with divine food, namely, the body and blood of Christ sacrificed.

The lighting of the altar, which is followed by the lighting of the church, reminds us that Christ is "a light to enlighten the nations"<sup>142</sup> his brightness shines out in the Church and through it in the whole human family.

#### Celebration of the Eucharist

After the altar has been prepared, the bishop celebrates the Eucharist, the principal and the most ancient part of the whole rite, because the celebration of the Eucharist is in the closest harmony with the rite of the dedication of a church.

For the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice achieves the end for which the church was built and the altar erected and expresses this end by particularly clear signs.

Furthermore, the Eucharist, which sanctifies the hearts of those who receive it, in a sense consecrates the altar and the place of celebration, as the ancient fathers of the Church often assert: "This altar should be an object of awe: by nature it is stone, but it is made holy when it receives the body of Christ."<sup>143</sup>

Finally, the bond closely connecting the dedication of a church with the celebration of the Eucharist is likewise evident from the fact that the Mass for the dedication has its own preface, which is a central part of the rite itself.

---

<sup>141</sup> See Rom 12:1

<sup>142</sup> Lk, 2:32

<sup>143</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilia 20 in 2 Cor. 3. PG 61, 540.

## *Adaptations of the Rite*

### ADAPTATIONS WITHIN THE COMPETENCE OF THE CONFERENCE OF BISHOPS

The conferences of bishops may adapt this rite, as required, to the character of each region, but in such a way that nothing of its dignity and solemnity is lost.

However, the following are to be respected: a) the celebration of the Mass with the proper preface and prayer for a dedication must never be omitted; b) rites that have a special meaning and force from liturgical tradition (see no. 16) must be retained, unless weighty reasons stand in the way, but the wording may be suitably adapted if necessary; c) with regard to adaptations, the competent ecclesiastical authority is to consult the Holy See and introduce adaptations with its consent.<sup>144</sup>

### ADAPTATIONS WITHIN THE COMPETENCE OF THE MINISTERS

It is for the bishop and for those in charge of the celebration of the rite: a) to decide the manner of entrance into the church; b) to determine the manner of handing over the new church to the bishop; c) to decide whether to have the depositing of relics of the saints. The decisive consideration is the spiritual good of the community; the prescriptions in no. 5 must be followed.

It is for the rector of the church to be dedicated, helped by those who assist him in the pastoral work, to decide and prepare everything concerning the readings, singing, and other pastoral aids to foster the fruitful participation of the people and to ensure a dignified celebration.

### *Pastoral Preparations*

In order that the people may take part fully in the rite of dedication, the rector of the church to be dedicated and others experienced in the pastoral ministry are to instruct them on the import of the celebration and its spiritual, ecclesial, and evangelising power.

---

<sup>144</sup> SC, 40.

Accordingly, the people are to be instructed about the various parts of the church and their use, the rite of dedication, and the chief liturgical symbols employed in it. Thus led by suitable pastoral resources to a full understanding of the meaning of the dedication of a church through its rites and prayers, they will take an active, intelligent, and devout part in the sacred service.

### ***Requisites for the Dedication of a Church***

For the celebration of the rite the following should be prepared: a) in the place of assembly: the Roman Pontifical, the Procession cross and if relics of the saints are to be carried in procession, the items indicated ahead. In the sacristy or in the sanctuary or in the body of the church to be dedicated: the Roman Missal, the Lectionary, a container of water to be blessed and sprinkler, containers with the Chrism, towels for wiping the table of the altar; if needed, a waxed linen cloth or waterproof covering of the same size as the altar; basin and jug of water, towels, and all that is needed for washing the bishop's hands and those of the priests after they have anointed the walls of the church; a linen gremial; a brazier for burning incense or aromatic spices; or grains of incense and small candles to burn on the altar; a censer, incense boat and spoon; a chalice, corporal, purificators, and hand towel; bread, wine, and water for the celebration of Mass; altar cross, unless there is already a cross in the sanctuary or the cross that is carried in the entrance procession is to be placed near the altar; altar cloth, candle, and candlesticks; and flowers, if opportune.

It is praiseworthy to keep the ancient custom of hanging on the walls of the church crosses made of stone, brass, or other suitable material or of having the crosses carved on the walls. Thus twelve or four crosses should be provided, depending on the number of anointings, and fixed here and there at a suitable height on the walls of the church. Beneath each cross a small bracket should be fitted and in it a small candlestick is placed, with a candle to be lighted.

For the Mass of the dedication the vestments are white or some festive colour. The following should be prepared: a) for the bishop: alb, stole, chasuble, mitre, pastoral staff, and pallium, if the bishop has the right to wear one, b) for the concelebrating priests: the vestments for concelebrating Mass, c) for the deacons: albs, stoles,



and dalmatics; d) for other ministers: albs or other lawfully approved dress.

Relics of the saints are to be placed beneath the altar, the following should be prepared: a) in the place of the assembly: reliquary containing the relics, placed between flowers and lights. When the simple entrance is used, the reliquary may be placed in a suitable part of the sanctuary before the rite begins. For the deacons who will carry the relics to be deposited: albs, red stoles, if the relics are those of a martyr, or white in other cases, and, if available, dalmatics. If the relics are carried by priests, then in place of dalmatics chasubles should be prepared. The relics may also be carried by other ministers, vested in albs or other lawfully approved dress; b) in the sanctuary: small table on which the reliquary is placed during the first part of the dedication rite; c) in the sacristy: a sealant or cement to close the cover of the aperture. In addition, a stonemason should be on hand to close the depository of the relics at the proper time.

The record of the dedication of the church should be drawn up in duplicate, signed by the bishop, the rector of the church, and representatives of the local community; one copy is to be kept in the diocesan archives, the other in the archives of the church. Where the depositing of relics takes place, a third copy of the record should be made, to be placed at the proper time in the reliquary. In this record mention should be made of the day, month, and year of the church's dedication, the name of the bishop who celebrated the rite, also the titular of the church and, where applicable, the names of the martyrs or saints whose relics have been deposited beneath the altar. Moreover, in a suitable place in the church, an inscription should be placed stating the day, month, and year when the dedication took place, the titular of the church, and the name of the bishop who celebrated the rite.

### *Anniversary of the Dedication*

In order that the importance and dignity of the local Church may stand out with greater clarity, the anniversary of the dedication of its cathedral is to be celebrated, with the rank of a solemnity in the cathedral itself, with the rank of a feast in the other churches of the dioceses, on the date on which the dedication of the church recurs.

If this date is always impeded, the celebration is assigned to the nearest date open.

It is desirable that in the cathedral church on the anniversary the bishop concelebrate the Eucharist with the chapter of canons or the priest' senate and with the participation of as many of the people as possible. In the case of a local church the anniversary of a church's dedication is celebrated with the rank of a solemnity.

## HEALING AND EXORCISM

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <i>The Situation Today</i> .....                  | 108 |
| <i>Instruction on the Prayer of Healing</i> ..... | 110 |
| Healing in the Church's Liturgy .....             | 111 |
| Miraculous Healing .....                          | 111 |
| In the New Testament .....                        | 111 |
| In the Course of History.....                     | 113 |
| Prayer Meetings for Healing Today .....           | 113 |
| Exorcism.....                                     | 114 |
| <i>Conclusion</i> .....                           | 115 |

### Bibliographical References

- S.C.D.W. "Les forms multiples de la superstition, 25 June 1975" (Christian Faith and Demonology), In *Vatican Council II: More Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1982.
- Congregatio de Culto Divino et Disciplina Sacramentorum, "Instruction on Prayers for Healing," in *Notitiae*, 414-415, Jan-Feb 2001 Vol. XXXVII, Citta' del Vaticano. Pp. 51-65.
- Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Instruction on Prayer for Healing", in *Origins CNS Documentary Service*, December 21, 2001, vol. 30: no. 28.
- Cardinal Medina, "Congregation Publishes new Rite of Exorcism", in *L'osservatore Romano*, n.5(1577), 3 February 1999.
- Peter E. Finks, *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*. Pp. 529-542.

## *The Situation Today*<sup>145</sup>

Today there is a general disbelief in miraculous healing and exorcism in comparison to generations past. Many cases that would in former days have been considered to be of possession are considered psychological diseases. Many biblical scholars find a natural explanation for the biblical accounts of miracles. belief in spirit possession is considered to be superstition. However, even the sceptic quite often encounters what is scientifically unexplainable.

At the same time there is an increase of healers among priests and even lay faithful. Prominent among these are the Charismatic groups. There are indisputable cases of healing, as well as many other cases of illusion. Masses for healing can attract great crowds and the preachers at these Masses can hold the attention of their congregation for an amazingly great length of time. Conversions are obtained at such Masses. People have been known to surrender their past acts of witchcraft on such occasions. At the same time there is much unease and even confusion of many of the faithful and clergy who are more inclined to the regular manner of Catholic worship. Even Masses for healing can sometimes be misused or misunderstood.<sup>146</sup> The clash between the traditional and institutional on the one hand, with the charismatic and prophetic on the other is nothing new. Most of the prophets clashed with the established religious tradition. Christ himself faced much opposition with the Church leaders of his day. So did his followers. But one may not by these facts rashly judge the case in favour of one side. Much of the opposition of the prophets, of Christ and of his disciples by the established religious institutions was due to resistance of the latter to change and to the challenge to conversion posed by the former.

The phenomenon of healing and exorcism is also to be observed as a widespread practice among many of the evangelical churches. In fact some of them consider as the basic characteristic of their

---

<sup>145</sup> Note for instance that in the code of Canon Law it is placed under "Sacramentals" (canon 1172), which in the Ceremonial of Bishop, under the same title (191-301) it is not mentioned at all. Incidentally canon 1172 is the only one that treats exorcism in the entire code.

<sup>146</sup> For instance cf. Joseph Willigers, *Pastoral Letter on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal*, Diocese of Jinja, 18<sup>th</sup> Oct. 2001.

particular denomination. One finds such places of worship named as “Miracle Centre”.

At the same time today, there is also a growing worship of Satan and the occult. There are many who have rediscovered the ability to tap supernatural powers and to use them for harm rather than for good. To counteract such practices there is need for a revival of the healing power for good.

The Church recognises the presence and the work of Satan. She does recognise the power of healing. At the same time she is aware of the vulnerability of people and the temptation for them to seek the sensational and the miraculous, some even as the basis of their belief. In the traditional liturgy healing and exorcism do not constitute the ordinary work of every priest. True there are rites of exorcism in the baptismal ritual, and the sacrament of anointing of the sick also includes the possibility of physical healing. But these do not require visible results. In general, it can be stated that the ministry of healing and exorcism has for some time gone to the background in comparison to what it was before:

“The special ministry of the exorcist, though not totally abolished, has in our time been reduced to a remotely possible service which may be rendered only at the request of the bishop; in fact, there is now no rite for the conferring of this ministry. Such an attitude to exorcism evidently does not mean that priests no longer have the power to exorcise or that they can no longer use it. Since, however, the Church no longer makes exorcism a special ministry, it no longer attributes to exorcisms the important role they had in the early centuries of its life. This development must certainly be taken into account. We must not conclude from these changes in the rites that the liturgy now shows a lessening or revision of the traditional faith. The Roman Missal of 1970 still bears witness to the Church’s convictions regarding the activity of demons.”<sup>147</sup>

Against this background there are questions that torment many of today’s pastors and faithful: Is there such a thing as possession or are they all psychological illnesses? Are modern medicine and

---

<sup>147</sup> S.C.D.W. “Les forms multiples de la superstition, 25 June 1975” (Christian Faith and Demonology), In *Vatican Council II: More Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1982. P. 473.

therapy adequate replacements of the ministry of healing? How can one distinguish between diabolic possession and psychological illness?<sup>148</sup> Is the power to heal ministerial or only charismatic? If it is ministerial, does this mean that all those who are ordained receive it? If it is charismatic, is it correct for the institutional Church to deter anyone who has the power from healing? Or to reserve the right to appoint those who can undertake the ministry? Is the ministry of healing essential or an accessory to priestly ministry? If it is essential does the non-exercise of this ministry a betrayal of one's duty? A lack of required faith, holiness and asceticism in the priest?

These are some of the observations and questions in the current situation which constitute a background against which we would like to examine the current teaching on healing and exorcism in the more recent documents, in the light of pastoral practice.

### *Instruction on the Prayer of Healing*

Presuming the acceptance of God's will, the sick person's desire for healing is both good and deeply human, especially when it takes the form of a trusting prayer addressed to God. Sirach exhorts his disciples: "My son, when you are ill, delay not, but pray to God, who will heal you."<sup>149</sup> Large numbers of the sick approached Jesus during his public ministry, either directly or through friends and relatives, seeking the restoration of health. The Lord welcomes their requests and the Gospels contain not even a hint of reproach for these prayers. The Lord's only complaint is about their possible lack of faith: "If you can! Everything is possible to one who has faith".<sup>150</sup>

Not only is it praiseworthy for individual members of the faithful to ask for healing for themselves and for others, but the Church herself asks the Lord for the health of the sick in her liturgy.

The Instruction on the Prayer of Healing distinguishes three different forms of healing in the Church: healing as contained in the

---

<sup>148</sup> Regarding the requirement to distinguish between psychological disease and diabolic possession see Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1673; Code of Canon Law, can. 1172.

<sup>149</sup> Sirach 38:9.

<sup>150</sup> Mark 9:23; cf. Mark 6: 5-6; "...And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief."

liturgical books, for instance in the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick; miraculous healing such as those obtained by one who has the charism; and exorcism, which would be expulsion of the tormenting power of the evil one from a person. It also acknowledges healing through natural means.<sup>151</sup>

#### HEALING IN THE CHURCH'S LITURGY<sup>152</sup>

Healing as contained in the Church's liturgy has already been described above. The liturgical prayer for the sick includes the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick, in which particularly in the Prayer over the Oil the Church prays also for the possibility of bodily healing. There is also Immediately before the actual anointing takes place, in the blessing of the oil, the Church prays: 'Make this oil a remedy for all who are anointed with it; heal them in body, in soul, and in spirit, and deliver them from every affliction.' And then, in the first two prayers after the anointing, the healing of the sick person is requested. Furthermore, the Roman Missal contains a Mass for the Sick in which, in addition to spiritual graces, the health of the sick is requested. In the Book of Blessings of the Roman Ritual, there is a Blessing for the Sick, in which, however, "the primary concern of every minister should be to show the sick how much Christ and his Church are concerned for them."<sup>153</sup>

#### MIRACULOUS HEALING

##### In the New Testament

Not only did wondrous healings confirm the power of the Gospel proclamation in Apostolic times, but the New Testament refers also to Jesus' real and proper transmission of the power to heal illnesses to his Apostles and to the first preachers of the Gospel. In the call of the Twelve to their first mission, according to the accounts of

---

<sup>151</sup> "obviously, recourse to prayer does not exclude, but rather encourages the use of effective natural means for preserving and restoring health, as well as leading the Church's sons and daughters to care for the sick, to assist them in body and spirit, and to seek to cure disease. Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Instruction on Prayers for Healing*, "The Desire for Healing and Prayer to Obtain it", p. 7.

<sup>152</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Instruction on Prayers for Healing*, "The Desire for Healing and Prayer to Obtain it", p. 8.

<sup>153</sup> *Book of Blessings*, 376.

Matthew and Luke, the Lord gave them “the power to drive out unclean spirits and to cure every disease and illness,”<sup>154</sup> and commanded them: “Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons.”<sup>155</sup> In sending out the seventy two disciples, the Lord charges them: “cure the sick.”<sup>156</sup> The power to heal therefore, is given within a missionary context, not for their own exaltation, but to confirm their mission.

The Acts of the Apostles refers in general to the wonders worked by them: “many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.”<sup>157</sup> These were amazing deeds that manifested the truth and the power of their mission. However, apart from these brief general references, the Acts of the Apostles refers above all to the miraculous healings worked by the individual preachers of the gospel: Stephen,<sup>158</sup> Phillip,<sup>159</sup> and, above all, Peter,<sup>160</sup> and Paul.<sup>161</sup>

In the conclusion to the gospel of Mark,<sup>162</sup> the perspective is broadened. The wondrous healings are not limited to the activity of the Apostles and certain of the central figures in the first preaching of the gospel. The same applies to the “charism of healing” in 1 Corinthians 12: 9; 28, 30.<sup>163</sup>

---

<sup>154</sup> Matthew 10: 1, cf. Luke 9:1.

<sup>155</sup> Matthew 10:8.

<sup>156</sup> Luke 10: 9.

<sup>157</sup> Acts 2: 43; cf. 5: 12.

<sup>158</sup> Acts 6:8: “Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.”

<sup>159</sup> Acts 8: 6-7: “The crowds with one accord listened eagerly to what was said by Philip, hearing and seeing the signs that he did, for unclean spirits, crying with loud shrieks, came out of many who were possessed; and many others who were paralyzed or lame were cured.”

<sup>160</sup> Acts 3: 1-10; 5: 15; 9: 33-34; 40:41.

<sup>161</sup> Acts 14: 3, 8-10; 15: 12; 19: 11-12; 20: 9-10; 28: 8-9.

<sup>162</sup> Mark 16: 17-18: “And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

<sup>163</sup> “To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,... And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues... Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?...”



## In the Course of History

In the course of the Church's history there have been holy miracle-workers who have performed wondrous healings. The phenomenon was not limited to the Apostolic period. There is also abundant witness throughout the Church's history to healings connected with places of prayer (sanctuaries, in the presence of the relics of martyrs or other saints, etc.). In Antiquity and the Middle Ages, such healings contributed to the popularity of pilgrimages to certain sanctuaries, such as that of St. Martin of Tours or the Cathedral of St. James in Compostela, as well as many others. The same also happens today at Lourdes, as it has for more than a century. Such healings, however, do not imply a "charism of healing", because they are not connected with a person who has such a charism.

## Prayer Meetings for Healing Today

With respect to prayer meetings for obtaining healing, an aim which even if not exclusive is at least influential in their planning, it is appropriate to distinguish between meetings connected to a "charism of healing", whether real or apparent, and those without such a connection. A possible "charism of healing" can be attributed when the intervention of a specific person or persons is viewed as determinative for the efficacy of the prayer. If there is no connection with any "charism of healing", then the celebrations provided in the liturgical books, if they are done with respect for liturgical norms, are obviously licit and often appropriate, as in the case of a Mass for the sick. If the celebrations do not respect liturgical law, they lack legitimacy.

In sanctuaries, other celebrations are held frequently which may not be aimed *per se* at specifically asking God for graces of healing, but in which, in the intentions of the organisers, and participants, the obtaining of healing has an important part. With this purpose in mind, both liturgical and non-liturgical services are held: liturgical celebrations (such as exposition of the Blessed Sacrament with Benediction) and non-liturgical expressions of popular piety encouraged by the Church (such as the solemn recitation of the Rosary). These celebrations are legitimate, as long as their authentic sense is not altered. For example, one could not place on the primary level the desire to obtain the healing of the sick, in a way

which might cause Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament to lose its specific finality, which is to “bring the faithful to recognise in the Eucharist the wonderful presence of Christ and to invite them to a spiritual union with him, a union which finds its culmination in sacramental communion.”<sup>164</sup>

The “charism of healing” is not attributable to a specific class of faithful. Rather all the spiritual gifts including that of healing “are activated by one and the same Spirit, who distributes to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.”<sup>165</sup> However, not even the most intense prayer obtains the healing of all sicknesses. So it is that St. Paul had to learn from the Lord that “my grace is enough for you; my power is made perfect in weakness”,<sup>166</sup> and that the meaning of the experience of suffering can be that “in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church.”<sup>167</sup>

## EXORCISM

According to article 8 of the Instruction on Prayer for Healing, issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (published 2001), “the ministry of exorcism must be exercised in strict dependence on the Diocesan Bishop, and in keeping with the norm of can. 1172, the Letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of September 29, 1985,<sup>168</sup> and the *Rituale Romanum*.<sup>169</sup>”

And so one may lawfully exorcise the possessed without the special and express permission of the local Ordinary. This permission is to be granted by the local Ordinary only to a priest who is endowed

---

<sup>164</sup> *The Roman Ritual: Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass*, no. 82.

<sup>165</sup> 1Corinthians 12: 11.

<sup>166</sup> 2 Corinthians 12: 9.

<sup>167</sup> Colossians 1: 24.

<sup>168</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Epistula Inde ab Aliquot Annis, Ordinariis locorum missa: in mentem normae vigentes de exorcismis revocantur: AAS 77(1985), 1169-1170.*

<sup>169</sup> *Rituale Romanum*, Ex Decreto Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II instauratum, Auctoritate Ioannis Paulii II promulgatum, *De Exorcismus et Supplicationibus Quibusdam*, Editio typica, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, MIM, *Praenotanda*, 13-19.

with piety, knowledge, prudence and integrity of life.<sup>170</sup> Such a life is often characterised by asceticism and trust in providence. When Christ sent his disciples to heal and cast out devils, he gave them strict commands not to take anything for the mission, but to depend entirely on the Father's providence. In the same way he himself went into the desert with practically nothing in order to combat with the devil.

### *Conclusion*

It is important for us to realise that the power to perform miracles is no guarantee of holiness. It may be as long as one has it. For even Jesus pointed to his works which bore witness to what he was. No one therefore can perform them in the name of Jesus unless Jesus approves of what he does. That is no guarantee that such a person cannot fall away from the grace of Christ. It is quite possible that when the twelve returned from one of their first missions and reported to Jesus how even devils obeyed when they commanded them in Jesus name, Judas Iscariot was one of those reporting. We have to recall Jesus answer which was also a warning, that they should not rejoice because of the ability to perform miracles. Rather they should rejoice because their names are written in heaven. The rather tragic story of bishop Milingo who for a long time exercised the gift of healing and had by that practice the utter trust and love of so many of the faithful, and who eventually married in the Moonie faith is another example.

Another important point to bear in mind is that miracles are not as important in demonstrating the power of God as many believe. On the contrary a God who continually demonstrates his power by miracles would prove to be a weak God; one who is rather forgetful of the needs of his children and who must intervene constantly by bending the laws of nature which he himself has established. Ours is an all-powerful God who laid down his plans from eternity, which plans simply unfold in time. Life is a constant miracle of that unfolding. To obey what he commands is to let his miracle unfold in our own lives. The miracle of evolution and natural selection, the miracle of instinct among unintelligent creatures, the power of human intelligence fully applied and used to solve human problems;

---

<sup>170</sup> Can 1172.

these are all evidence of this miracle of creation. Occasionally it may please him to intervene in a supernatural way for his all-wise purpose. When that happens we are grateful and we praise him as we do for all his works. But if it does not we ought to be equally content. A faith that does not feed on miracles and proofs for its sustenance is a more blessed faith, and this has the backing of our Lord's word to his apostle Thomas.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Quinn, J.R. ed., *Sacramentals*, in the Catholic Encyclopaedia, vol. 12, (2002) p. 54-58,.
- “The Sacraments and Sacramentals in General”, in DOL, 288-291
- Patrick Bishop, “Sacramentals” in *Dictionary of Sacramental Theology*, 1114-1116.
- “Sacramentals”, *Code of Canon Law*, can. 1166-1172
- “Sacramentals”, in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 1994. (English Translation for Africa), pp.408-411.
- “Definition of Sacramentals” in Anscar j. Chupungco. *Liturgical Inculturation Sacramentals, Religiosity and Catechesis*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992. Pp. 55-58.
- Ann Ball, *A Handbook of Catholic Sacramentals*, Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor Publication, 1991.



