

LAST AFTER TRINITY 2011 PROPER 25

Why should I speak about a Mass booklet? Well, I suppose in a way I feel a need to justify myself over this change from several booklets to one...and then there are practical reasons...because we'll find one or two tricky changes from what you've been used to...and when everything's compressed into one booklet, instead of the great variety that you've had here for a few years, we shall have to find different ways of coping with the variations which will still be part of our liturgy (for example through greater use of the weekly pewsheets). But I want to put off the practical points until later in this address...and to begin with a few thoughts about liturgical worship which, I hope, apply whether we've got one booklet, or several, or none at all.

You shall love the Lord your God, we heard Jesus quoting in today's gospel, and you shall love your neighbour. The first thing to say about the Mass is that it invites us BOTH to rest our attention on God, offering ourselves to Him in love...AND to rest our attention on human beings, offering ourselves to them in love. Let's think first for a moment about attention on *God*: we're talking about the human longing to encounter a living, yet unseen, God. Since He, the hound of heaven, is ever seeking *us*, we need to express our desire to seek *Him*; and the purpose of a well-ordered liturgy is to enable us all to participate in this encounter. And so we inherit a living tradition of special rituals and objects (holy things, that is, things set apart for worship), posture and roles (priest, deacon, server, musician, reader, and the people who are all *doing* the Mass...the liturgy, the *work* of the people of God); and this *living* tradition (living, not ossified), is grounded in the story of Jesus, incarnate, crucified, risen. It catches us up, all of us, into the very being of Jesus in His relationship with God the Father. And then let's think of attention to *neighbour*; this means that the normal relationships and obligations of human existence are not left outside church when Mass is celebrated; rather, just like the symbols of bread and wine, those relationships and obligations are the very stuff of the Mass. So even as the worshipping community seeks if you like, to take off its corporate shoes in the presence of the tremendous mystery of God (like Moses at the burning bush), it should be intensely aware of the realities of society, of humanity, and be drawn to respond to those realities with the love of Jesus, the man for others. Part of that response, most crucially, part of the liturgy's engagement with the realities of the world, is its taking seriously suffering and death...which is why the liturgy should never be a 'jolly'. Christian joy, Christian faith, hope and love do not explain away suffering, but they proclaim that it is ultimately not meaningless...and Cross and Resurrection, and the hope of future glory, are all re-called and set forth in the liturgy.

Whether or not, then, we have one booklet or many to assist us in our participation in this liturgical attention to God and to the reality of the world, we need clarity and a clear purpose. At the same time, we have to remember that human words and actions (to quote from the Alcuin Club handbook on Celebrating the Eucharist) 'will only ever be a partial and ultimately inadequate grasp of the reality of the worship of heaven'...and perhaps we might add, a partial and ultimately inadequate grasp of the reality of Christ-like engagement with our neighbour. I have a sneaking suspicion that the multiplicity of Eucharistic prayers, the vast range of alternative material for various parts of the Mass, is a refusal (unconscious maybe) to accept that our words and actions must always be inadequate when it comes to liturgical attentiveness to God and to the world. That's one reason why I feel happier with one booklet than

with many; we won't get adequacy by multiplying booklets. Another reason is that I believe that we do need, in this age of the supermarket shelf, a greater rather than a lesser sense of stability and rootedness. You will still find 3 Eucharistic prayers printed in our new booklet, one of them indeed a so-called traditional language rite (and we do sometimes use for musical reasons some of those traditional words); so it's not that all variety is denied to us and prefaces to the Eucharistic prayers proper to particular seasons and festivals, will be used...and the fact that they're not printed out in full will, I suggest, invite a deeper attentiveness to the particularity of the story and the significance of the season or the festival. Following in the book isn't necessarily the best way to give our whole being to an act of worship. Sometimes in the future, as I've hinted, the pewsheet will be needed to fill out detail for a special occasion.

Balance then: balance between attention fixed on God and attention fixed on neighbour both within the church and outside. That's the foundational balance. Balance between stability and variety. Balance between following the written word and looking, listening, longing in other ways (as we've been doing in the Tuesday lunchtime sessions). Balance between a sense of the transcendent, the out-there-ness of God...and the immanent God, Jesus in the midst, Jesus the man for others. Balance between the bringing to the Mass our own individual voice, concerns, thanksgivings (and the new booklet does have preparatory and concluding prayers for personal use), and the sense of fellowship and belonging which has been such a major rediscovery in liturgy over the last 50 or 60 years.

I did promise to mention the tricky changes: (1) 'and with your spirit', instead of 'and also with you'. For one thing, it sounds much better; for another, it's in the Latin of the western rite. But the important thing, says Dom Gregory Dix in his great work 'The Shape of the Liturgy', is that this response was interpreted by Christians as an acknowledgment of the particular grace of the Holy Spirit received at Ordination. The Celebrant then bids that the Lord whom he is called to present to the people should be with them; and they acknowledge the grace of his orders.

(2) for our good and the good of all His HOLY Church...again, the original Latin text included the adjective. The Church is human, yes; but it is set apart for God's work, set apart to draw men and women into the mystery of God's holiness. You shall be holy, we heard in the OT lesson today, as I the Lord your God am holy...which takes us back to our starting point; like the church herself, the liturgy brings us face to face with the mystery of the Holy God, and directs us towards the people and the world in which dwelt the Incarnate Lord. No booklet should ever distract us from these truths.