

With Word, Gesture, Song, the Liturgy Unifies the Assembly

Kathy Kuczka

As we were preparing for the liturgies of Holy Week, a colleague said, “I think the Good Friday liturgy is so monotonous. I mean, how many times can we sing ‘Jesus, Remember Me’? That same week, a parishioner came to me, saying, “I can’t wait until Good Friday. That’s my favorite liturgy! I could sing ‘Jesus, Remember Me’ all night!”

At times, I have come from Mass less than satisfied with the preaching that day only to hear someone exclaim to the priest or deacon, “Thank you. The words in your homily were exactly what I needed to hear today.”

As these examples illustrate, not all Catholics think alike. Words, music, symbols, and rituals are perceived in many ways. That’s because every parish includes a broad spectrum of the human family: men, women, children, teens, single people, married people, Democrats, Republicans, citizens and immigrants, those well-off and those who live paycheck to paycheck. Despite our differences and despite our culture’s affection for individual freedoms, the liturgy summons each member of the assembly to set aside his or her own self so that a community might be formed. As the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* states:

They [the People of God] are consequently to avoid any appearance of singularity or division, keeping in mind that they have only one Father in heaven and hence are all brothers or sisters one to the other. (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 95)

From the beginning of our liturgical celebration, we are being formed as one body in Christ. Walking into church, we become part of an activity that is in progress, gathering as God’s holy people. Dipping fingers into the font and blessing ourselves, we recall our common baptism.

As the entrance procession begins, the assembly members stand and unite their voices in song. Throughout the liturgy, the faithful are united by common postures, gestures, and prayers that call forth unity. This unity is evident in the preface, as we sing, “And so, with the Angels and all the Saints, / we declare your glory, / as with one voice we acclaim” (Common Preface, VI).

Singing together is a primary way that an assembly of individuals becomes one body. During singing, defenses crumble and people become vulnerable. With vulnerability,



As the assembly members raise their voices during the entrance song, divisions are set aside.

empathy grows toward our sisters and brothers in Christ. This is why the Church calls the community to sing together at the beginning and throughout the Mass. As *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* states:

So that the people might come together as one, it is appropriate that they always sing at least one piece as a congregation in the introductory rites—Entrance song or chant, *Kyrie*, or *Gloria*—apart from the sung dialogues of the Liturgy. (140)

The unity expressed in the liturgy is to strengthen us to move beyond our needs to the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Next time you sing your least favorite song at Mass or think that some element of the liturgy was too dry, too long, too boring, too repetitive, too (fill in the blank), rejoice and trust that the Spirit is at work, doing what the Spirit does—creating unity.

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