

How to Talk About Liturgy

Now that you have a committee that knows its role, a chairperson who hates wasting time, and a variety of temperaments and viewpoints, you can actually start doing the work for which the rest has only been a prelude: You can start talking about liturgies.

For this process to be successful, however, your group is going to need a common language: a shared recognition of a few basic liturgical goals, and a common agreement to try to separate personal preference and emotional reactions (important as they are) from the issue of good liturgy.

In this chapter, we'll try to give you a few basic liturgical principles that you can return to over and over as you try to make the liturgies in your parish better. We'll then review the major building blocks that go into creating a liturgy, and try to help you understand which ones might be causing you to react to any particular liturgy the way that you do.

Your Secret Agenda

Before we can begin to address the issue of what's good and what's bad, however, let's take a look at what people are usually talking about when they throw around the words "good" and "bad": the things that they like and don't like.

No matter who you are, no matter how objective you think you may be or how well educated in the areas of liturgy and worship, you have some preconceived notions, emotional reactions, and powerful memories that will affect any discussion of liturgy that you participate in. *Deep down, there is a way you like liturgy to be.*

It may be the way liturgy is in your parish right this moment. It may be some other liturgy you attended at some point in your past. It may be the way you imagine liturgies were like right after the Council of Trent, or during the

Eisenhower administration. It may be particular homilies that have moved you, songs you loved to sing, buildings you are attached to, or even simply the group you were a part of at one time or another. It may be the fact that you were a participant rather than a spectator. Do you enjoy seeing bishops and cardinals? Do you need to avoid wearing suits and ties?

Think about small details and incidents as well as Big Issues — they count, too. You may think you don't have a model in your head. Sit down, count to thirty, and think carefully. You *do*.

But let's suppose you really can't think of a truly outstanding liturgy that you use as your own internal paragon. Well, you have at *least* been to a liturgy that you *haven't* liked. One where a sense of formalism and distance put you off, or one where a phony folksiness came off as disrespect or incompetence. One where boredom and anonymity alienated you, or one where clubbiness and emotionalism nauseated you. Think of the homilies that have offended you, the music you've hated, the buildings that have distracted you with their ugliness. Think back to liturgies you attended when you were very young. What were they like? What do you feel about them now?

Now take these liturgies that come to your mind, good and bad, and use five or ten minutes to jot down a few thoughts about them, general feelings as well as specific things you loved or hated. You'll need to imagine these liturgies in some detail, because the way you feel about any liturgy you'll ever attend is determined to a great extent by its fit with those expectations.

That piece of paper you just finished working on is *your secret agenda*. It's what you like and feel comfortable with, and what you dislike and would probably work to oppose.

For a genuinely challenging evening, bring in these handwritten jottings and *exchange* them among the members of your parish committee, and devote a half-hour or so to mulling them over. An exercise like that would not only serve to bring out many of the issues that your members are waging clandestine battles over, but it will do one other thing: convince you that you can't *all* be right.

And that's the trouble. You may be tempted to believe — as we all are, on occasion — that the things you like on your written (or unwritten) secret agenda are what constitute *good* liturgy. Not just good, in fact, but right, proper, legal, and useful for others.

As a first step away from this point of view, you may have to slow down and force yourself to admit that everyone — even you — has at one time or another been moved by, and defensive of, something that was objectively “bad.” Even when the standards of good and bad can be easily determined by objective criteria (an out-of-tune organ or guitar, for example) there will always be those who find its out-of-tuneness as traditional, familiar, and charming as the incompetence of the person playing it. Bad music, bad architecture, bad reading, and bad customs will always find people to whom they are emotionally important.

Let's say that you, for some reason, were once moved by the children's choir's rendition of "Silent Night." As a liturgy committee member, you have to realize two things. One, it was OK for you to like it, and no one on any liturgy committee has any business telling you that you shouldn't have. You are not necessarily a mental defective, overly emotional, or a bad judge of music. But second, you do have to realize that you may rush to the following week's planning meeting ready to book the choir on a national tour only to find that everyone else on the committee thought it was a hokey arrangement, wrong for that particular liturgy, and sloppily done to boot. That doesn't mean your reaction wasn't valid, or that the children's choir has to be scrapped. But it does mean that you may need to jot down "children's choir" on your personal list of liturgical issues where you need to recognize your prejudices and emotional involvement — and, on occasion, disqualify yourself from a few discussions.

It is not our intention with this example to suggest that personal preference and emotions are lined up on the one side, and the demands of "quality" on the other. Far from it. Your secret agenda items are not irrelevant, or always wrong. They will be of incalculable benefit to your committee if they help make you passionate about liturgy and eager for others to experience the same positive feelings. Where your agenda runs into problems is not when it seems to bump into someone else's secret agenda, but when it bumps into what actually constitutes some basic principles of good liturgy.

What Makes Liturgy Good or Bad?

Let's return for a moment to two sentences from our American bishops' *Music in Catholic Worship* that we quoted back in Chapter 1:

Good celebrations foster and nourish faith. Poor celebrations may weaken and destroy it.

Notice first what these sentences imply about who liturgy is for. Simply put, liturgy is for *us*. This seems obvious, since we're the ones attending, but sometimes people act as if liturgy is something that we do for *God*. This makes a difference. We don't do liturgy because it somehow is divinely ordained to be particularly pleasing to God if we do it in a particular way. God appreciates our efforts, we're sure, amusing as they must sometimes appear. But the primary reason we do liturgy is because it seems to have some useful purpose in our own lives.

And that's the second important concept from those two sentences we quoted above. *Liturgy forms us*. Particular kinds of liturgy turn us, over the long haul, into particular kinds of Christians.

Before you nod your head in pious agreement, think about how people usually evaluate a liturgy they've experienced: by *how it made them feel at the time*. How we feel about a liturgy is important, and one measure of whether it was effective or

not. (A liturgy that we find alienating is unlikely to have much positive effect on us at all.) But that is not the true measuring stick for good liturgy.

Consciously or unconsciously, we usually evaluate the goodness or badness of a liturgy by the feelings we have conjured up, whether of reverence, community, solidarity, or whatever *How should our liturgies be evaluated?* Not by our feelings, but by our actions.¹

Now we're getting somewhere. Everything we try to do in liturgy, we do to turn us into better Christians, better disciples, more active participants in the life of Jesus. "Good" liturgy, over time, does that. "Bad" liturgy somehow fails to. A weekly fix of piety, self-congratulation, or just good feelings is not enough.

Yes, even a tacky liturgy, bad by virtually every conceivable norm, may be the liturgy that engages, supports, or turns around someone's life. Austin Fleming² reminds us that what we really are doing in our liturgy work is "preparing for liturgy," making the point that encountering Christ in liturgy is ultimately the work of the Spirit, not of our best-laid plans. But effective liturgies do tend to have things in common, and it is foolish to ignore what we know about the elements of liturgy that truly help make it powerful and life-changing.

In other contexts, we have no trouble accepting that we're shaped by our environment in all sorts of ways: by our parents, our ethnicity, the experiences we have in our workplaces and with our families. All those factors, over time, help make us who we are. Liturgy does, too.

You can imagine plenty of examples if you think about it. An evangelical community where the liturgies focus on personal testimonies and spectacular conversion stories will shape particular kinds of Christians — perhaps Christians who find it easy to see God at work in people's lives, but less easy to feel solidarity with the underprivileged, or connected with a long tradition of Christian discipleship. Some highly ritualized liturgies, well loved but from another era and culture, can shape Christians who see themselves living in clear antithesis to the world around them. A comfortable, white, middle-class suburban parish can easily shape Christians who find it difficult to imagine a responsibility that exists outside their rather homogeneous world.³

1. Tom Conry, "And Then, The Assembly Responds (The Practice)," *Pastoral Music* 6 (August-September 1982) 27-31.

2. Austin Fleming, *Preparing for Liturgy* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1997).

3. The Renaissance philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli, best known for *The Prince*, his tract of political realism, actually lamented the loss of the Roman Empire's pagan rituals of sacrifice. He felt they at least helped create a confident and committed people, while most Christian ritual seemed passive, and to discourage strong action of any type. He may have had a point — but please check with your local bishop before giving animal sacrifice a try in your parish. (See Sebastian de Grazia, *Machiavelli in Hell* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 101-02.)

Are all these “good” liturgies? In one sense, they’re certainly effective. As Catholic Christians, however, we have a liturgical tradition that we hope can steer us clear of many kinds of mistaken emphases, and shape us into committed, engaged people of prayer and action. We believe that our tradition can do it — if we can figure out how to allow it to.

How Does Liturgy Do What It’s Supposed To?

The process by which liturgy accomplishes this remarkable process of shaping us as Christians is complex. (If it weren’t, there’d be more good liturgy.)

Perhaps you have experienced a single liturgy that you can truly say changed your life. If so, that’s wonderful. But that isn’t what liturgy is necessarily about, or the best example of how it operates. Its real power is even more mysterious. In his marvelous book *The Art of Public Prayer*, Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman says that liturgy creates a world of symbols that acquire an amazing cumulative power over time.

That is the essence of worship — when it works: rituals are played out to their end until, like a jigsaw puzzle in time, a window onto reality opens up before the worshiper, who experiences an alternative world to the one he or she faces every day...⁴

What liturgy does is build an entire system of symbols and ways of talking about God that seem, over the years, to fit together into a coherent picture and a world we believe in. We hear the stories and experience the symbols again and again, and they have their effect. What happens to us at a particularly successful liturgy is a moment when the cumulative power of all those experiences snaps into place, and connections appear in a powerful way. Suddenly, the fire that is lit in darkness at the Easter Vigil reminds us of all the Scripture readings about light we’ve ever heard, and we actually see the Light that has shattered the darkness. The bread we see broken at the Eucharist suddenly becomes clear to us as the bread shared among the five thousand, the bread that unites us as brothers and sisters in the faith. “The discovery of pattern generates faith,” says Hoffman,⁵ and liturgy surrounds us with patterns in the hope that we’ll discover them. Gradually, the world they represent to us becomes real, and we begin to live as if the gospel and its demands on us were alive and active.

Good liturgy helps that symbol world and the patterns of our faith smack us head on. Every detail of the way we do liturgy plays its role, from where people stand and sit to the objects we use to the words we say. Let’s take an example. When we place the baptismal font at the entrance to a church, filled with water and a part of our experience every time we come together as a community, that

4. Lawrence A. Hoffman, *The Art of Public Prayer* (Washington: The Pastoral Press, 1988), p. 149.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

places baptism, quite literally, at the center of our understanding of Christian life. Someday, that font and its water may help us understand something powerful about our own baptism, and put us in closer touch with water as a symbol of death and resurrection. Similarly, when we debate how to work with music in the liturgy, it's because we believe that music brings words to life in a deeply sensory way. Over time, music expands and builds up our own mental "file" of Scripture passages, sayings of Jesus, ancient prayers, and even nonverbal images; they become part of our interior life, ready for connections to be made with them.

Bad liturgy, on the other hand, interferes with this process of helping us to see the patterns and connections of our faith, and has lots of subtle and not-so-subtle ways of doing so. Bad liturgy weakens the power of our symbols, with cardboard bread and puny fires that are unlikely to awaken the images and connections they need to. Bad liturgy sends mixed messages, simultaneously telling you (through poor seating or a hostile presider) that you're a passive participant at the same time it's trying to tell you that you are united with the disciples in dignity. Bad liturgy finds a way to exclude you from the assembly (through seeming indifference to your arrival and your participation) at the same time it is calling you to share in the life of your community.

We often don't mean to do these terrible things, but they happen nevertheless. Week after week, all the things we do in liturgy, important and mundane, either help build up this world of Christian symbols and patterns, or tear it down. In the rest of this chapter we'll take a brief look at *how* this happens: the major elements of liturgy that can help or hurt the work that liturgy is designed to do.

Liturgy's Three Actions

Here's one useful template that can help evaluate any basic element of liturgy, or any individual liturgy's success or failure. See if you are hindering, or clearing the way for, the three basic actions that liturgy needs to accomplish.

It is the Ryans' 20th anniversary, and their kids have surprised them with a reception in the parish hall (where young Jack was supposedly picking up his lector assignments before an intimate family dinner). All their old friends are there, and you can imagine the scene as they circulate and reminisce. At some point in the evening, young Jack will clink a glass, or tap a microphone, and deliver a speech whose text we all could predict in its broad outlines: "I just can't thank you enough for all coming out tonight. I know how much you all mean to Mom and Pop...each of you brings back such wonderful memories. I see the Marianos here, who took us in the night the furnace blew. And the O'Malleys, who have been like part of the family, despite the repeated episodes with the pink flamingos on the lawn...and

Mike Jablonski, who helped Pop do the roof when money was tight. I could go on...but right now I'd like all of you to raise a toast with me to two terrific people."

Jack's speech, we all know, must involve three elements. He acknowledges the gathering, he shares in the remembering, and he invites a response. In fact, his speech, with these mandatory elements, is a microcosm of the entire evening: The group has gathered, and remembered, and responded. It's no exaggeration to suggest that any liturgy, no matter what the style, no matter what the occasion, involves these same three elements. Omitting any one of them weakens the ritual's effectiveness — just as Jack, had he not welcomed the guests, or not reminded them of their history together, or not proposed the toast, would have failed in his role as the dutiful son and left everyone feeling as if something should have happened that didn't.

Think for a moment about Sunday Eucharist, looking at it through this lens. The gathering rite is there to help us know that we are gathered in Christ and acknowledge that we are there as one community; the liturgy of the Word reminds us of our common history and common purpose; the liturgy of the Eucharist is our common response to being gathered and reminded of our mission. We can help this structure of the liturgy work in concert, or we can neglect or mute the effectiveness of any of these three basic actions.

Even on a micro-level, within this large-scale structure, the dynamic of gathering, remembering, and responding is at work. Follow the eucharistic prayer and you will see the same pattern worked out again, ending with our response to the presider's invitation to proclaim the mystery of faith. In fact, all the details large and small we work on each week — the building blocks of liturgy we'll review in the next section, such as your building, your music, your lectors — affect whether these three actions can do their work on us. Buildings help, or hinder, gathering; lectors stimulate, or prevent, remembering; presiders and ministers invite, or discourage, responding.

We don't mean to present a magic formula that can diagnose or solve any liturgical situation or problem. But do write the words *gather, remember, respond* down on a little index card, and look at it now and then when you're trying to evaluate how well the liturgies in your parish are working — and as we begin, in this last section, to look at a checklist of basic liturgy decisions and ministries.

The Liturgical Building Blocks

Please don't regard the list we'll now take you through as a liturgical scorecard you can use every Sunday morning. Think of it instead as an informal assessment you may want to think through after attending a particular liturgy for the first time, or

when you need to take a few steps back and evaluate your parish's situation in general. Some of these items you'll have seen already in Chapter 5, where we proposed them as key agenda items for your committee's consideration; all of them are complex and important enough to have inspired many books and resources on their own. That's because they are the principal forces that can help, or stand in the way of, the work liturgy does, and because there are so many different ways of doing them right — and wrong.

You'll find lots of issues to consider here, from the subtle arts of music and architecture to something simple like a good p.a. system. We ask only that you not neglect the things that seem like a simple detail — it's amazing what a small change can do. Also, don't dismiss the big topics (like your worship space) because you feel they're "givens" you can't do anything about. Even if you're a new committee, and you're rightly intimidated about taking one of these big issues head on, be aware of its power, and keep it in sight as something you'll need to work on in the long run.

1. The Worship Environment

What did the space feel like when you walked in? Was the liturgy taking place in the most appropriate space available? What effect did the seating arrangements have? Was there a good enough sound system and lighting setup? Was lighting used creatively? What did the space communicate about the role of the assembly? About Eucharist?

When you enter an unfamiliar place for a Sunday liturgy, do you form an immediate impression of what that liturgy is going to be like? About what that community is like? About whether you are comfortable there or not?

We do — and we suspect that everybody somehow picks up messages from all the powerful architectural and aesthetic signals given off by your building and its fixtures. You are, quite literally, surrounded by your surroundings, and it is necessary to be sensitive to exactly what each detail is communicating. The space you're in is so powerful a force that all your best efforts in other areas may not be able to counteract it.

Many different styles and sizes of building can be effective worship spaces. Recognizing how yours can become a better one is a complex task, and one where experiencing lots of different buildings, studying the relevant church documents and guidelines, and finding some expert help will all be valuable. For now, just give some thought to a few of the ways your space might be affecting your experience of any particular liturgy.

Size and Distances

There is an ideal size for a worship space: big enough for the people worshipping in it, but no bigger. This, of course, probably helps you not at all. Perhaps the

problem is overcrowding — you're not likely to have the money to make a big church even bigger. Or, perhaps your building is far too large for the congregations that use it — the only way to make it smaller, after all, is to start over (or, of course, renovate a smaller space you could use for smaller Sunday and weekday liturgies).

The point, though, is that you should at least check to see if a liturgy is taking place in the best place you have available for it. A sparse crowd in a big church space will, like a gas, expand to fill the container provided; most Catholics don't come to church expecting human contact, and they will take up positions that "defend" them against such unwanted intrusion. By suggesting that you may want to develop a smaller space for small groups, we're not suggesting that you corral people into somewhere they don't want to be; we are suggesting that wide-open spaces are the enemy of participation and celebration.

Nor is every space renovation necessarily major. For example, if you do find yourself with more space than you actually require, a simple "renovation" might consist in strategically removing a few pews, especially near the rear of the church where adequate gathering space is often lacking. Ask your committee to take a hard look now and then at how well your space needs match up with the number of people you actually have.

Layout

Just as important as finding the right *size* space is the issue of how people find themselves seated. People need to be able to see what they are participating in — and what they need to see is not only the priest and the altar, but the other people they are there with.

Seating arrangements imply roles: Where do people sit in rows, all facing forward? In a concert hall or movie theater. Does that mean participation? No. It means you shut up, talk in whispers if you talk at all, and try to ignore any distraction from the person next to you. We hope it is not inappropriate to suggest that a dining room, rather than a theater, is a more relevant model you might set up in your minds for Sunday liturgy: people seated around a table, rather than people waiting for a show to begin.

Ugly and foolish as many people are, in liturgy they are not only *not* a distraction but an important symbol of what you are there to celebrate. Yes, in the long term the best course might well be a rather substantial and expensive reorganization of your church, one guaranteeing that everyone can see the face (or the profile) of at least some other people in attendance, and feel as though the altar and lectern are not set apart from them on a stage. Will you need to rip out your pews, move the altar forward, and arrange seating in a semicircle or U-shape around the altar? That's for you and a good architect to decide, but it may well be the case, and it may even mean you have to spend some money. If so, spend

enough to have the job done right — it may be the best investment you ever make, because you will be making a strong and permanent statement about what is actually going on in your parish on Sundays.

Audio

Just a little reminder that here in America, entering the twenty-first century, the art of sound reproduction has made remarkable advances. You do not have to settle for a sound system that fails to make what happens in the front of your church audible and natural sounding to a person even in the last row.

Step back and listen to your old p.a. system every year or so — during an actual liturgy. Is its signal lost in reverberation? Do voices sound electronic and amplified? Do things get too loud? Too soft? Are you using a p.a. system in a small space where you really don't need one? Do your gooseneck microphone stands creak whenever anyone steps up to the lectern and makes the mistake of adjusting one of them? Do you have dusty switches that CRACK into place at top volume when someone turns on a mike? Do you have enough mikes, and enough flexibility to give a group of guitarists and singers all the mikes they need, adjusted at proper levels? Does someone monitor and have control over how things sound *during* each liturgy?

Yes, we're talking about more money here, and the need to search out a genuine sound expert rather than Mr. O'Malley, your local electrician, who would be delighted to sell you a big order of speakers and amplifiers at, of course, a generous clerical discount. Good sound is one of the few major capital investments you need to make for good liturgy, and how subtly and smoothly the system works can make the difference between someone listening to the readings or looking distractedly out the window.

Lighting

While on the subject of capital investment, remember that while a church doesn't need to have the lighting flexibility of a Broadway theater, lighting *is* an important tool in which even the most ancient liturgical traditions require variety. Even for the simplest liturgies and buildings, it's invaluable to have a lighting system that is more than the customary on-off variety. ("On," in many churches we've seen, is using the term loosely.)

Lighting is a variable like words and music: It speaks powerfully of the mood you're trying to create, and focuses attention where it ought to be at a particular time. On the feast of Christ the King, your church may be ablaze with lights and candles. On the First Sunday of Advent, you may have only the sanctuary lit, in a darker, warmer glow. The contrast, on these two consecutive Sundays, will be striking enough to require no wordy explanation of the change in seasons. Find someone in your town who has some experience in theatrical lighting, and who

also recognizes the moods and rites of the liturgical seasons and feasts; ask for some specific advice about what you might need. (Again, watch out for Mr. O'Malley.)

2. The Priest

Did the presider set a mood and pace that welcomed people and encouraged celebration? How was the homily?

We've said before that a presider can make or break a liturgy. Your diagnoses of sad liturgical cases may well end right here: No liturgy can survive a presider who is uninvolved with the liturgy and its community or, even worse, not very good at what is admittedly his very difficult job.

Presiding Style

Part of this power to make or break comes not simply from his skill at writing and delivering homilies but from how well he fulfills the more personal requirements of his official role. That role is not to be the priest, or even the "celebrant" (you are celebrating, too). The priest at a liturgy is there to *preside*. Master of ceremonies? A bad pun, but perhaps accurate: At Sunday worship, a priest sets the mood and the pace, and serves as ritual leader of the community's prayer.

When this is well done the role itself is transparent, and you see an individual personality, yet one that is not imposing itself on the liturgy or upstaging it. Your impression is one of naturalness, and a sense that the presider is both comfortable and, imagine it, *happy* to be there. This gets communicated not by smiling all the time (revolutionary as that would be), but by working on the dozens of details that go into good presiding.⁶

Do your presiders make good eye contact? Do their gestures seem like uncomfortable poses, or like natural extensions of the words they're speaking at the time? Do they rush? Do they shout? Are they uncomfortable or perfunctory in those parts of the Mass not written down verbatim in the book? Do they sing when the assembly is supposed to be singing, or is that when they look around uncomfortably, waiting for it to be over? Do they feel compelled to ad lib or gab at every opportunity, like a talk-show host? Your only hope may be that in such specific details there are things that a strong planning group can help your presiders to correct, one by one.

Never underestimate the value of feedback. Priests do not get very much of it, aside from the perfunctory comments about the homily on the church steps. If you have a regular priest and a congenial, well-functioning group, you are in a good position to swallow hard and begin to point out the areas in which your presider

6. For a more in-depth description of the presider's role, see Robert W. Hovda's *Strong, Loving and Wise* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1976).

could use some improvement. They may be things he is clearly opposed to or incompetent at. On the other hand, they may simply be details he has never thought about before. Such a process does not need to be a hostile one, as long as those involved have the tact and good will necessary to provide constructive feedback.

Homilies

What your planning group *can't* do, however, is write homilies. You can torment yourself by reading books of outstanding homilies, and you can try to isolate the features that make up a good one: brevity and organization; power, and a call for change; eloquence; a sense that the preacher knows your deepest concerns, fears, and self-destructive habits; an absence of trite examples and tiresome doctrinal defenses; a reliance on the readings for themes and ideas. However you would describe a great homily, though, the characteristics of a bad one are equally numerous — occasionally funny, but usually just painfully annoying. A homily is often the longest uninterrupted liturgical action in any given celebration; you can never overestimate the overall effect a rotten one can have on how you reacted to a liturgy.

Again, do not underestimate the power of honest, regular, fair feedback. You are entitled to give it, and homilists need to hear it. Be specific and constructive: What would be a useful time limit? (As with many other events, time here is relative: Someone with nothing to say will always seem to take too long to say it.) Are there particular days in which you felt the homily could have been more oriented toward the readings or the season?

In the worst case, of course, a serious lack of skill cannot be overcome by corrective comments. As a last resort, don't overlook a long-term lobbying effort (and a commitment of parish funds) for the purposes of importing an occasional desirable presider or homilist from a local school, college, hospital, or monastery. Heaven knows that the shortage of clergy makes such an arrangement more difficult all the time, but *it can be done*. Whatever your strategy, however, do not be ashamed to make your opinions on this crucial variable known.

3. Music

Did the music make you feel like singing? Were the musicians performing, or leading? Were they musically competent? Did the selections reinforce or conflict with the overall mood of the liturgy and readings? Why was there music (or no music) at any given point?

As we've said throughout this book, picking music is your musicians' business, and disputes about Song A vs. Song B are too trivial for a parish committee's attention. Nevertheless, parish committees are going to need to evaluate music and

musicians periodically, and we hope these brief comments help you go beyond the usual skirmishes about likes and dislikes. (See “How Can They Keep from Singing?” at right.)

Music gets everyone riled up in liturgy committees in part because there are no “official” musical styles or compositions for the church (in spite of what some of your members would like you to believe; see “Pop Quiz,” page 85). The reason you use music in your liturgies is not simply because you’re supposed to, but because it is one of the most powerful tools at your disposal to make a liturgy work better. The evaluation of the music or musicians at any liturgy is much more properly oriented around not what songs they sang, or what instruments they played, but *whether they enabled people to feel more deeply what any particular liturgical action is all about.*

Take the beginning of the liturgy: It demands a spirit of community, gathering, and (usually) festivity. An opening song should, by its selection and performance, support and even help build that mood. Songs that fail to do this (through unsingability, poor warmup of the assembly, or bad performance) are pointless, and you’ll feel — rightly — as though you were wasting your breath doing something you weren’t enjoying. You need a real “lift” from an opening song, and that’s hard to get — but evaluate the music that opens your liturgy based on whether it succeeded in giving that “lift,” not primarily on whether you

How Can They Keep from Singing?

Liturgy committees are wonderful places to sample outrageous opinions on all sorts of matters. One of our favorite examples is the spectrum of opinions on why an assembly is not singing.

“The songs are all too high.”

“The music is too hard.”

“It’s too unfamiliar.”

“Men can’t sing well with women cantors.”

“The organ is too loud.”

“They need catechesis.”

“The choir sounds so nice I just want to listen.”

While there may be a grain of truth in many of these statements, we really have to classify them as well meaning but dead wrong. There are two often overlooked facts that beleaguered committees would do well to remember.

1. People will sing music they like, no matter how hard it is or how unfamiliar it is. Think about music people do sing along with — shows, pop music, Christmas carols, even the old reliable hymns. Much of this music is not particularly simple — but you hear the music and you feel like singing it. One of the biggest “hits” in recent church music is Michael Joncas’ omnipresent “On Eagle’s Wings.” Its popularity as a congregational piece sung by the assembly surprised no one more than the composer, who thought the piece too tricky, with too great a range. So don’t accept all the usual excuses about difficulty or unfamiliarity — they’re often smokescreens for music people don’t enjoy hearing.

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How Can They Keep From Singing?...continued

2. People need to feel like singing. Did the pastor just chew them out because the collections were low? Did your parish parking experience rival crossing midtown Manhattan? Is your assembly a group that is generally happy to be together, or a group of mildly mistrustful strangers? The best music in the world won't galvanize or motivate a depressed group, or one that needs lots of other kinds of ministry before music can join them together in song.

So don't overthink or overdebate this issue. Hire a music director who understands a wide repertoire, can train a good congregational choir, and can find cantors who like leading music rather than performing it. Tell your director when a song or arrangement is a hit or a dud in your opinion, but leave it at that.

Make good music. The people will sing when they're ready.

liked the words, or whether it was an organ song or a guitar song, or whether you like other songs better. Those are all subsidiary to the issue of whether the music did what it needed to do.

Or take the Gloria — due to its length and meter, it's usually considered a difficult part of the liturgy to deal with musically. Yet the guidelines for evaluating its musical treatment are fairly simple, if often violated. The Gloria is a prayer of praise; that implies two things. First, it belongs to the assembly: If you decide to use music to emphasize the Gloria it ought to be a musical setting that the congregation has some part in. (Better to leave the Gloria out entirely than turn your assembly into an audience.) And second, your musical setting had darn well better end up sounding like praise, or it's not worth doing. Don't sing the Gloria because you think it would be nice; sing it because by singing you can make it have more of the effect it was meant to.

What all this boils down to is three rather simple observations on evaluating music:

1. In general, liturgical music “works” when it supports the overall mood of a particular celebration. Someone who's great at finding songs wherein there is a clever tie-in in the fourth verse with a line from that Sunday's second reading is less valuable to you than someone who can find the song that creates the *right feeling* at a particular liturgical juncture. Words matter, but not as much as emotional rightness and memorability.

2. But words do matter. They matter not so much because of clever tie-ins which no one picks up on at the time, but because the words you're singing can have a subtle, subliminal clash with what's supposed to be going on. Read through the words of songs and ask yourself whether it at least makes some sense to be singing this today, on this feast, with these readings. Watch out for things that sound stilted, or just plain silly. And also double-check the words of even those songs that have just the mood you want; in the bright, upbeat "Blest Be the Lord," you'll find:

I'll not be shaken with the
Lord at hand.

His faithful love is all the
armor that I need

To wage my battle with the
foe.⁷

We hope that rules it out for most weddings.

3. Before you worry at all about specific musical selections, take an even harder look at *where* you use music in the liturgy than *what*. The four-hymn mentality (entrance, offertory, communion, closing) makes for easy planning and is still popular. But it neglects, for example, the priority of the psalm as a scriptural part of the liturgy that should always be *sung*, not read in unison.⁸ It also means that you may

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8. For more specific guidance about what parts of the liturgy take musical priority, see the Catholic bishops' statement on *Music in Catholic Worship* (see Appendix).

Pop Quiz

OK, time for a trick question. In a Catholic church, what do you call a group that only plays music that's at least 25 years old?

- (A) traditionalists
- (B) old fogies
- (C) the contemporary ensemble
- (D) the folk group
- (E) a schola cantorum

Sad to say, full credit is given only for answers C or D.

What's in a name, you may well ask. The problem is not so much the name, but the mindset that too often accompanies it. Never mind that while the "adult choir" may be singing the very latest from Haugen and Haas and Richard Proulx, the "contemporary" group is belting out St. Louis Jesuit favorites of the '70s, and yet managing to feel somehow that they are more "with it" than their counterparts.

Does your parish have a self-styled "guitar mass" or "folk mass"? Perhaps it's time to point out to the musicians at these liturgies that the bulk of contemporary composition is actually piano- rather than guitar-based (though much of it works well enough with guitar) and that it may be time to stop naming liturgies after musical instruments.

The consensus among liturgical musicians today is that an eclectic mix is perfectly acceptable. Whereas purists once were aghast at the thought of organ and guitar music at the same liturgy, styles have matured and tastes have adapted to the point where an organ gathering song can be followed by a piano-accompanied psalm, and by guitar and piano instrumental music as the gifts are prepared with no one

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Pop Quiz...continued

feeling as though a first course of paté had been followed by a platter of franks and beans. Of course your parish may not have the breadth of resources to make such variety available at a given liturgy, but know that coexistence is the norm, not the exception.

neglect the possibilities offered by opening and closing in silence⁹ on occasion, and risk emphasizing parts of the liturgy (such as the preparation of the gifts) that really don't need congregational singing for any better reason than to kill time during the collection. Examine where you sang in a liturgy based on where singing was liturgically sensible, and demanded by the importance of the liturgical moment, not where you wanted music to fill some imagined hole.

Now, after you've put your thoughts together on whether the music was well chosen and structured, you can evaluate the *skill and competence* of the musicians as *a separate issue*. And while good musicians' virtues are many and complex, perhaps it's simpler for our purposes to raise the specter of their primary vice: self-indulgence. You'll find self-indulgence lurking in two common forms:

1. *A love of performance*. The welcome rise of professionalism in church music does not mean that

9. Given what we said earlier in this section about the "gathering" function of an opening song, you might well ask how beginning in silence might make sense as a gathering rite. In theory, it works as follows: A liturgy beginning in silence focuses the community's attention on the entrance procession itself. If everyone can focus in that way, it can "gather" the assembly quite effectively on occasion. However, if your assembly can't see the procession due to your church's sight lines, or if the procession is as disorganized and careless as usual, or if the assembly isn't in place and ready to focus, then beginning in silence will just seem like someone forgot to announce the opening hymn. It's a good example of how a liturgy "tip" your committee may pick up on — some liturgy experts recommend opening in silence on Sundays during Lent — may shock you by seeming not to work well in practice.

churches are now concert halls or nightclubs. The more professional and well-trained the musician, however, the greater the temptation to let musical considerations outweigh the demands of celebration. There are music directors who have professional choirs sing important congregational parts of the Mass, and even ask the assembly to sit down during them to relax and listen. Similarly, brilliant organists can play too quickly, too slowly, or with too little attention to giving people an audible melody line; and cantors with operatic training often do a lot more to encourage passive listening than provide a role model for those who are normally a bit tentative about joining in.

Good pastoral musicians are always good musicians, but they also know that liturgical music has a special role, and that what they are doing is encouraging participation and prayer as much as providing great art or fun entertainment.

2. Being blind to incompetence. People do not sing along with, enjoy, or appreciate untrained, sloppy, amateurish organists, singers, or guitarists. Period. That means, in spite of what you may believe, that having *something* in the way of music is not necessarily better than having nothing. Music at Sunday liturgy is happily now considered normative. But that does not justify the continued employment of anyone whose contribution to a sense of celebration is, in the balance, a consistently negative one.

Obviously, except in extreme (and probably amusing) cases, opinions on such a topic will differ; some people are far snootier in their standards than others, and that's unavoidable. But, before deciding that the incompetence of the person doing the music was responsible for your not liking a liturgy, make sure you are not confusing musical competence with the issue of songs you don't like, music that's badly chosen, composers you detest, and styles or periods of music you are just never comfortable with. The issue of whether the music was appropriate for that liturgy is separable from the issue of whether it was competently done.

4. Visual Impact

Did the important liturgical symbols make the impact they needed to?

What we are trying to get across with the concept of "visual impact" is that certain liturgical symbols, actions, and objects are more important than others; you can reinforce their importance by making sure that they *look* important. What happens at your liturgy should be as clear and fully experienced by a deaf person as by anyone else there. Liturgies do not get their primary points across with words; they also speak in a visual language that has as its vocabulary the main symbols of our faith.

Cross. Altar. Cup and plate. Lectionary. The physical objects that first come to mind when you think of Sunday liturgy are the ones that, upon walking into a church, should grab your attention — through how they are lit, how big they are,

The Paper Chase

The same rule — if it's not necessary, get rid of it — goes for all the paper a congregation usually has to deal with while it's seated in the pews.

People need to be able to read about what's going on in a liturgy only insofar as it assists their spoken and musical response. That means that while music, words to hymns, and prayers other than the standard ones should of course be made available, anything else is only a distraction that works to reinforce a passive role and weaken the visual impact of what you're up to. This rather nasty statement includes, in its condemnation, your diocesan newspaper, your bulletin, prayer cards, and Bibles; useful as these publications are, they are for afterward, not for during liturgy. Most especially, we mean to exclude missalettes, which are to most liturgies what programs are to concerts: something to read for those who are just a bit bored with what's going on.

You can put together a worship aid — preferably a songsheet or other bulletin custom-made each week for a specific liturgy — to give people the music they need to participate. A simple and attractive hymnal is another alternative. Anything else, particularly if it reproduces the Sunday's readings, damages many of your liturgical efforts but none so completely as the impact of hearing Scripture proclaimed. Those readings are to be listened to, not read along with; missalettes and hymnals that enable people to follow along rob the readings of the power they have even with the worst of lectors. When people don't have the words in front of them, they actually need to listen; if they can follow along, it's often the case

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and how good a job people have done in peeling away needless distractions. The altar, the presider's chair, and the lectern should be, for example, the three focuses of the assembly's attention during a liturgy. A liturgical space with ornate side altars, banners with huge words on them, votive lights, statues and flower vases, manger scene, and a tabernacle dead center in the sanctuary is doing its subtle part to prevent people from focussing on what are, in the main, simple and powerful symbols and shapes. This is not to criticize baroque architecture or historic buildings. It is only to say that when you walk into a liturgical space what should dominate your attention is not the complexity of the space but its essential simplicity.

Visual impact is not only created by major forces like the art and architecture of your building. There are dozens of bad little habits that do their part to rob liturgical symbols of their power to communicate. An altar is an altar, not a desk; a pile of different books, a mike, multiple chalices, Father's glasses, the cruets, and two copies of the announcements distract people's attention from the bread and wine. Similarly, does the cup you use look like a real cup? Does what you use to hold the bread look like another cup, or like a plate or a bowl *meant* for bread? Eucharistic ministers are invaluable symbols of service to the assembly — but do you have so many ministers, lectors, and altar servers coming and going in the sanctuary that the roles of presider and

lector are robbed of their power? If you process in with the lectionary, and then the lectors use missalettes to proclaim at the ambo, what does that do to diminish the importance of the book you have carried in?

Most worship spaces we have seen could be significantly improved, not with expensive renovations or new artworks and fixtures, but simply by removing lots of items that over the years have crept into the sanctuary under the mistaken belief that they were helping things look more beautiful. You don't need to go out and strip churches bare, but it wouldn't hurt to insure that everything up in the sanctuary really needs to be there (also see "The Paper Chase," pages 88, 89), and that the important objects used in liturgy are permitted to look like what they are.

5. The Balance of Formality and Informality

Did the liturgy depart from ritual or tradition in ways that were distracting or pointless? Or did it adhere too closely to prepared texts or a ritualized model of liturgy?

As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, liturgy acquires a great deal of its power from repetition — from hearing the same stories and speaking the same responses, over and over. What would a wedding be without the exchange of rings? What would the Easter Vigil be without the Exsultet sung into the darkness?

The Paper Chase...continued

that the process of following along is itself absorbing enough to let the words go in one ear and out the other. The role of the lector becomes superfluous, and the care and preparation that goes into an excellent job of lectoring is drowned out by a wave of communal page-turning.

If you're concerned about people not being able to hear the readings, first pay attention to the p.a. system and your lector training program. If you have people in your assembly who are hard of hearing, we're sure you can make some arrangements for them to have copies of the readings available for their personal use.

Departing from some of those expectations, now and then, can bring a refreshing moment of humanity and real life into an otherwise dull liturgy. On the other hand, tampering with how the ritual is supposed to do its work is a tricky business.

There's a lot to be learned here in the extremes encountered in the way people choose to wed. Couples have gotten married while bungee jumping; in amusement parks; in swimming pools — all in an attempt to personalize this ritual event. Such over-individualization feels just as wrong as the couple that walks into City Hall and out five minutes later as husband and wife. We want our weddings, like our other rites of passage, to reflect both our individuality and our respect for some type of tradition. When we run to one or the other extreme we find the effect jarring, or at least discomforting.

How to avoid these equally disorienting extremes? In general, the answer is to work with the rituals we have. The authors of this book both pride themselves on their willingness to thumb their noses at the rules now and then. Nevertheless, doing so in the area of liturgy can easily do more harm than good.

Let's take a simple example: Sometimes a presider will decide to elaborate on the dismissal at the end of Mass — “The Mass is ended, let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord” — to include a little reprise of the homily: “The Mass is ended, let us go in peace to bring the words of the gospel to the world around us.” Or, in the interests of friendliness, that same presider will introduce a secular greeting at the beginning of liturgy, feeling the need to have a “Good morning!” dialogue with the assembly before the prescribed sign of the cross.

Harmless? We don't think so. In the first case, what inevitably happens is that a well-trained assembly will be thrown off its rhythm. Their response of “Thanks be to God” will probably be disorganized and tentative, since they won't be sure when the presider intends for them to come in. That robs them of the final word, and overemphasizes the presider's already dominant role. In the second case, the friendly “Good morning!” subtly lowers the priority of beginning our prayer with the sign of the cross — and again, makes a bit too much of the role of the presider, who may be doing it out of a sense that without it he's being impersonal. (Actually, it's probably that he's been watching too many cheery talk shows, or wants a bit too much to be liked.)

So we think that the liturgy should have a warning label on it, the way many of your electronic appliances do on the back of the cabinet: Most repairs or adjustments should only be done by trained servicepeople. Departing from what the ritual prescribes can be necessary and helpful at times — your first duty, after all, is not to the rules but to the community you serve, and if some practice is a genuine benefit to your community's celebration it deserves a hearing whether it's “official” or not. (As your committee becomes more experienced, you'll also develop

a more confident sense that some departures from the norm are less harmful and troubling than others.) But just as often, your inventions and innovations can rob your assembly of a moment or a word they're entitled to, and water down the power of liturgy to do its work. The best liturgies generally accomplish what they need to do while still sticking pretty close to the ritual texts, using flexibility where it's offered and encouraged (see "Creative Writing," at right) but making sure the basics are allowed to do their work without obstacles or interference. As Aidan Kavanagh recommends, "Do the liturgy with directness and vigor"¹⁰ — that is to say, apply your creativity and energy to the rituals we have, not to inventing changes.

That may sound off-putting, we know. Yet we think you'll be happier in the long run. All we ask is that when you're "sticking to the rules," make sure that you're following the real rituals and traditions of the church, as expressed in the church's liturgical documents and by its best liturgical theologians and practitioners — not your pastor's idea of what the rules are, your music director's, what you happen to be familiar with, or what you heard once at a liturgy workshop. The famous conductor Arturo Toscanini said frustratedly that in music, tradition was just "the last bad performance." That's also often true in liturgy, where all sorts of crazy ways of doing things quickly

10. Aidan Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite* (Collegeville: Pueblo, 1982), p. 96.

Creative Writing

It's surprising how few parishes pay attention to the one part of the liturgy that demands a community's creativity and input: the prayers of the faithful. While the sacramentary suggests some overall concerns that should be addressed in these prayers each week,¹ this is clearly a time for your own parish to voice the problems, needs, and even lamentations that you feel need God's continuing attention.

There are plenty of publishers that can deliver your parish a regular list of suggested intercessions. Don't use them. Besides being generally badly written, they can't begin to reflect the issues your own parish needs or wants to raise in prayer each week. Remember, it's much less important that the prayers change all the time than that they be yours. What kind of an area do you live in, and what does it need? Is your parish filled with children, with the elderly, with the unemployed? What problems in the world or your community are on people's minds this week, or every week? What about the other churches near you — what might you pray for together? Questions like these will always be a better focus for your intercessions than any canned effort to tie them in to the day's Scriptures or the homily.

Good intercessions can be written in a variety of styles, from the simple to the almost flowery, but what they have in common is that while customized for your parish, they're still "general" in the sense that they avoid specific recommendations, specific people or events, and specific solutions. One sure-fire cure for the overly specific, by the way, is the simple elimination of the "that" clause. You know what we mean. It's when our prayers for the poor, or

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Creative Writing...continued

whomever, go on to recommend what should happen: “For the poor, that they may find jobs and a welcome place at God’s banquet table.” “That” clauses tend to get preachy, and try to tell God how to fix some fairly complex problems. If the intercessions simply remind us that our community and our world have problems that need to be placed before God, week after week, they’ve done their job.

1. For the needs of the church, for public authorities, for those oppressed by need, and for the local community. (General Instruction on the Roman Missal 46)

become “traditional” even though you will search for them in vain in the church’s rituals and most recent liturgical documents. Liturgy committees are often hungry for rules and guidelines, and there are plenty of them out there — but stay cynical enough to know when you’re being sold a bill of goods, or something that just won’t work.

6. Pacing

Did the liturgy all seem the same, or were there parts that seemed particularly important or well done?

A sense that you need to stick pretty closely to the liturgical ritual’s outline and texts can, unfortunately, often lead beginners to a sense that everything that takes place in a liturgy is equally important. That is not at all the case, and much bad liturgy is bad simply because it fails to understand which parts of the liturgy are the important ones, and how to create a setting in which they make the impression they need to.

To take just one example, many good liturgies successfully emphasize the gathering, the readings, the homily, and the eucharistic prayer simply through ensuring that the parts of the liturgy in between these elements are dispatched with the greatest possible simplicity and lack of delay and bumbling. In this scenario the readings, surrounded by carefully maintained periods of silence and read with deliberateness and power, can have a chance to stand out. Such emphasis, however, will also

require a deemphasis on, say, the often endless period between the end of the prayers of the faithful and the preface. Clogged with a collection, a song or a choral piece, a procession, prayers over the gifts, and lots of dead time with people sitting around waiting, this period can instead be got through quickly in a swift, well-coordinated effort to get that done with simultaneously, smoothly, and quickly.

By stressing one important part of the liturgy, you do not denigrate another. In liturgy, departures from the norm grab people's attention; by carefully regulating the way your liturgy ebbs and flows, you can use this fact for constructive purposes, and not simply annoying ones.

You may also find that you're giving some parts of your liturgy the wonderful gift of silence. Just as you can create more visual impact for the principal symbols in your church through removing visual distractions, you can give some parts of your liturgy more power by surrounding them with a silence that suggests that something important is happening.

7. A Sense of Occasion

Did you feel welcome? Did you feel as if what was going on was important and significant?

Most good liturgical communities spend an awful lot of time talking about making people feel welcome. What they are after might best be described as a sense of occasion.

Such issues are often too quickly

Ask Me No Questions

Someone on your committee may someday have the bright idea of taking a parish or community survey on liturgy. Or, more likely, you'll think of a survey when your committee is at loggerheads on some thorny questions it can't resolve. "Let's ask people. That'll settle it."

It probably won't. Let's consider a few guidelines and caveats on surveys.

First: The more concrete the question, the more a survey will do for you. If you want to know how old your parishioners are, where they're from, what their educational background is, what liturgy they go to and how often, a survey can give you terrific information. But if you're trying to find out whether people prefer organ music or guitar music, or even whether they like your liturgies, then you're in trouble.

The problem is not the idea of asking. It's that questions about people's attitudes are a lot harder to get meaningful answers on. Many people, despite the strong and deep feelings they have about liturgy, simply haven't spent much time analyzing why they react the way they do — and even if they have, it's entirely possible that their judgment about what's causing their reaction is dead wrong.

Written questionnaires are great at quantifiable, A vs. B issues. But it's rare that a liturgical question can be boiled down to A vs. B. (The ones that can — "Would you rather hear a homily by Father Baker or Monsignor Ferrone?" — probably won't get asked.) Let's take the oft-tried question "Do you prefer organ music or guitar music?" You can phrase this any number of ways; yet what you're probably measuring is not some

continued...

Ask Me No Questions...continued

sort of general stylistic preference but (a) opinions of your organ music and your guitar music (or maybe even someone else's); (b) whatever awful thing comes into people's heads when they hear the phrase "guitar music." You're also, of course, neglecting the fact that many people like both, if they're done well.

Even something as simple as "Do you think the 10:15 liturgy is too long?" is laced with more complex issues. If it's a dull and careless liturgy, of course it's too long, and cutting 15 minutes off the back of it won't make people like it one bit better. Many companies ask prospective customers if their products cost too much, and of course people answer yes – if they don't really want the product in the first place.

It's even tougher to ask more open-ended questions about what people want in a liturgy. Just try to find some unloaded words that all mean the same thing to everybody. Do you prefer something prayerful? Traditional? Spiritual? Formal? Informal? Our answer to a question like that, like yours, is probably sure, all of the above — or none, depending on what you mean.

We're not opposed to gathering information — but make it information that helps you understand who you're working on a liturgy for, not something that will make decisions for you. A good demographic portrait of who attends your liturgies (or even better, who doesn't attend them) can be a great stimulus to a committee's thinking. But if you're doing a survey to settle an argument, be advised that it will be no substitute for work that's based on judgment, creativity, and just a bit of gambler's instinct.

lumped together under the heading of "hospitality," and palmed off on the poor ushers and the coffee committee. Yet having someone at the door of the church, smiling and handing out song sheets as people come in, is only one step toward creating a real sense of occasion. Whether people feel welcome and happy to be there when they walk into your church, and eager to stay around after they leave, has very little to do with whether you even *have* ushers. Instead, you might look at what sort of behavior your worship space is silently encouraging as soon as people walk in the door — because that's when the liturgy begins, not when Father crosses himself.

Take a look around your worship space before Mass. Is your presider in the church, carrying on conversations with people? How about the musicians and the other ministers — is anyone in evidence at all? Are they seated quietly whispering to each other, or carrying on conversations with their colleagues and friends in the assembly? Is there music playing which is telling people to be quiet? Or is there a hubbub of conversations and greetings as people come in and find seats next to their friends and neighbors? All these things may seem to you to be breaking (unwritten) rules concerning pre-Mass behavior, and indeed there may be particular feasts and seasons where you'll wish to break the mood of warmth and conviviality. Nevertheless, on most average Sundays, you're looking for a spirit of strong

congregational participation and listening, and a liturgy that begins from a silent, cold start is almost impossible to get moving later.

If you want your church quiet when you walk in, then you'd better realize that there are inevitable tradeoffs in terms of how welcome and enthusiastic people will feel, not only when they walk in the door but throughout the entire liturgy. Yes, some people welcome a brief moment of quiet before Mass begins. But others will be subtly put off by people's unwillingness to make eye contact or talk with them, or by the disapproving stares their three little children get when they can't conform to your unspoken complete-silence-before-liturgy policy. People who feel that way are unlikely to be open to the messages the rest of your liturgy is trying to send.

Take the temperature of any liturgy before it even starts, and be aware that there are many ways to adjust that temperature that don't violate either the letter or the spirit of the ritual. For example, particularly in large parishes, people may well need to be invited to greet one another — *every week*. Or, consider having the presider in place throughout the musical preparation. If he's participating, people may be more inclined to take it seriously — and, perhaps, to show up on time.