



Monastic Musings

Summer 2013

Welcome

By: Right Rev. Barb Martzall



Summer has arrived for us here in New England. Personally it is the season I enjoy the most. Everything is in bloom and thus the colors around me are wonderful. The fragrances are many - even if some do not seem very pleasant! Summer is just so vibrant.

In this newsletter, Mother Myrella and I are going to address the topic of Liturgy/Mass and Spirituality. I suspect it is going to take this newsletter and the Fall newsletter to really accomplish the goal we have set out for ourselves. What are our objectives for this topic? Well, for this newsletter: 1. Understanding the purpose

of Liturgy/Mass; 2. How Liturgy/Mass can increase our spirituality if we allow it. 3. Symbols within Liturgy/Mass that helps us to grow spiritually. For the Fall newsletter: 4. The role of Holy Orders and laity within Liturgy/Mass and spirituality; We want to help each of you grow stronger in your love of God and to feel His love within you each and every day. Remember, attending Liturgy/Mass should be something we really look forward to and not just a requirement.

The Liturgy/Mass – A Glimpse Into Heaven

By: Right Rev. Barb Martzall & Rev. Mother Myrella LeClair

Let's start with a definition of Liturgy/Mass so that we are all on the same page. Liturgy/Mass is the form or rite or system of rites prescribed for public worship; it is a customary repertoire or repetition of ideas, phrases, or observances. Liturgy/Mass is worshiping God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit for all their gifts given to us. Yes, there is a basic format of worship used by each denomination throughout the world. Let's be clear, no worship service format is better or more sacred than another since each service expresses the spiritual teachings and beliefs of the denomination and how they perceive Liturgy/Mass.

There is nothing wrong with having a set format to a Liturgy/Mass so long as that is not what becomes important. It is the content within the Liturgy/Mass that becomes the important "food" for the people so that they can grow spiritually as a Child of God.

If we take the time to "study" different Liturgies/Masses, we see a "table of contents" or framework that basically is the same in all of them. First, there is the: gathering, call to worship, entrance or great entrance. This usually consists of some uplifting/rejoicing hymn of praise and an opening blessing from the celebrant. Second is the proclamation of scripture for the day.

Third is the general confession from the congregation. Fourth, there is the communion or Lord's Table where there again are some uplifting hymns of thanksgiving. Finally it is the leave taking, the blessing by the celebrant, and the closing hymn of praise. This brief description is the framework of all Liturgies/Masses although there are many different formats depending on the denomination's teachings. Some are very simple and straightforward while others are very ornate, long and repetitive. But if you understand the "table of content" of the Liturgy/Mass, you can very easily see the purpose of the Liturgy/Mass – The thanksgiving and praise for God's love of us and our love for God.

The biggest barrier to attendance is that usually many of us from a Western liturgical tradition view attending the Liturgy/Mass as a requirement or obligation. That is not what Jesus taught His followers. The original Liturgy/Mass was a gathering together to share a meal while talking about religious/spiritual topics, usually in the evening, joining together in prayer to praise/thank God for the blessings since the last gathering and then sharing communion together. They would then depart to their respective homes and communities until the next gathering. As time went on, a more formal gathering (Liturgy/Mass) was developed, and in that process, various gatherings (denominations) started to apply rules to the content and the form of their worship services! In the process, the true meaning of the purpose and focus of the Liturgy/Mass was often lost. Attendance became a duty to fulfill if you wanted to get to heaven! No longer was the focus on how you lived your daily life but did you attend Liturgy. The idea of "family" was lost somewhere along the way. Attending Liturgy/Mass became an institutional requirement instead of a joyful celebration in which people gathered together as a loving family to share a meal and to praise and thank God for His unconditional, everlasting love.

So if attendance at Liturgy/Mass is not a requirement for Salvation, then what is the purpose of Liturgy/Mass you ask? Liturgy/Mass is the coming together of "like-minded" people to celebrate God's Love for them and their Love for God. The time spent within the Liturgy/Mass is a period of rejoicing and thanksgiving. The readings and the music should be uplifting to everyone. It is a place where one can "refuel" his or her spirit so as to be able to go out into the world, demonstrating God's love to all with whom you come into contact. It is also a time where you can learn more about God and how God will help you within every area of your life – if you are willing to listen and follow His instructions. Liturgy/Mass offers you a space where the world is kept outside of the church doors and you, along with all of the other congregants, can just concentrate on hearing God talk with you and you with Him! In essence, you ascend as the Body of Christ and arrive at the altar of God, resting in Him but for a moment and then it is time to return back to this world where you are charged with extending His Peace and Love -- His Salvation – to all whom you encounter, just as Jesus did. You have been blessed with a glimpse into Heaven and an encounter with the Divine.

How Liturgy/Mass can increase our Spirituality

By: Right Rev. Barb Martzall & Rev. Mother Myrella LeClair

In addition to being a joyful gathering, Liturgy/Mass can help us grow in our spirituality if we allow this to happen. However, we must be willing to approach our attending Liturgy/Mass with a very open mind to the idea that we will learn more about God and ourselves.

Our spirituality reflects how we see God, ourselves and others. If we constantly keep our eyes on God, we will then find ourselves being drawn to worship with others. Worship draws us closer to Him. When we worship Him, we imitate the angels and saints who surround His throne in heaven. We are drawn out of this life and catch a glimpse of the next. The Liturgy/Mass and the other services of the Church are not mere human ceremonies or social hours; they are a participation in heaven here on earth. When we reach the understanding in our minds that heaven and earth are joined together during Liturgy/Mass, the whole feeling of the service changes to one of sheer joy! We hear God's words spoken to us, and in turn we pull those

words into our hearts. There the words start to take shape as to how we will move forward to share God's love with others. As the joy increases in us, we find ourselves overflowing with emotion, and we are drawn to sharing it with others who are "hungry" for the Word.

Let's look at Liturgy/Mass in this manner so that hopefully you can see how your spirituality will begin to grow. You decide you want to go to church. You park your car, walk up the sidewalk and reach for the door. You realize for a moment that you are about to enter a space where time stands still and the world is kept out. You walk through the door and find a place where you want to sit. In the quietness of the moment, your eyes fall upon the statues, icons, etc. and you feel a little tug in your heart. That tug is telling you that you are at your true home for a while. The organ starts to play and you let your mind soar with the music – you might even hear the choir of angels of heaven singing. You join in with the hymn being sung and your heart becomes even lighter. As you go through the Liturgy/Mass reading and saying familiar words, you find yourself moving more and more away from the world you live in into a world that is full of peace and joy. It is time now for Communion; so, you join the others as they walk to the altar to receive the Holy Gifts that have been blessed by the Holy Spirit at the altar in Heaven. You are at that moment one with the saints and angels just as heaven is one with earth. If you have allowed yourself to completely feel the peace and love, you may think that you are just floating in air as you return to your seat. What a wonderful sensation of God's Peace and Love you may be experiencing – even if it is just for an instant! That sensation arises because you have set aside the world you are living in to enter into the church (heaven) for a period of joy, relaxation, learning, and renewal. For the period of time, it is as if the world just does not exist at all. Communion is now over and you hear the organ start to play. Now you realize that the Liturgy/Mass is about to end. Are you sad? – I would hope not. Hopefully, you will take the wonderful feeling you just experienced into the world as a spiritually renewed person who can share God's love with others and not be just another person who leaves church and returns to old habits of life.

Liturgy/Mass is a safe place where we can experience what it must be like in heaven. It is a time for us to be able to do some healing within. It is also a place where we can allow our minds to connect with God without any concerns of what is happening around us but to just be still for a moment. Spirituality takes many different forms for each person, but it all leads to Joy and Happiness through God's love!

Symbols within the Liturgy/Mass

By: Right Rev. Barb Martzall & Rev. Mother Myrella LeClair

A symbol is an object that represents, stands for, or suggests an idea, belief, action, or material entity. Symbols take the form of words, sounds, gestures, or visual images and are used to convey ideas and beliefs. Christian symbolism invests objects or actions with an inner meaning expressing Christian ideas. The Liturgy/Mass is imbued with many symbols; however, in this newsletter, we will touch upon a few of the simple elements which speak to us of the sacred.

Bells signify the call to devotion and prayer. Before a Liturgy/Mass begins, we hear the bells, which remind us that it is now time to turn our thoughts to God and to join with our brethren in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving.

We assemble together in the **Church building**, which symbolizes the Ark of the Covenant and the Holy of Holies. There is a **Cross**, located somewhere on the external of the Church property, represents Christ's mode of death but symbolizes His triumph over death.

The Liturgy/Mass often begins with a **Procession**, which signifies the journey of the soul to God.

Within the Church are contained simple elements of everyday life, which are transformed into both sacred objects as well as sacred symbols. These elements include bread, wine, water, fire/light, and oil.

Bread and Wine: Humans grow and transform wheat into bread and grow grapes, crush them, and transform them into wine. Bread is a symbol of life, and wine is a symbol of joy. During a Liturgy/Mass, the celebrant lays hands over the bread and wine, and calls upon the Holy Spirit to consecrate the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. In solidarity and thanksgiving, the congregants can come together to eat and drink, becoming one body. This act is a symbol of the common love and fellowship they share in Christ.

Water: Water, like food, is a necessity for the human body. Christ provides us with “living water” to nourish our souls just as He did for the Samaritan woman at the well. The water used within a Liturgy/Mass has been blessed. It is a symbol of our Baptism. We use this water to bless ourselves in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Fire/Light: Fire and Light, such as in a candle flame, symbolize the presence of God. Christ is the Light of World who gives this light to all of His disciples so that they may be transformed and radiate His transforming Light to all.

Oil: Oil is a symbol of grace and blessing. It is used to anoint a person for a special mission. The word “Christ” means the “Anointed”. Although oil is not commonly used in a Liturgy/Mass, it is an important symbol because “we are the community anointed to continue the work of Christ, the anointed one.” Through our Baptism, we have been anointed as Christ’s disciples.

In addition to the everyday elemental symbols mentioned above, there remains one more important symbol within the Liturgy/Mass: the **Altar** upon which it is celebrated. The altar is a symbol of Mount Cavalry (the place where Christ was offered for the sins of the world) as well as the Tomb from which He escaped and rose from the dead to give us eternal life.

Hopefully, this simple explanation of some of the basic symbols you encounter during a Liturgy/Mass will broaden your spiritual understanding and will serve as an invitation to you to reflect on the spirituality and mystery of our Faith and God’s grace and presence in your life.

Reflections on Liturgy/Mass

By: Right Rev. Barb Martzall

Over my years as a Christian, I have had the pleasure to attend many different denominational churches. Each one brought to me something very unique. Within the Quaker faith, the community does the teaching of the homily after a great period of silence and meditation (much like a “Lectio Divina”) where they allow the Holy Spirit to share with them the meaning/teaching necessary to be shared with the gathered community. In the many Anabaptist churches (Mennonite/Amish/Brethren/Moravian), Communion is received only several times a year. They have lots of music including instruments praising and thanking God. Their focus is on “how do you live your life as a child of God as an example to others”. Then there are the more “formal” denominations, such as the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox Church, Lutheran Church, and Episcopal Church, which have developed a very “rigid” worship service. In my opinion and from what I have observed, they have lost the focus of “how do you live your life as a child of God to be an example to others”. Usually, that focus is found in their monastic houses! What I have observed over the years is that people go to church because they must; they worship as they are taught, and then they leave the church building picking up exactly where they left off before going to church. That is not what Liturgy/Mass is all about. It should be a “tool” to help us change our lives in such a way that we are shining forth God’s love to everyone we come into

contact with. Liturgy/Mass is the gathering of like-minded people for thanksgiving and praise for all God has given us every moment of our lives.

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