

A Theology of Lay Liturgical Ministry

“But you are a ‘chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises’ of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1Pt. 2:9).

All who serve in the orderly and faithful celebration of the Eucharist are baptized members of the Body of Christ, baptized priest, prophet and king. All of these Liturgy Ministers have both the right and the privilege to participate in the ministry of Christ. Participating in the ministry of Christ leads us to bring Him into our homes, neighborhoods and workplaces. It also leads the faithful, by virtue of their baptism, to bring His Real Presence to the liturgy. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* tells us that the most fundamental expression of our lay ministry is the “conscious, active and fruitful participation in the mystery of Christ”¹ Being in service to the greatest prayer of the Church is indeed a privilege.

The celebration of the Eucharist is the “action of the whole Church”² and as such, everyone in the assembly has an “individual right and duty to contribute their participation”.³ The first and foremost duty belongs to the assembly. We who do not hold specific designated roles must still take seriously our role as members of the assembly responsible for revealing Christ’s Real Presence in the Eucharist. Those with specific designated roles as Liturgy Ministers have the right and the duty to fulfill their ministries with grace and competence.

The diversity of roles, functions and ministries enriches the Eucharistic celebrations and assists us in our prayer. “Starting from Vatican II, the Church has continually drawn more people to participate in her activities. In liturgical celebrations, the faithful ‘should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; on the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration.’”⁴ This is even more the case for those of you God has called to the designated service of the liturgy as Liturgy Ministers.

A Spirituality of Lay Liturgical Ministry

- **Liturgy Ministry flows from baptism.** This means that Liturgy Ministers, including members of the assembly, should spend time more deeply understanding and living the promises of baptism and the profession of faith. Resources at the end of this booklet can help you begin that journey of unpacking just what happened to us when we were baptized.
- **Liturgy Ministry is a response to a call from God.** If you are reading this, you are either sure God has called you to this work or you are discerning *if* God is calling you. In either case, when God calls us to service, God is also calling us to integrate our spiritual lives with our daily lives. There are a number of actions you might take to give outward signs of your integrated life in

¹ General Instruction of the Roman Missal. Introduction #5.

² Ibid.

³ GIRM Chapter 111, #58.

⁴ Sacrosanctum Concilium, #48 in “Liturgy for the People”

<http://sacredliturgy.blogspot.com/2007/07/manifestations-of-lay-liturgical.html> Accessed 2/25/11.

Christ. This witness to an integrated faith life may be done by arranging for time off from work and/or school for religious observances such as Ash Wednesday or Triduum liturgies. Witness to your faith might also include fasting consistently throughout Lent. Another way to witness to your faith may be by keeping the season of anxious anticipation that is Advent and not giving over the season of Advent to the merchant-driven Christmas model. Saint John Chrysostom suggested we might approach this integrated life in Christ this way:

Be pure and intent of heart, bent on him, the holy One,
who has called you;
—be holy in all you do.
I am your own God, your Lord;
be holy for I am holy.
—Be holy in all you do.⁵

- **Liturgy Ministry calls for a personalized spirituality.** God is many and varied. God made us in God's own image and that means that we too are many and varied. The corollary to that is that our spirits grow and change, our hearts are enlarged and our lives are molded into Christ's life, taking paths that are unique to us. What is not personal or individual is the outcome: dynamic living faith, a faith like Jesus Christ's. A faith like Jesus' is characterized by the actions of questioning and self-examining. Donna Cole says it this way, "Ministry is neither a beginning nor an end but rather a timeless component of our communal journey of faith. Before we commit to serving in a liturgical sense, we must first commit to lives of questioning, examining the motivations and desires of our hearts, for the life of a minister of Christ is one of dynamic, living faith. As we begin to function in service to the liturgy, which defines our identity as Catholic Christians, it is essential for us to scrutinize the way we live and worship."⁶
- **Liturgy Ministry is nurtured through prayer.** "To serve the people of God we must first be open to the power of the Spirit working in us and among us and be unafraid to listen in the stillness of prayer."⁷ For Liturgy Ministers, this means embracing prayer forms in your personal prayer that link you directly to elements of the Eucharist in general and to your particular area of service in particular. In this way you integrate your spiritual life so that your prayer outside of Mass will strengthen the prayer and service you give within it. The appendix to this manual has suggested prayer forms for all Liturgy Ministers. Remember, this is integral to developing a spirituality that will create in you the difference between someone doing a job at Mass and someone serving God's people in the celebration of the Eucharist.

⁵ Saint John Chrysostom. Adapted from the *Office of Readings* from the "Common of Holy Man" in Cole, Donna M. *Liturgical Ministry: A Practical Guide to Spirituality*. San Jose, CA: Resource Publications, 1996. E-book. p.12.

⁶ Cole, Donna M. *Liturgical Ministry: A Practical Guide to Spirituality*. San Jose, CA: Resource Publications, 1996. E-book. p. 5

⁷ Ibid. p. 7