

## **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” (1Pet. 2:9).*

The celebration of the Eucharist is the “action of the whole Church”.<sup>1</sup> Those who come together for Liturgy do not have the luxury of acting as spectators, waiting for all to be done for them. “Full, conscious, and active participation” in the Liturgy is not only the right of the baptized assembled, but also their duty and responsibility.<sup>2</sup>

All who *serve* in the orderly and faithful celebration of the Eucharist are baptized members of the Body of Christ. By Baptism they share in the priesthood of Christ, in his prophetic and royal mission. By virtue of Baptism, 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. Participating in the ministry of Christ, Liturgy Ministers bring His Real Presence to the Liturgy. Being in service to the greatest prayer of the Church is indeed a privilege. 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.’”<sup>3</sup> This is even more the case for those God has called to the designated service of the Liturgy as Liturgy Ministers.

## **A Spirituality of Lay Liturgical Ministry**

**Liturgy Ministry flows from Baptism.** Baptism makes us worthy to become Liturgy Ministers. When asked, the Holy Spirit will give us whatever we need to perform our ministry effectively. This means that Liturgy Ministers should spend time more deeply understanding and living the promises of Baptism and the profession of faith.

**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 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

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<sup>1</sup> General Instruction of the Roman Missal. Introduction #5.

<sup>2</sup>ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Sacrosanctum Concillium, #48 in “Liturgy for the People” <http://sacredliturgy.blogspot.com/2007/07/mainfestations-of-lay-liturgical.html> Accessed 2/25/11.

your faith may be by keeping the season of anxious anticipation that is Advent. 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.<sup>4</sup>

**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. In prayer and through God's grace 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. "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, examine 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."<sup>5</sup>

**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."<sup>6</sup> 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. 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.

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<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 5

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 7