

# Closing Thoughts

I have attempted in these pages to make some observations—both negative and positive—about the way Sunday liturgies are celebrated in the average parish. As you can see, I think it is an area that needs some attention.

I don't want to close, however, without affirming very strongly my belief that the new liturgy holds great promise. The pre-Vatican II liturgy had nowhere near the potential to be a life-giving religious experience.

Our mind plays tricks on us. Nostalgia sifts out bad memories, smooths over the rough edges and rearranges the past so it becomes a golden age. We idealize the days of the family doctor who made house calls, forgetting how often his patients screamed in pain or how he performed surgery on the kitchen table.

Sometimes we look on the old Latin Mass in the same way we admire an antique car. We see a 1926 Ford all polished up and see only its charm. It would be different if we had to use that car for our daily transportation. Nostalgia would quickly give way to hard reality: noise, fumes, slowness, frequent flat tires, prickly upholstery, lack of a radio, laborious steering, crank starter. If people really wanted such cars, automobile companies would be producing them as fast as they could.

If we experience the Sunday Mass “just as it used to be” every Sunday, nostalgia would give way to reality in similar fashion:

- You can see and hear what is going on. In the past, the priest had his back turned most of the time and said almost all of the prayers in an inaudible tone of voice. He read the missal (and you read yours) and rarely did you arrive at the Consecration at the same time.
- The readings and prayers offer much more variety. Do you remember the same Preface almost every Sunday? Or the same Scripture readings year in and year out? Or the repetition of Requiem Mass during the week? Today's selection of Scripture readings and prayers provides a welcome change.
- We can celebrate in our own language. Had Jesus used Greek at the Last Supper while his disciples understood only Aramaic, they could not possibly experience the warmth and closeness that they cherished. The same is true for us.

- We no longer have to fast from food and drink (including water!) from midnight on. Besides making Communion more accessible, the opportunity to have coffee or even breakfast before Mass makes for better dispositions.
- In general, the Mass is much more orderly. Standing for Communion, for example, we no longer have waves of people crowding to the communion rail.
- The use of special ministers of the Eucharist enables everyone to move along at a calmer pace. In some places they used to begin giving Communion at the Our Father, which further disrupted everything. And remember the priest hurrying along the communion rail on his return trips, walking so fast that the chasuble was flapping in the draft behind him?
- The Mass is not as drawn out as before. Recall that the priest used to read the Epistle and the Gospel in Latin, then he would read them again in English from the pulpit—followed by the announcements (often with editorial comments) and then the sermon. This has been greatly simplified, and is an example of other simplifications that make the Mass move along at a better pace. It doesn't take less time, but the time is more consistently filled.
- Mass schedules are more comfortable. The introduction of Saturday evening Masses and the change in the laws of Eucharistic fast have enabled parishes to spread out the schedule. You remember a typical Mass schedule: 6 A.M., 7 A.M., 8 A.M., 9 A.M., 10 A.M. (high Mass), noon—and woe to anyone who lingered too long in the parking lot! Not too many people would want to go back to that.
- The general atmosphere is warmer. People seem less inhibited and more pleasant. They smile more and appear more at ease.

## A Renewed Liturgy

All in all, the new liturgy holds great promise. We've got something good going for us. As we have seen throughout these pages, however, our execution leaves a lot to be desired, our mistakes can get in the way of a truly prayerful, reverent celebration.

The new liturgy is a product of Vatican II, which helps us to appreciate the Church as the people of God. Using this model of Church, our renewed understanding of liturgy involves an appreciation of many expanded roles in worship and the skills needed to carry out those roles.

If we work at it together, if we don't shy away from giving or receiving constructive criticism, we will continue to deepen the spirit of prayerfulness which is what the liturgy is all about. That is the goal of the renewal of the liturgy.

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1/ Transcribed from *Sunday Liturgy Can be Better*, Bishop Kenneth E. Untener, St. Anthony Press, ©1980, adapted from a series of articles that appeared in the *Michigan Catholic*, weekly newspaper of the Archdiocese of Detroit.