

Reflections on Lay-led Liturgy

for the Jesuit Schools Chaplains' Conference

St Beuno's – January 2014

What is Liturgy?

Strictly, the word 'liturgy' refers to the celebration of the Eucharist, the Sacraments, and the Liturgy of the Hours (ie. the Divine Office of the Breviary). Everything else (eg. Benediction, Holy Hour, Rosary in common) is technically a 'paraliturgy'. However, 'paraliturgy' is not a pretty word that we would usually wish to use on service sheets and in announcements, etc.

Presiding / Leading

With increasingly unavailability of priests to preside at liturgy, it is necessary to consider lay-led liturgy.

It is important to recognise that in the Catholic tradition, liturgy is led. It should be clear who is leading (if not presiding) the liturgy. Consideration needs to be given to (a) clothing, (b) seat/position, (c) relationship to others who perform a role.

In the Catholic tradition, only an ordained person can speak prayers on behalf of the assembly (congregation). The 'Amen' ("so be it") at the end of a prayer is the assent of the people to the presider's words. Consideration needs to be given to how a lay person prays in lay-led liturgy – it is not appropriate simply to take over the prayers written for the priest. A new 'register' is needed.

Communion outside Mass

There should not be an assumption that if a priest is not available for Mass, a communion service should take place. Even on a Sunday, there is an increasing view that a communion service should not automatically be held.

The decision to hold a communion service should be made only if it is impossible to find a priest, or travel to Mass elsewhere, and it would otherwise be necessary to attend Mass (ie. a Sunday or Holyday of Obligation).

The template for communion outside Mass (other than as viaticum with the sacrament of the sick) is the Good Friday liturgy: a liturgy of the Word, followed by prayers of intercession, followed by the communion rite beginning with the Our Father.

A communion service would therefore look something like this:

- Gathering hymn
- In the name of the Father . . . (but no greeting ‘The Lord be with you’)
- Penitential rite
- Opening prayer
- Readings (usually the readings of the Mass for the day)
- Time of reflection or shared spoken reflections (in place of a homily)
- Prayers of intercession (Bidding Prayers)
- Blessed sacrament is brought from tabernacle to altar (possibly with hymn)
- Communion Rite (from Our Father to giving of communion; but no breaking of bread)
- Prayer
- Blessing

Communion outside Mass should be led by a deacon, commissioned acolyte, or special minister of the eucharist (even if commissioned for one specific occasion).

A Stand-Alone Liturgy of the Word

The template for a stand-alone Liturgy of the Word is the vigil of readings at the Easter Vigil, or the Liturgy of the Word from the Mass.

1. There needs to be some simple introductory rite which has the function of gathering the people (hymn, greeting, procession, silence, lighting of candles, placing of the book of the Word, etc.), and calling them into the presence of God (words of invitation, announcing the ‘theme’, silence, hymn). In some liturgies it may be desirable to have a penitential rite. The Collect prayer draws the introductory rite to a close by articulating the ‘theology’ of the occasion.
2. Then come the readings – one, two or more as appropriate.
3. Each reading is announced (“A reading from the book of Genesis”) and it may be useful to add a sentence such as, “in which God creates the heavens and the earth, and our ancestors Adam and Eve on the sixth day, after which he rested and saw that all he had created was good.”
4. The readings should link or relate.
5. One of the readings should always be from the gospels. The gospel reading should be honoured by a change of posture (stand rather than sit) and other gestures (procession, candles, incense, etc.).

6. After each reading there should be a reflection or response (a brief spoken reflection, silence, a prayer, a psalm or hymn).
7. There does not need to be a homily – strictly only an ordained person can preach. But there can either be a lay-led reflection or a shorter response as for the first reading.
8. The Liturgy of the Word would usually then include bidding prayers (see below).
9. The Liturgy of the Word concludes with a prayer summing up the tenor of the readings and a blessing and sending out (dismissal) to put into action what has been heard in scripture.

Carol services and Tenebrae are, in effect, Liturgies of the Word and provide a useful pattern for other Liturgies of the Word.

The readings should be either the readings of the day or chosen for the particular celebration or to reflect the liturgical season. Rather than start from scratch it is always helpful to scan the readings in the lectionary. On choice of readings for liturgy with children see Scripture Readings below.

Bidding Prayers

The models for bidding prayers are the Solemn Intercessions of Good Friday. These are the “Rolls-Royce” version of a bidding prayer and consist of:

1. The announcing of an intention (by someone other than the presider)
2. A silent pause in which the people make their own prayer for the announced intention
3. The prayer (addressed to God, on behalf of the assembly, by the presider)
4. The ‘Amen’ by which the people assent to the prayer made on their behalf

While these prayers are probably more than is usually needed in liturgy, they do provide the template for writing bidding prayers.

This template is employed for the useful exemplars of ‘ordinary’ bidding prayers given in the Roman Missal (p.1514). These are well worth looking at. They make clear that the normal number of bidding prayers should be no more than four. They also set out a general pattern for the four prayers:

1. For the needs of the universal Church
2. For public authorities and the salvation of the whole world
3. For those burdened by any kind of difficulty (poverty, war, bereavement, sickness, etc.)
4. For the local community (especially those assembled here)

On particular occasions it is desirable to make the intentions reflect the occasion and its implications.

Bidding prayers should not be a version of a news bulletin. They do not need to change constantly.

So, each of the bidding prayers should begin with an intention (not a direct prayer) Then be followed by a brief pause

Then be concluded with a prayer to which the people respond (eg. Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.)

In England and Wales, it is customary to include the Hail Mary (permission granted by papal indult in the 70s but falling out of favour with some bishops). The Hail Mary should come as the last of the intercessions and before the priest's concluding prayer.

The presider introduces the prayers (not with a prayer but with an invitation to pray, or a reason for making intercessions) and concludes them (with a prayer asking God to listen to our petitions).

Scripture Readings

Approved translations for use in liturgy are the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV], Jerusalem Bible [JB], and the Good News Bible [GNB] (for children's liturgy; also known as Today's English Version [TEV]). In general, the NRSV is better for the NT and the JB for the OT. Psalms are from the Grail Translation.

In liturgy with children, consideration needs to be given to ensuring that the scripture used is intelligible and speaks to its listeners:

- Have fewer rather than more readings
- Shorten readings that are too long
- If readings are truly inaccessible or inappropriate for children (relevant to age and maturity) choose other readings
- Bring readings to life by using different voices, or by dramatizing them
- Use images to illustrate readings
- Use the symbol of the book (the book itself, candles, lectern/ambo, procession, reverence, posture, music, gospel-signing of head, lips and heart, showing of the text, etc.)
- Use spoken introductions (but only if necessary to explain the context of the reading or flag-up what to look for)
- Involve the children in responding to the scripture (dialogue, Q&A)
- Don't forget silence (Let us think about this story . . . what this reading has said to us . . .)

Writing prayers

Prayers for public use have a particular structure:

Collect of Wednesday of Third Week of Lent

1	Grant, we pray, O Lord, that,	<i>The address to God (Which person? Here it is God the Father)</i>
2	schooled through Lenten observance and nourished by your word,	<i>Reminder of feast, mystery, season, 'theme'</i>
3	through holy restraint, we may be devoted to you with all our heart and be united in prayer.	<i>The intercession (or praise, or thanksgiving, etc.)</i>
4	Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your	<i>The Trinitarian ending (sets out how</i>

	Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.	<i>the prayer ‘works’) – this is the ending for prayers addressed to God the Father</i>
5	Amen.	<i>The people’s assent</i>

The alternative ending for prayers addressed to God the Son: “who live and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.”

A Prayer during Examinations (APsj)

1	Lord,	<i>The address to God (Which person? Here it is God the Father)</i>
2	as I prepare for this examination, let your strength and your wisdom be present to me.	<i>Reminder of ‘theme’ – examinations – and reference to attributes of God which are especially relevant here</i>
3	May I revise my work thoroughly. May I understand what it is I have to know. May my memory be reliable and orderly. May I be calm and focused on the task ahead. May I know and feel the love and support of my family and friends.	<i>The intercessions</i>
4	And may you, the author and creator of all things, enlighten me. Through Christ our Lord.	<i>The prayer refers back to the attributes of God; and is addressed to the Father through the intercessor, Jesus Christ</i>
5	Amen.	<i>The people’s assent</i>

In writing about the particular attributes or activities of God, or Jesus, or the Holy Spirit, it is good to use scriptural or traditional words, phrases and language. This helps connect the new prayer to the Christian tradition of prayer and builds up a vocabulary and ‘prayerful cadences’ which become familiar to people in worship.

Blessings

Strictly, only an ordained person can give a blessing. However, there is a long tradition of anyone being able to say prayers of blessing.

In adapting a prayer of blessing to be lay-led, the language is of “we” and “us” rather than the “you” of the priest’s blessing. An example is given for the conclusion of the Liturgy of the Hours:

Priest’s Blessing	Lay-led Blessing
The Lord be with you. And with your spirit. May almighty God bless you, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.	The Lord bless us and keep us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Amen.	
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The missal gives models of prayers of blessing (p.709 and included in the particular pages for major feasts and Sunday of Lent, etc.). These can be adapted for lay-leadership by changing the language from “you” to “we” and “us”. Cf. this example from the blessing for ordinary time No.2:

Priest’s Blessing	Lay-led Blessing
May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.	May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

An example of a well-written prayer of blessing:

May the love of the Lord Jesus draw us to himself.
May the power of the Lord Jesus strengthen us in his service.
May the joy of the Lord Jesus fill our souls.
May the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be amongst us and remain with us always. Amen.

(William Temple 1881-1944)