

“The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in”

A. GATHERING

Why must there be a Gathering Rite? We know from second century accounts of the Church’s liturgy that the first thing to happen after people arrived in the place of worship was probably the reading of Scripture.

However, the followers of Jesus live in two worlds simultaneously, and whatever that may have been like in the second century, it is not easy to remember on a daily basis that we are living in the Kingdom of God as members of the Body of Christ. Today, the recovery of our awareness of living in this new world by faith is an essential function of our participation in the liturgy. The recovery of that awareness through an intentional rite of gathering can be spelled out in the following particular functions:

1. ‘Re - membering’ who we are as a people bound together in God’s love through Christ-dead-and-risen in the communion of the Holy Spirit: acknowledging one another as people who have been baptized with the baptism that Jesus was baptized with and who drink the cup that he drank.
2. Giving voice to our gratitude, joy, and expectation for the thing that God is doing in us and through us.
3. Opening ourselves through prayer to the thing that God will do now, through Word and Sacrament.

In addition, because we no longer live in the second century when only the baptized gathered in the liturgy, and because we no longer live in Christendom when all present could be expected to share similar experiences of the liturgy, a fourth function may be named:

4. Welcoming strangers, affirming and honouring their coming among us and their place in the liturgy without pretending to know their faith or presuming upon their affection.

Questions

1. What are the comparable functions served by the typical courtesies at a dinner party?

2. How many of the elements of your liturgy preceding the first reading serve one of the four functions spelled out here? What elements serve some other function? What functions are over- or under-served?
3. What expectations do people bring to the experience of those elements? How do these expectations cohere with the four functions named here?
4. Do you normally sing the Gloria in Excelsis on Sundays outside of Lent? Why?
5. If 'gathering' is a verb (as well as a ritual action), who is enacting it ritually in your assembly? How?
6. Are there distinctions between the way the congregation gathers and the way the people wearing liturgical clothing gather? Why?
7. Are there distinctions amongst the gathering patterns of
 - a. the core members,
 - b. the occasional members,
 - c. and the strangers?Why?

Some alternative patterns of gathering

(An edited list of proposals will be solicited from members of APLM, beginning this summer.)

B. SENDING OUT

"The Church is meant for mission as fire is meant for burning."¹ We are formed and fed through Word and Sacrament so that we may go into God's world to serve as Christ serves. If the prayer after communion does not adequately acknowledge this, it has failed. If the 'Dismissal' serves only to signal the end of the ritual action, it has failed.

The ritual that follows communion is meant to serve a greater function than merely providing an opportunity to dwell upon the sweetness of what has just happened (there is no great need for yet another act of thanksgiving after the Great Thanksgiving!) There is work to be done; and some of this work may already be acknowledged in the liturgy: if there are announcements that are appropriate to the occasion, they will be announcements related to this vocation to serve; if there are ministers of extended

¹Attributed to Emil Brunner.

communion to be sent off, they are fulfilling a part of this vocation to serve. There may be a closing hymn; if so, it is properly a hymn celebrating our vocation to be God's servants in God's world.

The rite of Sending (Dismissal), therefore, needs to order these concerns in some intelligible and cogent manner.

Questions

1. What are the elements of your post-communion ritual? How do they serve this function? Is this adequate? What other functions are served?
2. What expectations do people have for this closing part of the liturgy? How do these expectations cohere with the function described here?
3. If 'dismissal' implies an action (as well as a ritual), who is enacting it ritually in your assembly? (Who is involved in the ritual departure?) How?
4. Are there distinctions between the way the congregation obeys the dismissal and the way the people wearing liturgical clothing obey it? Why?
5. What happens to the strangers at the dismissal?

Some alternative patterns of sending

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