

Toward a Theology of Ministry

*. . . whatever you do, in word or in deed,
do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

Col 3: 17¹

The Second Vatican Council opened the door for all baptized Catholics to enter fully into the rites of worship of the Church. *Sacrosanctum Concilium: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* specifically calls for the “full, conscious, and active participation”² of all the faithful.

*The Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious, and active part in liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1Pt 2: 9; see 2:4-5) is their right and duty by reason of their baptism*³.

The Decree on the Apostolate⁴ of Lay People: *Apostolicam Actuositatum*⁵ from the Second Vatican Council states

*Lay people’s right and duty to be apostles derives from their union with Christ their head. Inserted as they are in the Mystical Body of Christ by baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit in confirmation, it is by the Lord himself that they are assigned to the apostolate.*⁶

As members of the Body of Christ through baptism, in addition to life as Christians in the secular world, it is our right and duty to participate in the various roles and ministries of liturgical celebrations appropriate to our status. Baptism calls us to a way of life in Christ. It is a call to holiness shaped by the Paschal Mystery, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. All our intentions and activities are to be formed by the teachings of Christ to give glory and praise to God. It is our responsibility to live a life worthy of our baptismal call. Because of baptism, we expect to join together in prayer to give witness to the blessings we receive from a gracious and loving God.

We celebrate the Sacred Liturgy as a means to be fed for life and to be fed for ministry within the Church and in the world. We worship at Eucharist to rejoice in the fruitfulness of our efforts giving praise and glory to God for His abundant blessings. Again, reference may be made to the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* which states that “*the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed; it is also the source from which all its power flows.*”⁷

In addition to the ordained ministries of bishop, priest and deacon, lay people are blessed with talents and called forth by God to share those gifts for the benefit of the church. Each role to be fulfilled is to be accomplished by individuals possessing the proper skills and having received appropriate instruction and preparation for the position assigned. Ministries within liturgical worship are not simply tasks to be performed. They are actions in service of the clergy and the assembly fulfilling the instruction and example of Jesus.

¹ Biblical quotations taken from The New American Bible, St Joseph Edition. Catholic Book Publishing Company, New York, 1987.

² *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy – Sacrosanctum Concilium*, (SC), 4 December 1963, paragraph #14.

³ SC, paragraph #14.

⁴ Apostolate, as referenced here, means “an organization of the laity devoted to the mission of the Church.”

⁵ *Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People – Apostolicam Actuositatum*, (AA), 18 November 1965.

⁶ AA, paragraph #3.

⁷ SC, paragraph #10.

You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.

Jn 13: 13-15

As one accepts a role of ministry for liturgy as a right and duty, he/she must understand the privilege and responsibility attached to their ministry. The role is to be fulfilled with all due reverence and dignity warranted in serving Christ. When embracing a role for liturgy, one embraces the commitment to dependability, time for preparation each time he/she serves, and time for ongoing development and enrichment. So that each role may be given its proper status, no individual is to be given more than one role in a given liturgy. Secondly, this allows more of the faithful to share his/her gifts within a community.

Bishop Cistone quotes his installation address as the Sixth Bishop of the Diocese of Saginaw in his Pastoral Letter, A Future Full of Hope:⁸

Not only does the Church draw her life from the Eucharist; the Church, you and I, also draw our identity from the Eucharist. We come to know who Jesus is and who we are as His body through authentic Eucharist.

We as ministers within the Eucharist, accept the invitation to become what we eat and drink by living the theology of ministry with hearts filled with gratitude and desire to live out our call to say "yes" to the various roles within the Eucharistic celebration. Liturgical ministers, then, assist in building the Kingdom of God, and Eucharist is the heart of the Gospel.

*Praise the Lord in his sanctuary,
praise him in the firmament of his strength.
Praise him for his mighty deeds, praise him for his sovereign majesty.
Praise him with the blast of the trumpet,
praise him with lyre and harp,
Praise him with timbrel and dance, praise him with strings and pipe.
Praise him with sounding cymbals, praise him with clanging cymbals.
Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! Alleluia.*

Psalm 150

⁸ *A Future Full of Hope, A Pastoral Letter to the People of the Diocese of Saginaw*, Most Reverend Joseph R. Cistone, D.D., Bishop of Saginaw, 7 October 2011, page 26.