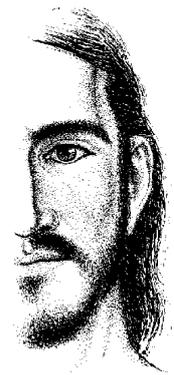




The Lord be with you

Bringing life to the
liturgy

THE LORD BE WITH YOU. This short phrase occurs five times in our Sunday liturgy, each time as an affirmation of an amazing reality: the Risen Jesus who has gathered us together is present with us now, working through us and in us. What would our liturgies be like if all of those present at the Sunday liturgy were to appreciate the profound significance of that phrase and recognise more fully the Christ who is present and active not only in the liturgy but also in their daily lives? What would our liturgies be like if we realised that the phrase defines us? We are Christ's Body; the Lord is with us.



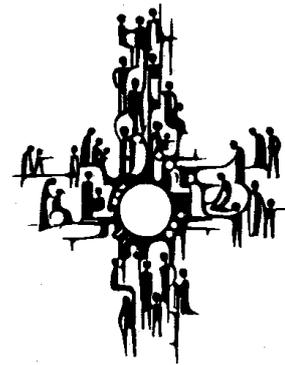
The full conscious and active participation in the liturgy into which we are all invited means more than having something to “do” during our celebration of Eucharist. It involves us at a deeper level than external action. **Participation** is an experience of feeling a **part** of what is unfolding in the liturgy. Furthermore, it begins before we enter the church; it begins in our homes, it begins in ourselves. Participation in the liturgy begins with our awareness that as part of Christ's Body, our participation in the liturgy is a continuation and a celebration of our ongoing participation of what Christ is doing through us, with us and in us in our parishes, in life and in liturgy.

“ . . . all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy” Sacrosanctum Concilium 14

Sadly, many of those who sit in the pews during the celebration do not feel themselves to be part of what is happening around them, however valiant and successful efforts have been to increase lay involvement in the various ministries related to the Eucharist, or however enthusiastically attention has been given to the quality of responses and music in the liturgy. For many and complex reasons, many parishioners do not feel part of the parish community. They sit as visitors in ‘God's house’, not realising that they are welcome and valued members of the Body of Christ, that they are beloved children. They join in the words and actions of the liturgy with little or no awareness that the words celebrate what Christ is doing not only in liturgy but in their lives, through them, with them and in them.

This resource is an attempt to address in a very simple way the gap that exists between liturgy and life, the gap that prevents many from feeling a part of the liturgy and, therefore, from participating in the liturgy fully, actively and consciously. We might say that the resource aims to shorten, if not eliminate entirely, the distance between 'Our house' and 'God's house' by encouraging parishioners to see Christ's presence and action with them at all times.

This simple resource aims to help those gathered for Sunday liturgy to come to a more conscious awareness of Christ present with them in daily life and thus to become more conscious of what they are sharing and celebrating with Christ and with each other as they gather for Eucharist. It provides opportunities for parishioners to recognise themselves as members of the Body of Christ, to see Christ powerfully and faithfully at work in their often mundane and ordinary lives and to appreciate the liturgy as a place where they can meet Christ, be nourished and restored, and recognise and celebrate Christ's presence in life and in liturgy.



The resource focusses on seven specific moments of the liturgy.

Seven moments of liturgy

- ❖ The Lord be with you
- ❖ I have failed
- ❖ Let us pray
- ❖ The Word of the Lord
- ❖ The bread we offer you
- ❖ Body of Christ: Amen
- ❖ Go . . . announce the gospel



For each of seven Sundays (weekly or monthly), the parish concentrates on one particular moment of the liturgy. To help parishioners to participate more fully and consciously in that moment – to know themselves to be part of that moment – an appointed person* addresses the congregation before the priest moves onto the altar to begin Eucharist. Referring to the short reflection text provided, s(he) helps the congregation to see how life connects with the moment in the liturgy and how the connection is specific and unique to each one, that they do not come before Christ as a sea of nameless individuals, that their individual stories are represented and celebrated in the story of the liturgy as it unfolds before them.

As well as slowing down at the relevant point of the liturgy, the presider/others can emphasise the ‘moment’ of the week at appropriate places in the liturgy, the homily, bidding prayers and prayer after communion being the most obvious locations for such reflection. A line or two placed into the bulletin can also help to reinforce the message and ensure that thinking continues after the congregation has left the church.



The approach is simple. It gives those present a gentle and encouraging nudge in the right direction – towards an awareness of Christ present with them at all times and of themselves as valued members of the Body of Christ. We have something to celebrate.

THE LORD IS WITH US

**More frequently now parishes have cantors or what they refer to as “animators”, lay people who come onto the altar before Eucharist begins to set the tone for the celebration and/or prepare the congregation to respond in words and songs. Someone with suitable gifts can be very helpful in focussing the congregation on the theme of the Eucharist and are ideally placed to read the reflection. In the absence of such a person/role in a parish, a Minister of the Word can be chosen to lead the reflection.*

Moment 1: THE LORD BE WITH YOU

Welcome!

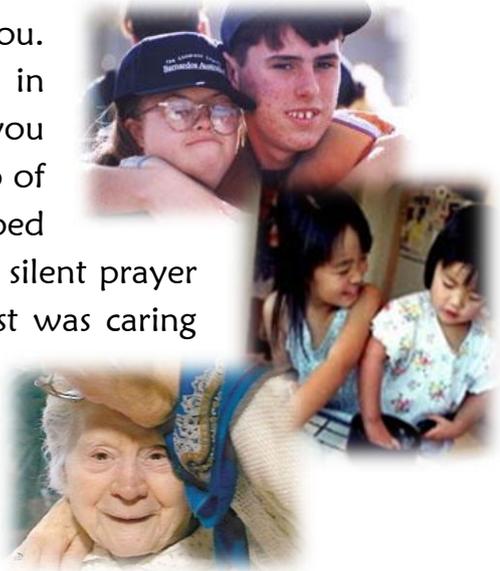
The Lord be with you . . . and with your spirit. Do we believe these words? Do we appreciate that they are addressed to each one of us? We come to Mass every weekend and maybe we still have in the back of our minds some notion that we are coming to meet God, to meet Jesus. We tend to forget that God, that Jesus, is with us at all times, his Holy Spirit helping us in all that we do.



Our lives are full of God, full of his Spirit. It is this same Spirit who helps us to be the Body of Christ, helps us to share Christ's kindness, his generosity and compassion, to share Christ's love and peace with others.

But we forget . . .we forget that we are filled with God's Spirit. We forget that as members of the Body of Christ, we now are Christ's hands and heart; we are Christ's gestures of love.

The Lord be with you! The Lord is with you. Take a moment to realise that his presence in you this week was made visible in that smile you gave a passing stranger in the street, in the cup of tea you made for another, the child you helped with homework, the ironing, the taxi-ing, the silent prayer for someone, the DIY job you stuck at. Christ was caring for his people through you, through the many ordinary routine, mundane duties of everyday life. He was with you in the good times and present also in the strength you found to persevere through tough times.



The Lord be with you and with your spirit . We join in with these words five times in this liturgy. Each time you hear and respond to them, ask for help to believe that they are addressed to you, that Christ is present in your life, that you make his love real and visible in your words and actions.

The Lord is with you!

Moment 2: I HAVE FAILED

Welcome!

Have you had a good week? Can you look back on it with satisfaction, glad of what happened, glad that you seemed to be doing a good job . . . wherever you were . . . whatever you did? Or are you human? Did you have a few moments of this week when you were not the best version of yourself? Maybe said or did something that you were not happy with?



When we gather here for Eucharist, it is not only to recognise all the good that Christ is doing through us and in us but also to admit that there are times when we have failed, when we have let ourselves and God down. Maybe we have failed only in small ways, maybe only every now and then. Most of us fail in some way during the week: we've fought unnecessarily, lazed about letting others do our work, said an unkind word or avoided the truth. You know how you have let yourself down.

Just as it is comforting to have a good friend and to have a place to go where you do not have to pretend to be better than you are, so it is with this Eucharist. There is no need to pretend with Christ. He gathers us together, offering us a place to go to admit that we are "eejits" that there have been times this week when we have failed to do what was best for God, for others. . . or for ourselves.



Yet Christ does not leave us wallowing in our failures. At the point of the Eucharist when we admit to our failures we also can ask for what we need to be more like Christ, more capable of being his Body, his heart and hands in the world.

I HAVE FAILED. How might you have failed to be Christ's Body for others this week? What hurt do you need healed, what strength or help do you need from him? Think about it now before we start so that when it comes to the penitential rite you know that he sees you, he knows what you need and he offers it to you.

Moment 3: LET US PRAY

Welcome!

LET US PRAY. The words seem strange because we have already started to pray by the time we hear them but the gesture of the priest shows us what is happening at that moment in our liturgy. The priest opens his arms . . . and in his gestures we see the gestures of Christ opening his arms, gathering us together. Christ is welcoming us, Christ is glad to be with us.



But there's another gathering taking place as well. Christ is gathering the stories of our week, all our good and bad memories, our successes and failures. He is listening to what is in our hearts and minds as we sit here today.



So today, when it comes to that time in our liturgy where the priest opens his arms, recognise that this makes visible the Christ who gathers us in his arms, gathers our lives, all our expectations and our concerns. Know that he has heard your story. Know also that you do not need to waken Christ up or knock on some heavenly door to get his attention. The priest's gesture, this "let us pray" moment in the highlights what Christ is doing: he is praying with us; he is praying for us.

Take a minute sitting here now to think about what happened in your life this week. . . Tell Jesus your story, what you are grateful for, the help you need. Do this before Mass begins so that when the moment in the liturgy comes - and it comes all too quickly - you will hear the "Let us pray" for what it is . . . Christ is praying for you . . . Christ is praying with you. He hears you. . . he cares about your life.

LET US PRAY!

Moment 4: THE WORD OF THE LORD

Welcome!

If Jesus walked into the Church and tapped you on the shoulder today, what would you expect him to say . . . or what would you hope that he would say?

We could all do with a bit of encouragement. You might hope that Christ would tell you that you are doing a good job, maybe give you a few pointers for the week ahead. Maybe you have had a tough time recently and you need to know that he appreciates your difficulties and wants to support you . . . or maybe your needs are of a different kind . . . you might hope he shares next week's lottery numbers . . .



The truth is that every weekend we come here and Jesus *does* speak to us. We don't get the lottery numbers but he speaks to us through the liturgy and especially through his Word. He gives us pointers, reassures us, perhaps provides some strength to deal with difficult times or words to capture our ups and downs.



And Jesus is not just speaking to us as if we were a sea of nameless faces. He listens to the stories of *your* life, he gathers them tenderly as the Eucharist begins and he offers them in his prayer to God the Father, a God who sees you and who knows the intimate details of your life speaks The Word of God to you. Jesus did not stop speaking 2000 years ago but he continues to speak to us through his Word; he has something unique and particular to say to you today. Perhaps some word or phrase will stand out for you or perhaps it is enough to trust that he is with you.



As we begin our Eucharist, ask for help to trust that the God who knows your story is with you. He is speaking to you in his Word. What will he say?

Moment 5: THE BREAD WE OFFER YOU

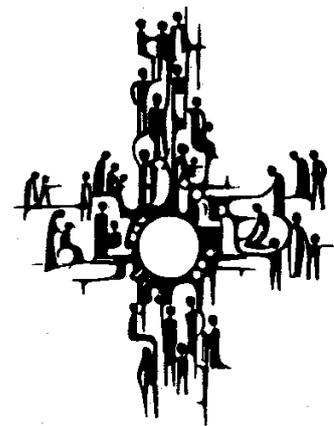
Welcome!

What kind of a week have you had? Did you find yourself having to set aside what you were doing in order to help someone else . . . a child with homework . . . a neighbour who needed groceries . . . a friend who needed someone to listen . . . or someone who valued a bit of company?



This week we focus on the offertory and before we begin our celebration, think about this. We bring the bread and wine to the altar not only to be transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ but also as symbols of creation, symbols of our lives. Therefore, in offering bread, we are also offering our lives, offering all those small acts of loving and giving, done so frequently and so often taken for granted.

They are not taken for granted here. Here, Christ gathers all your efforts and offers them with himself to the Father during the Eucharist. He is gathering all of our small sacrifices into something much bigger, gathering them into his gift of himself. And so, in the offertory we have ourselves and Christ gathered together as the Body of Christ, offered to God; a God who sees his beloved children; a God who appreciates our efforts.



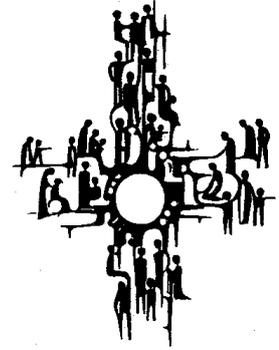
So now, think back over your week and to when you gave someone else a bit of your time or talent, your energy, your patience, your money. And when it comes to the offertory, know that those small acts are being gathered by Christ, seen and loved. Know that these acts, no matter how small and insignificant you feel them to be, are making Christ's loving and giving a reality in your world.

Moment 6: BODY OF CHRIST - AMEN

Welcome.

How will this Eucharist change you?

Maybe if we are honest we do not really expect that this Mass will change us in any way . . . or at least not every time we come here. We do not and cannot understand the mystery of what is happening in our midst during each Eucharist but we do expect the bread and wine to be changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. And we believe that even though the bread and wine look the same, they are profoundly different; they are Christ's Body, his precious Blood.



However, we so often overlook another change that is also happening. Something else looks the same but is profoundly different. Us. We are being changed. We are being transformed into the Body of Christ.

Every aspect of this Eucharist we share, whether we realise or not, is Christ's invitation into this transformation. Meeting together to offer support to each other as a community, bringing our stories to him, asking for his help, being with him as he shares himself with us in the Word, offering our small acts of loving and giving: all have one purpose - to help us to become more and more like Jesus.



What this means is that when we go to receive Eucharist, the words we hear and say express more than our belief in this is Christ's gift of himself. We are also saying YES to who we are becoming: **Body of Christ-AMEN. YES!.**

So look at your hands for a moment now. Recognise them to be the hands of the Body of Christ, his way of bringing his love to life in the world. And when you go to receive, appreciate his gift of himself to you but know also that the hands you stretch out before you are the hands of the Body of Christ. Say your AMEN to who you are becoming. **Body of Christ: AMEN! YES!**

Moment 7: GO . . . AND ANNOUNCE THE GOSPEL

Welcome!

We are just at the start of our Eucharist so it will seem a little strange to think about some of the words we will hear at the end of the liturgy today. ***Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord***. The words may come at the end but they also point to why we are here in the first place and what we are to do when we leave here. We go from here to announce the Gospel.

But what does that actually mean? The Gospel is full of the Good News that God is with us. ***Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord***, means that our job is to show that this the Good News is true: we are to be living proof the presence of God in the world.



We are already providing this proof. As members of the Body of Christ, we are bringing God's love to life through our hearts and hands, our words, through the ways we live our lives and take care of each other.

And we come together at the weekend to remind ourselves of the Good News – he is with us – and to help each other to continue to be that Good News, to be living proof of God's loving presence in the world.

So throughout this Eucharist think about how you will be the Body of Christ for others this week. How will you be a visible sign of his loving presence in the world? How will you bring the Christ we meet in today's gospel to life in your life?

Do not forget to ask for help. You are not in this on your own. We gather here to pray for each other. Christ is praying for us and with us. We remember the Good News of the Gospel, God's reassurance in Jesus' words *I am with you always*.

Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord, How will you be a sign of God's loving presence in your home this week?

