



The other day I was re-reading one of my old treasures* while I was struggling with what we mean in Spred when we say that we attempt to offer a liturgical catechesis. We can look at a liturgical catechesis from both the inside and the outside. My old book helped me to come to grips with some of the inside of liturgical catechesis.

In the catechetical progression of a Spred session, we begin by evoking human experiences. This might take twenty to twenty five minutes as each one in the community of faith calls to mind a really lived experience. Suppose we evoke living in the light. One might talk about his experience of waking up at dawn. Another might talk about the quality of light while walking in the new-fallen snow. Another might evoke an experience of light in the springtime and another may focus on an experience of playing ball in the park in the summer twilight. As each one shares, there is a growing emotion of love and gratitude and finally the leader, in the phase we call interiorization, names the feeling and emotion that we all share now as we evoke our experiences of living in the light.

At this point in the process, we begin to shift into what we call the liturgical evocation. This is a subtle shift in the session and it requires some care. We juxtapose our evocation of being happy and grateful in the light to a lived liturgical experience. Suppose we talk about who carried the Easter candle. We talk about how that person went down the dark aisle in the church. Everyone waited for the light and finally there was an explosion of light and the song of light, the Exultet. We all took some of the light with our little candles and looked at the light reflected on all the faces around us. We were in the light of Christ.

Only later would we read from the scriptures the saying of Jesus "I am the Light of the world" and then we would hear the catechist say to each one, "Jesus says to you today, I am your light."

All this takes forty-five minutes to an hour to get inside the progression of a liturgical catechesis. One can also say that a liturgical catechesis is a sacred catechesis or a catechesis of the sacred.

A catechesis of the sacred is the art of helping a person to be attentive to God. To be attentive to God means to allow oneself and to help others to be guided by and led by God to eternal beatitude which is reflected in the liturgy. God created us to share divine happiness. God's desire is that we allow ourselves to be loved and to be saved. Our role is to collaborate in our own salvation by being attentive to God.

ATTENDING

A sacred pedagogy is a door to mystery. Mystery is not the absence of light. Mystery is a superabundance of light. This light cannot be imposed, nor is it to be explained or comprehended. Mystery mediates presence. One is absorbed and nourished by this presence. One does not analyze this presence, one breathes in this presence. Our biggest traps as catechists are to make God an abstraction or to avoid God altogether. A sacred pedagogy that helps us to initiate a community of faith into mystery gives us a way to cope with our own obtuseness in trying to be a good catechist.

Everyone has access to this presence of God but how is one to become aware and attentive to God and so be nourished in faith, hope and love?

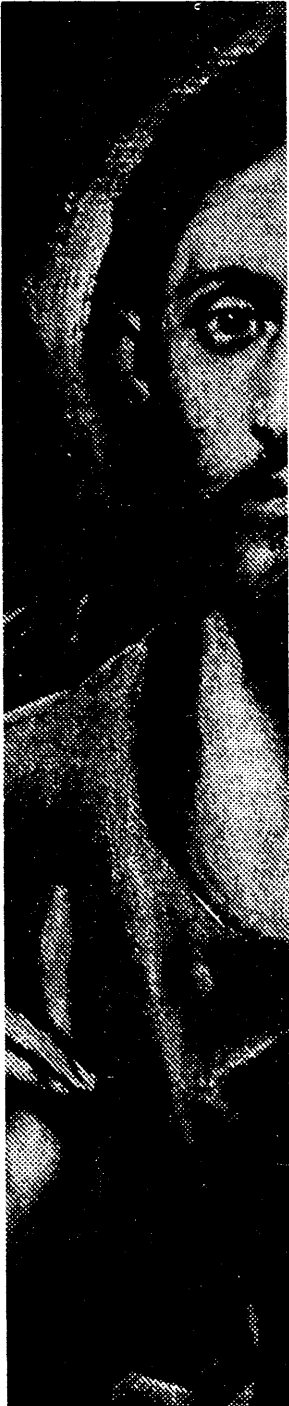
Epiphanies can be found in sacred scripture. This happens when there is a manifestation of the divine through what is known and observed. The ultimate epiphany we celebrate at Christmastide when we celebrate the divine permeation in our world through and in Jesus. Since then, our world is diaphanous, translucent, transparent for those with the eyes to see. A sacred catechesis prepares ourselves and others for epiphanies. We are led beyond where we expected to be.

To enter into this process, we start with the space that we create for this kind of liturgical and sacred catechesis. To become attentive to God, we need to gather ourselves together, to recollect ourselves. So we have subdued lighting and speak in softer voices. We take one another very seriously and we are solemn with one another. Our gestures and manner of being are calm. When we look around at one another we begin to see faces softening and relaxing, expressions becoming gentle. The spirit of each one is being given a chance to emerge to the space where God is waiting for our attending. Silence becomes a welcome bath. Our spirits are being refreshed. The room begins to take on the characteristics of the upper room, the Cenacle of the last supper.

To enter this desired space, a liturgical catechesis imposes somewhat on the person. An ambiance of the sacred requires some bodily boundaries, some emotional boundaries. We gather our resources in close to ourselves in order to expand in another part of our being. All this is not so much to be explained as to be lived

A sacred liturgical catechesis involves space, gesture, posture, voice, elan, desire, relationships and a transformation. One closes ones eyes to enter into ones own hidden room. "When you pray, enter your own room, shut your door and pray to the Father who hears you in secret." (Matt. 6, 6) In the calm of a community of faith happy to be together with closed eyes, one learns to be attentive to God. In the calm of a community of faith happy to be together with eyes open wide to rest on a lit candle, one learns to be attentive to God. In the calm of a community of faith happy to be together in the light, one learns to be attentive to God in the Word being proclaimed.

In this setting, the community of faith is free to place gestures to express praise and thanksgiving. The gestures may be more full of meaning in a community with our friends with disabilities than any words. The community of faith learns to love gestures of praise and loves to rest in silence. In all of this, the community of faith is developing a sense of the sacred. In this setting, it is no longer the catechists alone who take our friends seriously, but they take one another seriously. Each one lends support to all the others in their effort to be



attentive to God. Each one is supported by all the others in their gestures to show God their love and God receives these gestures as gifts of great importance.

In this way the community of faith learns ritual gestures, ritual action, a liturgical way of being in the world. One begins with attention to God in the community of faith in response to the invitation and initiative of God. Gradually one's capacity for attention to God deepens and widens. The spiritual life is but a sustained attention to God.

No one likes to be dissipated. Even little children become cranky in an atmosphere of dissipation. Our friends with disabilities do not do well in an atmosphere of dissipation. They become disoriented and ill at ease. They like Spred, count the days, prepare their clothes hours before a session, call to make sure they have the right date, etc. because they love to be called to silence, to attention to God. They love to be in a sacred place and to be taken seriously in their desire to be with God, and so do the catechists.

This development of each person in the community of faith bears fruit in the formal celebration of the liturgy. It is no longer a question of everyone grasping the superficial meaning of all the elements of the liturgy or sacraments, but it is a question of beginning to inhabit a world of mystery being celebrated with the larger assembly.

After participating fully in a formal liturgy, the community of faith returns to their small space to savor what happened. This is the liturgical evocation of a Spred session. "Remember when we were all together around the Easter candle? Remember when the light shone on the face of each one...? Remember how we sang and then we were silent? Remember how happy we were in the light of Christ? Now we are happy in the light."

Another way of saying what we mean by liturgical catechesis is "All that we do to prepare to enter into the liturgical experience and all that we do to understand all that comes out of liturgy." ** Thus catechesis is for liturgy and from liturgy. Catechesis that is from liturgy is called Mystagogy. It is an evocation of the liturgy that open out the words, gestures, music, silences, objects and persons into their symbolic dimensions.

Symbol is constructed in such a way that what is seen, heard, felt, smelled, known and loved opens out beyond itself. In this opening out, mystery can be encountered. Mystery approaches us as much as we approach it. We wake up to a new dimension in life. We wake up and are attentive. We wake up and are attentive to God. This is what we learn in a liturgical catechesis, a sacred catechesis. When we say that the first goal of Spred is to develop a sense of the sacred, this is what we are trying to get at. When a parish liturgical assembly is alive with a sense of the sacred, our friends with disabilities are at ease. They can be integrated into the heart of the parish in the most profound sense.

The Spred community of faith is where each one learns to be attentive to God in life and in liturgy.

Sr. Mary Therese Harrington, S.H., Chicago Spred Staff

*Helene Lubienska de Lenval, Pedagogie Sacree, Desclee de Brouwer, Paris, 1966

**Victoria M. Tufano, "How Do We Do Liturgical Catechesis?" Liturgy 90, April 1977, Liturgy Training Publication, 1800 N.Hermitage, Chicago Il 60622, p.4.



GOD

VICARIATE SPRING PLANNING MEETINGS

ST. MARY, LAKE FOREST
201 East Illinois Rd, Parish Center
Rudy Iberle
Monday May 12, 7:30 p.m.

DIVINE PROVIDENCE, WESTCHESTER
2550 Mayfair Ave, Convent
Anne Rodden
Wednesday May 14, 7:30

ST. BARTHOLOMEW, CHICAGO
4924 West Addison, Parish Center
Lorraine Kurek
Monday May 12, 7:30 p.m.

QUEEN OF ANGELS, CHICAGO
2330 West Sunnyside, Rectory
Mary Ward, Bob Hess, Teresa Fett
Wednesday May 14, 7:30

ST. MARCELLINE, SCHAUMBURG
822 So. Springingsguth Rd. Rel. Ed. Wing
Art Evans
Tuesday May 13, 7:30 p.m.

ST. PIUS, CHICAGO
1919 South Ashland, Gift Shop Basement
Gloria Miranda, Margarita Lopez
Wednesday May 14, 7:30

ST. JOSEPH SUMMIT
7240 West 57th St., Rectory
Marianne Devo
Tuesday May 13, 7:30 p.m.

ST. TERRENCE, ALSIP
4300 West 119th Street, Rectory
Mary Ellen Lynch
Thursday May 15, 7:30

ST. AGNES, CHICAGO HEIGHTS
1515 Chicago Road, Parish Center
Jack Yauger
Thursday May 15, 7:30

MASS INTENTIONS

Requests and donations can be arranged
with Fr. James McCarthy, Spred Center
2956 So. Lowe Ave. Chicago Il 60616
312-842-1039

REMEMBER SPRED

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Mamre, a non-for-profit corporation
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