

LITURGY

The General Directory for Catechesis (#30) pinpoints a persistent problem:

“Catechesis is intrinsically bound to every liturgical and sacramental action. Frequently however, the practice of catechetics testifies to a weak and fragmentary link with liturgy: limited attention to liturgical symbols and rites, scant use of the liturgical fonts...the marginalization of liturgical celebrations in catechetical programs.”

Romano Guardini wrote a book, Sacred Signs, in Spring, 1927, republished in 1955, which tried to anticipate this challenge. He listed 24 short reflections on signs which are the bases of the sacramental system: the sign of the cross, hands, kneeling, standing, walking, striking the breast, steps, doors, candles, holy water, fire, ashes, incense, light and heat, bread and wine, linen, the altar, the chalice, the paten, blessing, space sanctified, bells, time sanctified, the name of God. These are subjective poetic ruminations which I have found helpful through the years. He wanted to contribute to a re-education, to furnish clues on how creation, humanity and art have lapsed from our awareness and need to be re-exercised. Guardini remarks that liturgy is not a matter of ideas, but of actual things, and of actual things as they now are, not as they were in the past. He would have us discover the soul from the body, the hidden and spiritual from the external and material. “Whatever in human nature responds to these elementary signs should be fanned into life.” But the key question is posed: how do we make these signs a fresh and vital experience of our own? Guardini states that “people need to get at the spirit that informs them.”

He insists that we help a person see what it is in himself that a lighted candle stands for. He cites Maria Montessori’s method: to teach by doing. Her approach to the liturgy was not by being told about it but by taking part in it. The fundamental “skills” are to learn to see, to learn to do. “Doing” does not mean ‘practicing’ in order to get a thing right.” Doing, “with the right kind of instruction, is liturgical education,” says Guardini.

Balthasar Fischer in 1979 wrote Signs, Words and Gestures, 30 engaging reflections on passing from the externals of liturgy to the substance of a sound liturgical spirituality. He focuses his work by a quote: “In every new situation we must start all over again, like children, cultivate a passionate interest in things and events and begin by taking delight in externals, until we have the good fortune to grasp the substance.” (Goethe) Good fortune, or grace is a gift. He wanted to move from the intense interest in the outward form of the liturgy to the substance, the spiritual life. But how to do this?



EVOKED

IN

Spred uses Method Vivre in its catechesis with persons with developmental disabilities. A leader catechist unfolds an experience like a napkin, in stages. He has to stir a past experience for each individual. This takes time. When an experience is felt as held in common by everyone present, a bond is established; an affective lasso is drawn tighter within each person until the leader knows that everyone is finally on board. Then a leader catechist can say genuinely, "We feel, etc." Establishing this moment of genuine congealing is one of the hardest efforts of the catechist. It is called the stage of "interiorization." Those present are held together by their own personal felt experience, a reaction belonging to each one - and yet now also belonging to the group as a whole - simultaneously.

There follows a series of evocations which are juxtaposed to this impetus. Each evocation reinforces that same inspiring element as lived in liturgy, (the liturgical evocation) and in the historical life of Jesus, (the biblical evocation).

The leader catechist brings the journey full circle when, identifying with the Christ of faith, the Christ of now, she says, "Jesus says to you today..." a brief, cryptic, direct, highly personal message. Somewhat like a photograph appearing in a chemical solution in a dark room, what was present but hidden in the original human experience is shown, mystery. An illumination is revealed in the everyday hurly burly of our lives and our friends. Method Vivre is a catechesis of unveiling, of realising, of attending, of slowing down, of make the inconspicuous, conspicuous in the light of the Gospel.

Liturgy and life can be tied together through catechesis by way of the liturgical evocation. Method Vivre stresses experience first. We approach a liturgical sign by first exploring a human experience at length, then distill the force of the emotional immediacy into one facet of appreciation. We place the impact of this "current" side by side with a liturgical sign that corresponds to that flowing medium. It is then that the liturgical sign can take on a living vibrant color. This process is already living. The mystery is not just out there, but it is in here, inside me.

We do not teach the liturgical experience. We live the experience, do it. Then later, recall it, savor it, in a sense slip below the surface of it. There seems to be a front door and a back door to a sign. We can talk about liturgical signs, expound on them - even with guided instruction - a front door. When we do this watch what happens. A glaze will gather across the eyes of our friends. Instruction, explanation is an exercise of cognition, a form of abstraction, the very locale of the disability.

We do liturgies as Guardini and Montessori direct. We do not explain, we do. Rather than accompany this with instruction, the front door, as Guardini suggests, we approach by the back door by way of evocation. A human experience, real, quite simple, is explored, remembered, drawn out of memory, and relived by way of lively story telling. Then we focus on a specific feeling response, we interiorize. The participants are all on board. The underlying vitality, by way of evocation, is placed along side a liturgical aspect whose symbolic dimension corresponds to the human vitality remembered and made present. This is more than an association of different elements. Rather, openness to being which the liturgical evocation unearths, is swelled with more being, the revelatory being of presence. The liturgical evocation in Method Vivre is a form of re-education, not by instruction, but by way of evocation, memory of what one has done.

What is it that a catechist evokes in liturgy with persons with developmental disabilities? A catechist evokes Christ's presence in liturgy. What is presence? It can be a "hereness," or a "thereness." Is it a bodily tangible nearness? measureable? or is it primarily intangible? There is certainly a difference between two stones in a garden and two persons who are in love. But what is the difference?

Presence is primarily interrelation and interaction. Everything in our visible cosmos is somehow present to everything else because all things interact - at least through gravity. Yet there are varying degrees of presence and absence, depending on the amount of inter-influence. There is a certain immediacy to presence. In liturgy Christ is present in more than one way.

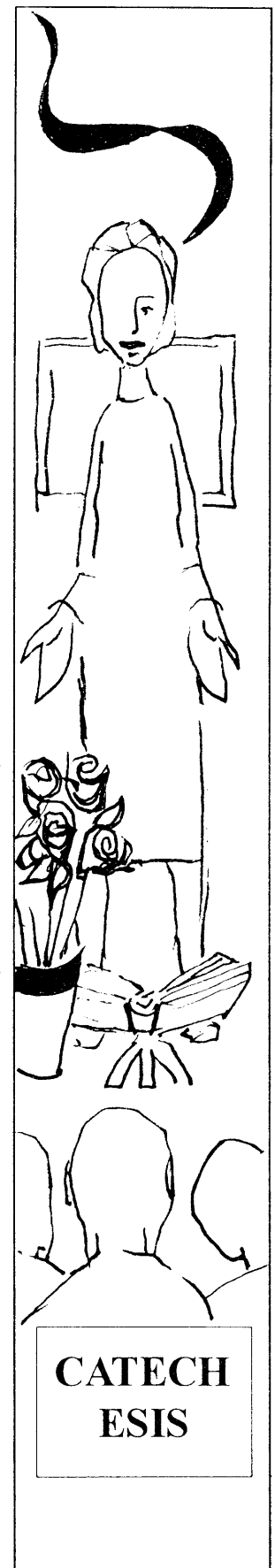
Christ is always present in his church (1)...especially in the sacrifice of Mass... (2)in the person of his minister, the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formally offered himself on the cross... (3)most of all in the eucharistic species... (4)sacraments... (5) in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in church... (6)Lastly he is present when the church prays and sings."

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (#7)

What is being said is that the presence of Christ in liturgy is mediated. This is a puzzle. It is the capacity to say to, or receive from, another, a "Thou". Not the church as a thing, but a thou. Not the priest as an it, but a thou. Not the word as a thing, a sound, but a thou. No longer bread and wine, but a thou. In all the signs about us there is an undertow, pulling us to another level of consciousness, another level of relating. The answer to the puzzle is relating in faith, an openness to being, His being. It is the haunting specter of the gloriously risen Christ drawing us magnetically into relationship: whether they be with people, words as letters or sounds, music, movement.

Our vehicles of mediation are our senses. The six blessings of the senses used in the Rite of Becoming Catechumens (#68) show us the ways of interacting and interrelating in evoking the sensate aspects of liturgy. The celebrant makes the sign of the cross on the **forehead** as a sign of Christ's love and says: Christ will be your strength. Learn to know and follow him. Signing the **ears**, he says: may you hear the voice of the Lord. Signing the **eyes**, he says: may you see with the light of God. Signing the **lips**, he says: may you respond to the word of God. Signing the **chest**, he says: may Christ dwell in your heart by faith. Signing the **shoulders**, (or **hands**), he says: may you accept the sweet yoke of Christ. In doing liturgy, the senses are heightened, activated, opened up, become like sponges, absorbent.

Sometimes Spred catechists could be puzzled by a "liturgical evocation." The puzzlement is rooted in my opinion, in the disjuncting of catechesis and liturgy as they have known and experienced it. The catechist can be befuddled on what to draw on. This is why the Spred Center has a monthly Spred family liturgy: to have catechists as well as our friends to do liturgy, to loosen up their senses, involve them, provide their memories with something to excavate for the liturgical evocation. More parish Spred Centers are participating at the Spred Chapel Eucharist - over 40 parishes in this past year. What is important is that these parish Spred groups go home to their own parishes and try to share with their priests, musicians, ushers and families what has



happened. They can try to replicate this kind of an involving liturgy for catechists, persons with disabilities and their families in their own regularly scheduled Sunday Eucharist. How much easier it will be to evoke such a liturgy. How much firmer the link between catechesis and liturgy.

Rev. James H. McCarthy
Director, Spred Chicago

1. Romano Guardini, Sacred Signs, Pio Decimo Press, St. Louis MO. 1955
2. Balthasar Fischer, Signs, Words, and Gestures, Pueblo Publishing Co., NY, 1981

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SPRED CALENDAR

HELPER CATECHIST TRAINING IN SPANISH,

APRIL 13, 2002, FROM 1:00 TO 5:00 AT THE SPRED CENTER

2956 SO. LOWE

312-842-1039

OBSERVATION

6-10 April 8, 22, May 6

11-16 April 16, 30, May 14

22+ April 15, May 6

SPRED FAMILY LITURGIES

April 7, May 5

MAMRE DINNER DANCE AT THE MARTINIQUE

2500 W. 95TH STREET, EVERGREEN PARK

APRIL 28, 5:45 TO 10:30

Spred

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