

Principle Four: **Liturgy Prepares and Leads the Church to the Heavenly Life with God.** ³⁶

We believe that this earthly life is more than mere rehearsal for the next life. It is, in fact, the pathway by which we reach heaven, our journey's end. All the liturgies we celebrate give us a glimpse of what we will see for ever in that new life. Good liturgies, then, do not bemoan life here on earth. Every good liturgy is celebrated by those who trust the paschal mystery and look forward in hope to the salvation we do not see but know to be true. ³⁷

Good Practices to Foster

How we dress the church shows we care about liturgy. How we move in processions big and small and who takes part in them reflects our understanding of the Body of Christ as pilgrim Church. And how we view heaven, where we will see God face-to-face, shapes how we see God in the faces of those we see here and now. The Lectionary is filled with images and stories of what heaven is like: the kingdom of heaven is compared to scattering seed, growing seeds, baking bread, finding buried treasure, searching for pearls, a net bursting with fish, and eating a great dinner. The *Order of Christian Funerals* proclaims that eternal life with God is that place where there are no more tears, no more weeping. ³⁸ The liturgy for the dedication of a new church and altar as well as the feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica (9 November) name heaven as the New Jerusalem. ³⁹ The new covenant journey to the New Jerusalem recalls the first covenant passage into the promised land.

When Saint Dominic Parish needed a new church building the diocesan staff provided guidance for forming the building team and the parish, for discerning needs, for planning the process, and for preparing the dedication. On that day, the people gathered two blocks away in the temporary worship space. The bishop and other ministers met them there and together they processed with banners and song and instrumental music to the doors of the new church. ⁴⁰ Saplings that had to be cleared from the land were prepared by the parish scout troops as walking sticks for these pilgrims. They were collected at the doors and then used as fuel for the new fire during the next Easter Vigil.

Saint Elizabeth Parish prepares processions to highlight the image of pilgrim Church: the blessing of throats, the Ash Wednesday giving of ashes, the Holy Thursday transfer of the Holy Eucharist, and the Good Friday veneration of the cross. On the Presentation of the Lord, on Palm Sunday, and at the Easter Vigil parishioners gather at a place outside the church to begin the liturgy. During funerals, the faithful go out with the priest to meet the body and the mourners. After rites of greeting, sprinkling, and clothing the coffin with the white garment (pall), all process into the church. ⁴¹ Because the cemetery is on the parish campus, the faithful process again with the body to the place of burial. The solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ ⁴² and the patronal feast day call for more processions outside the church.

Saint Ephrem Parish makes full use of the preferences the ritual books provide for Baptism. For the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens, the inquirers and their sponsors wait outside the

³⁶ *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 8.

³⁷ *Lectionary for Mass*, no. 62ABC, Pentecost Sunday at the Vigil Mass, Romans 8:22-27.

³⁸ *Order of Christian Funerals*, nos. 107-108.

³⁹ *Dedication of a Church and an Altar*, II nos. 16, 62, 75; *The Roman Missal*, Common of the Dedication of a Church.

⁴⁰ *Dedication of a Church and an Altar*, II nos. 29-35.

⁴¹ *Order of Christian Funerals*, nos. 131-136, 158-162.

⁴² *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist outside Mass*, nos. 101-108; *Ceremonial of Bishops*, nos. 385-394.

door. The faithful come to them and, after listening to their requests and signing them with the cross of Christ, they process with them into the church to hear the saving word of God.⁴³ For the Baptism of infants and small children below catechetical age, the assembly gathers at the door to hear the given name and the desire for a life of faith.⁴⁴ Then all process in for the celebration of Baptism within Mass.

Saint Felicity is now a bilingual parish with a growing population of immigrants from Mexico. The December celebration of *Las Posadas* marks the Holy Family's search for shelter. Now hundreds of people, both Anglo and Hispanic, join the procession from house to house in search of lodging that ends at the parish center with a piñata, food, and dancing.

Saint Fidelis Parish has been living in its new buildings for ten years. The parishioners see themselves as stewards of this property. The parish works with committees of volunteers to keep the place in good shape. Regular groups dust, sweep, and vacuum. Seasonal groups rake leaves, shovel snow, and wash windows. Parishioners know that tithing includes time and talent as well money. The monies not spent on maintenance personnel are used for the poor. Parishioners want their church and the surroundings to look a bit like the heaven to which they are bound.

Saint Frances Cabrini Parish has worked very hard on the Communion procession. In the United States, the norm for receiving Communion is standing and, as a rule, in procession.⁴⁵ Catechists draw attention to the Passover meal and Exodus story⁴⁶ during preparations for First Communion and mystagogy with neophytes. When possible, the pastor makes use of the biblical stories of journey, pilgrimage, and the reign of God to highlight the glory of heaven. On the golden anniversary of the parish and the 40th anniversary of the church building, the liturgy committee reread the notes left by the founding pastor. They discovered that the church was built with a sloped floor not to improve sight lines, although that happened. The intentional pitch of the floor was to propel the faithful to the altar and Communion with great ease and to make it harder to walk away after receiving the Eucharistic meal.

Dangers to Avoid

Unkempt buildings, dirty vesture, frayed linen, and tattered ritual books are unworthy for use in rites that celebrate so great a mystery. Ragged processions and unprepared ministers do not foster either a desire for the destination or assurance that anyone will get there. Shepherds who do not know how to lead, where to go, or how to get there will instill no confidence in the faithful. Preaching and song that portray the world as an ugly, unredeemed place to be tolerated for the benefit of a better life hereafter put little trust in God's creative world and work.

What Is at Stake

The Second Vatican Council's recovered image of Church as pilgrim⁴⁷ reminds us that we are in procession from this life to life yet to come. Ritual processions for weddings and funerals, for Sunday Mass and Communion, for special feasts and occasions remind us that we are pilgrims. The liturgies in which they take place prepare us for the final liturgy in heaven.

⁴³ *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, nos. 48-60.

⁴⁴ *Rite of Baptism for Children*, nos. 16, 29, 32-43.

⁴⁵ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 160; BISHOPS' COMMITTEE ON THE LITURGY, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Introduction to the Order of Mass: A Pastoral Resource of the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy*, no. 135.

⁴⁶ *Lectionary for Mass*, no. 39ABC, Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14 and *Lectionary for Mass*, no. 41ABC, Easter Vigil, Third Reading, Exodus 14:15—15:1.

⁴⁷ *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, nos. 14, 48-51.

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- Read the preceding two pages.
- In silence, write down additional (1) good practices to foster and (2) dangers to avoid. Do this either as homework to prepare for the meeting or during some silence provided during the meeting.
- Share this individual work in the large group.

| (1) – More Good Practices to Foster |
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| (2) – More Dangers to Avoid |
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- In silence, (3) assess the current parish practice concerning this principle for good liturgy.
- Then listen to the assessing of current parish practice each person has done respecting any differences expressed while at the same time testing each assessment with the values and principles of Roman Catholic liturgy. Affirm the good practices of the parish.
- Brainstorm (4) dreams for the parish to improve the celebration of liturgy.

(3) – Assessing Current Parish Practice

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(4) – Dreams for Parish Improvement

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