

Principle Two: **Liturgy Celebrates the Many Ways Christ Is Present in the Church.** ¹⁴

The God of the new covenant is not far off. God, while still being God, is present to us. God is with us. God in Christ is one like us in all things but sin. The constitution counts these ways that Christ is present in the Church, especially in the liturgy: in Mass, not only in the minister but especially under the Eucharistic elements, in the sacraments, in his word, and in the Church praying and singing. ¹⁵

The liturgy acknowledges this presence of Christ in various ways. Advent calls upon Emmanuel, God-with-us, and knows this is Christ the Savior. ¹⁶ One of the Gospels for December 25 proclaims: “And the Word became flesh / and made his dwelling among us.” ¹⁷ The Bible footnote recalls this literal translation, “he pitched his tent among us,” alluding to the dwelling place of God with the chosen people of the Exodus. ¹⁸

We remind ourselves of how treasured this presence of Christ is to the Church with every profession of the Nicene Creed when we bow our bodies while saying, “by the power of the Holy Spirit / he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man.” This presence of God in Christ in our midst and the real presence in the Body and Blood are ways most dear to us. Every presence of Christ manifests all of Christ whole and entire.

Good Practices to Foster

The Eucharistic liturgy is important for the very life of the Church. But Mass is not enough. It cannot bear the whole weight of our liturgical praying or our Christian lives. In this diocese (and in others as well), daily Mass is not possible in the majority of parishes. Therefore, in addition to Mass, the rich treasury of word and sacrament, of Morning and Evening Prayer, of blessing and song are liturgical ways to fill every gathering with a conscious presence of Christ.

Saint Barbara Parish has a Bread Baking Committee with a long history of making substantial and legal bread for use at every Mass. There is a dedicated refrigerator in the parish center to store staples and prepared loaves.

At Saint Basil Parish, the ministers for both the children’s Liturgy of the Word and the catechumens’ and candidates’ dismissal take with them ritual editions of the appropriate *Lectionary for Mass*. In both prayer spaces a place of honor is readied to put this ritual book. It is used by the prepared readers to proclaim God’s word and Christ’s presence to the people. ¹⁹

The people of Saint Bridget Parish devote 15 to 25 percent of every meeting to prayer. The Lord’s Prayer alone is not enough for staff, committees, and councils. Over the years, members of these groups have been formed to prepare suitable liturgical prayer and faith sharing. They use the full complement of ministers that liturgy requires, and music, even a *cappella* singing, always has its place in

¹⁴ *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 7.

¹⁵ *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 7.

¹⁶ *The Roman Missal*, entrance chant, December 21; *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Evening Prayer, antiphon for the Canticle of Mary, December 23; *Lectionary for Mass*, no. 201.9, Alleluia verses for the weekdays of Advent from December 17 to December 24.

¹⁷ *Lectionary for Mass*, no. 16ABC, Nativity of the Lord, Mass during the Day, John 1:14.

¹⁸ *New American Bible*, John 1:14, Exodus 25:8ff.

¹⁹ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 29.

this prayer. Because these groups are convinced that prayer time prepares them for better use of the remaining meeting time, the committee and council work still gets done.

Saint Boniface Parish takes this treasured time for prayer one step further. Whenever possible, parish meetings and choir rehearsals are held on a common night. All the various members gather first in church for Evening Prayer or a Celebration of the Word of God or some other prayer suited to the feast or season. All parishioners are invited to participate even if they have no meeting to attend. The pastoral council eventually moved to a larger space when more and more parishioners stayed for the open meetings. Saint Benedict, a smaller rural parish, holds one of the council meetings on the same night as child and youth catechesis and begins with common prayer suited to ages and gifts of those gathered.

Dangers to Avoid

Stale hosts ²⁰ and too little wine, unprepared ministers, and regular use of the reserved sacrament are some of the ways that the real and glorious presence of Christ in the Eucharist is poorly manifested during Mass.

Poor proclamation by readers who have neither gift nor art, who are not trained, or who do not regularly love and read holy Scripture cannot persuade the faithful that Christ is present in the word.

Prayer that does not engage the faithful in the pattern of proclamation and response, in sung and spoken texts, in times for quiet reflection and joyful sounds to the Lord is deadly. Sunday liturgy teaches us ritual patterns of when to sing, when to respond, when to listen, when to be quiet, that need to be transferred to all our praying. ²¹

Liturgical prayer that makes use of only one or two ministers (when more are required) is not appropriate. Sunday Mass teaches us that a number of people have differing roles to perform. “All, therefore, whether they are ordained ministers or lay Christian faithful, in fulfilling their office or their duty, should carry out solely but completely that which pertains to them.” ²²

What Is at Stake

Everything and everyone can manifest the presence of Christ. They are to be treated with great reverence and honor. We want to be with Christ now – in Eucharist, in sacrament, in word, and in the gathered assembly. We, and God too if truth be told, are unwilling to wait for heaven to be with Christ.

²⁰ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 320; *Code of Canon Law*, canon 924.

²¹ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, nos. 39-45.

²² *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 91.

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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

(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

(4) – Dreams for Parish Improvement