

# **UNDERSTANDING THE LITURGY: TELLING THE DANGEROUS STORY**

The eucharistic prayer narrates a dangerous story of re-creation and redemption. It tells the story of God's involvement with all of creation: with rocks and rivers, sky and soil, wind and winged creatures, lambs and lions. It announces hopes of harmony. It prays back to God the saga of divine engagement with Jewish and Christian ancestors and contemporaries. The story is voiced because humanity easily forgets its creatureliness. This is classically called pride. Some arrogantly posture a self-sufficiency. Others think that their creativity, inventiveness, and acquisition of material goods expunges ties with other people or with God. This leads to isolation. "I need no one; I have everything I need." This is classically called avarice or greed.

The eucharistic prayer overturns the tables of the greedy and the pedestals of the proud. It narrates God's donative love constantly reaching out to all creation and creatures. No one ever gauged the profound depth of God's commitment. The Word became flesh, like us in all things but sin. He entered the human story with a singlemindedness. Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God. He showed that God would raise up the lowly, protect the bruised reeds, and watch over the vulnerable. The broken bread and the poured out cup were put on the menu. They are agenda put on the table of each local church.

This is a dangerous memory of suffering. The community which narrates this memory immerses itself in the biblical and contemporary stories of those who make up the underside - the poor, the neglected, the

forgotten, the throw-aways rejected by the proud and the greedy. The community makes memory of a suffering servant. His anguished passion and brutal cross death realign relationships between God and cosmos, creation, and creatures. Every time the memory is narrated in the eucharistic prayer, the sacrifice of Christ is ritually renewed. This is why the eucharist is called the memorial of the passion of Christ and the holy sacrifice of the Mass.

The memorial meal we share is a sharing in the glorious passion and passover of the Lord. It is a ritual remembrance of the sacrifice of Calvary. It is the offering this local community makes. "In memory of his death and resurrection, we offer you, Father, this life giving bread, this saving cup. We thank you for counting us worthy to stand in your presence and serve you."

This praying signals danger. The danger is spelled out in our mission in the world. Those who eat and drink live this mission - to serve others, to be willing to sacrifice, and to commit ourselves to changing unjust social structures. Our service may entail confrontation with systems of sin, institutions of darkness, and evil powers. This is frustrating and discouraging. It has resulted in twentieth-century martyrdom. Our reaching out is done in imitation of Christ. We extend hands to brothers wounded by brutal suffering. We open arms to sisters abused by brutal beating. Our prayer at the table unites us with Christ who still prays for all and unites us with our dreams of freedom.

--John J. O'Brien C. P